

THE PERFECT VOICE



Government under fire; contractor booked; Navy to probe

... pg 3



Kuno : Prey, predator challenges; Second site not ready

... pg 6



The current World Champion: Sandeep Dive

... pg 10



Govindas celebrated Dahi Handi festival with zeal in Mumbai on Tuesday.

Pic: PTI

“Can't pick and choose anyone. What is this fairness?”

SC slams ED and CBI over fairness of investigation

New Delhi: In a relief to BRS leader K. Kavitha, the Supreme Court on Tuesday granted her bail in corruption and money laundering cases linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, while questioning the central agencies over the fairness of their probe and asking if they were free to “pick and choose” an accused.

The apex court said Kavitha's custody was no longer required as both the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) have completed their probe against her. The Bharat Rashtriya Samithi (BRS) lawmaker from Telangana has been in jail for over five months.

A bench of Justices B.R. Gava and K.V. Viswanathan noted since 493 witnesses were to be examined and 50,000 pages of documents were to be considered in the two cases, there was no likelihood of the trial being concluded in the near future.



The SC granted bail to K Kavitha in excise policy case

“The appellant (Kavitha) is directed to be released forthwith on bail ... on furnishing bail bonds in the sum of Rs 10 lakh in each of the cases,” the bench said, while allowing her appeals against the July 1 verdict of the Delhi High Court which had denied her bail in the two cases.

A Delhi court issued release warrants for Kavitha, paving the way for her release from Tihar jail on late Tuesday.

While quashing the high court verdict, the apex court

said Kavitha shall not make any attempt to tamper with evidence or influence the witnesses and shall deposit her passport with the trial judge.

It said she shall regularly attend the trial court proceedings and cooperate to ensure expeditious disposal of the trial.

The two federal agencies came in for some sharp criticism over the “fairness” of their investigation, with the apex court observing “Sorry to see this state of affairs”. “You will pick and choose

anyone?” it asked, while referring to one of the witnesses whose statements were read out in the court during the arguments.

“The prosecution has to be fair. You can't pick and choose anyone. What is this fairness? A person who incriminates himself has been made a witness,” the bench said, adding, “Tomorrow you will pick up anyone as you choose and leave anyone as you choose as an accused? Very fair and reasonable discretion!”

When Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju, appearing for the probe agencies, referred to some witnesses who have claimed Kavitha's involvement in the alleged scam, the court told him it would be compelled to “observe everything” if he tried to pull it into the details.

“We will have to observe about the fairness and impartiality of the investigating agencies,” it said, adding, “If you want those observations, you argue more”. - PTI

Jay Shah ICC Chairman

Dubai: BCCI secretary Jay Shah will take over as the next ICC chairman on December 1 after being elected unopposed for the top post here on Tuesday, making him the fifth Indian to reach the pinnacle of global cricket administration.

The 35-year-old Shah, who has been the BCCI secretary since 2019, will take over from 62-year-old incumbent Greg Barclay after the New Zealander decided against running for a third consecutive term of two years.

Shah will relinquish his position in India at the BCCI's Annual General Meeting likely to be held towards the end of next month or in October.

Shah became the youngest Indian among late Jagmohan Dalmiya, Sharad Pawar, N Srinivasan and Shashank Manohar to take over high-profile job.

It is understood that one among the powerful SENA cricket boards (South Africa, England, New Zealand and Australia) was Shah's proposer and another one of these countries seconded the nomination. And he remained the lone contender on the last day of nominations.

That he is a likely choice was evident when he was appointed the head of ICC's most powerful sub-committee -- the Finance and Commercial Affairs (F&CA) in 2022.

The timing couldn't have been better for Shah, who would have had to go on a mandatory cooling off period in 2025 for a period of three years till 2028.

Shah, if all goes well, can have two terms in the ICC and come back to complete his remaining four years in BCCI in 2028 albeit as president of the board.

The immediate task facing Shah will be the conduct of the Champions Trophy in Pakistan.

Hema Committee report Now, Mohanlal quits

Kochi: Top actor Mohanlal and other office-bearers of an influential cine artists' association in Kerala resigned enmasse on Tuesday amidst an uproar over the sexual abuse allegations made against a number of male professionals by women actors over the past few days.

Many women actors, including a Bengali actress, have gone public with allegations of sexual harassment against some of the well-known faces of Malayalam cinema, including eminent director Ranjith and actors Siddique and Mukesh, in the wake of the Justice K Hema Committee report that shed light on workplace harassment in the Malayalam film world.

On Tuesday, the influential actors' union -- Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA) issued a press statement announcing the mass resignation of its office-bearers, including president Mohanlal.

The veteran actor, in his capacity as president, reportedly convened an online meeting of its members to discuss the unprecedented dilemma being faced by the association before taking the decision about the resignation of the executive panel members.

AMMA said that the current administrative panel has resigned as such, taking moral responsibility for the allegations.

Following the release of the Justice Hema Committee report, some office-bearers of the AMMA, including actor Siddique who quit as its general secretary, had to face sexual allegations in the social, visual, and print media. And in view of that, the present executive panel was resigning, taking moral responsibility, it explained.

The new administrative panel would be elected within two months after conven-



ing a general body meeting, it said, adding that the outgoing panel would continue as a temporary system to carry forward the association's various ongoing programmes without fail until the next general body meeting, it said.

“We are hopeful that AMMA will get a new leadership capable of reforming and strengthening the association. Thanks to everyone for criticising and correcting (us),” the statement added.

Many actors, especially women, welcomed and expressed joy over the resignation of AMMA office-bearers.

Well-known actor Shwetha Menon said she welcomed the executive panel's decision and wished that the outfit would get new leaders who are capable of continuing its various ongoing programmes.

She said a young actor like Prithviraj has the ability to lead the association.

“I feel Raju (Prithviraj) as a president in the future. I think he has the capability... calibre for the same,” she told the media.

Menon also said she felt sad seeing a great actor like Mohanlal facing this much stress over the developments.

Another senior actor, Usha, said AMMA as an out-

fit was really good, but some of its members on its executive panel were troublemakers.

“A new panel, which can address the concerns of women and to whom female actors could courageously approach and open up about their issues, should come to the top positions in the outfit,” she said.

Senior dubbing artiste Bhagyalakshmi also welcomed the resignation of the AMMA panel and said it was their responsibility in the wake of sexual allegations and accusations that cropped up against its members.

The publication of the Justice K Hema Committee report on harassment and abuse in the Malayalam film industry has opened a can of worms with several female actors stepping forward with disturbing accounts of the mistreatment they faced at the hands of their various male counterparts.

Amid these allegations, the government announced the establishment of a seven-member special investigation team to probe the allegations made in the wake of the Justice Hema Committee report being published.

Following that, more complaints surfaced against many actors and directors. - PTI



Youngsters involved in forming multi-storeyed human pyramids as part of the 'Dahi Handi' celebrations, enjoyed the festival in Mumbai on Tuesday. At least 63 'Govindas' were injured, officials said. Pics: Bhushan Koyande

Decide pre-arrest bail pleas quickly: HC

Mumbai: The Bombay High Court on Tuesday said when the question of liberty of a citizen is involved, it is necessary that the lower courts take up and decide applications seeking anticipatory bail either finally or at least for grant of interim protection in an expeditious manner.

If the lower courts do not decide such matters, then the high court is burdened with them, it added.

A single bench of Justice Sandeep Marne made these observations while expressing displeasure with a lower court at Kalyan in Thane district for not deciding expeditiously the pre-arrest bail plea of Waman Mhatre, a local leader of the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena.

Mhatre is accused of making derogatory remarks against a woman journalist during the last week's protests in Badlapur over the sexual abuse of two kindergarten girls.

Mhatre filed an appeal in the high court, claiming that his pre-arrest bail plea filed on August 22 before the Kalyan sessions court was not yet heard and that even his application seeking interim protection was not considered.

He claimed that the sessions court was adjourning his plea on every occasion and that it is now scheduled for a hearing on August 29.

Justice Marne directed the sessions judge to decide Mhatre's application on August 29 itself.

"A report about the status of the anticipatory bail application shall be placed by the sessions judge before the registry department of high court in the evening of August 29 itself," Justice Marne said.

Justice Marne said when the plea pertains to the liberty of a person then ideally the court could have at least considered the application seeking interim protection.

"When the question of liberty of a citizen is involved, it is necessary that application for pre-arrest bail is taken up and decided either finally or at least for grant of interim protection in an expeditious manner," the HC said.

"If lower courts do not decide such matters, then the high court is burdened with such matters. They should decide. The problem is that a decision is not taken," it added.

The HC, while disposing of Mhatre's appeal, said the sessions court shall take up and decide his pre-arrest bail plea on August 29.

Mhatre's advocate sought the court to at least take an oral assurance from the police that no coercive action will be taken until the sessions court decides plea. The additional public prosecutor then said "nothing will happen".

A woman journalist had on August 21 filed a complaint against Mhatre for allegedly making derogatory and offensive remarks when she was reporting the protests at Badlapur over the incident of sexual assault of two minor girls inside their school premises by a male attendant.

As per the complaint, Mhatre allegedly said the reporter was acting "as if she herself had been raped".

Mhatre claimed that his remarks were being misconstrued. - PTI

Pune Porsche case Father of juvenile's friend in custody

Pune: Two persons arrested last week in connection with the May 19 Pune Porsche car crash case were on Monday remanded in judicial custody by a court here.

Aditya Avinash Sood (52) and Ashish Satish Mittal (37) were held on August 19 as their blood samples were used for tests in connection two minors who were in the car along with the 17-year-old main accused at the time of the accident.

Two IT professionals hailing from Madhya Pradesh were killed when a Porsche car, allegedly driven by a minor boy in an inebriated condition, rammed into their motorcycle in Pune's Kalyani Nagar area.

As per police, blood samples were swapped as all three persons in the car were drunk.

District and additional sessions judge U.M. Mudholkar remanded Sood and Mittal to judicial custody,

35 mandals in Pune hold joint event

Pune: In a bid to reduce traffic congestion, 35 mandals in Pune city have come together to organise a single Dahi Handi event in the iconic Lal Mahal Chowk near Shanwar Wada on Tuesday to mark Krishna Janmashtami, the birth anniversary of Lord Krishna.

Mandals, including Shri-mant Bhau Rangari Ganapati Trust, Shri Tambdi Jogeshwari Sarvajanic Ganesh Mandal, Tulshibaug Sarvajanic Ganesh Mandal and Shrimant Peshve Ganapati Mandal, have decided to have joint festivities.

According to volunteers of these mandals, motorists face hardships while plying on narrow lanes in the Peth areas of the city, and a joint celebration will help ease traffic congestion during peak hours.

Puneet Balan, chairman of the Bhausaheb Rangari Ganapati temple, said, "The objective was to avoid snarls in the central part of Pune city because of Dahi Handi festivities in very chokh. When the idea was floated to the key mandals and the rationale was explained, they readily accepted the proposal."

Bench recuses from hearing Waze's plea

Mumbai: A division bench of the Bombay High Court on Tuesday recused from hearing a petition filed by dismissed policeman Sachin Waze seeking bail in the CBI's corruption case also involving former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh.

Waze, who is in judicial custody, had sought to be released on bail, claiming he is an approver in the case and on grounds of parity as all the other accused are out on bail.

A division bench of Justices Bharati Dangre and Manjusha Deshpande had earlier this month briefly heard the petition and said it would pass order on the interim bail request first and then hear the petition finally.

However, on Tuesday, Justice Dangre recused from hearing the matter.

"I did not realise then that this matter also involves Anil Deshmukh. I cannot hear pleas related to this," Justice Dangre said without elaborating any further.

The petition will now be placed for hearing before another division bench.

Waze, in his plea, said keeping him in jail, even after he was declared an approver, was violative of fundamental rights.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had opposed the plea, saying Waze had not yet deposed in the case and it would not be in the best interest of the case to release him on bail.

The former policeman was declared an approver by the special CBI court in June 2022.

Waze was arrested in March 2021 for his alleged role in the case of an explosives-laden vehicle found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence in south Mumbai and the murder of Thane businessman Mansukh Hiran.

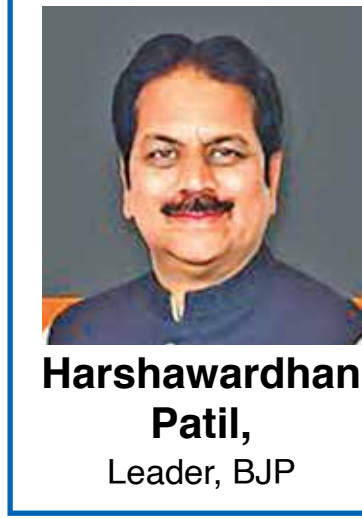
The high court, in April 2021, directed the CBI to conduct a preliminary inquiry into former police commissioner Param Bir Singh's allegations of corruption and misuse of official power against Deshmukh.

Based on this inquiry, the probe agency registered an FIR against Deshmukh, his associates and Waze.

Singh had alleged that Deshmukh, then a home minister, had directed police personnel to collect Rs 100 crore per month from restaurants and bars in the metropolis.



QUOTE OF THE DAY



"Since I am one of the council members of the Vasantdada Sugar Institute, I was part of today's meeting and other than official discussion, no other discussion took place. It is to be seen what decision Fadnavisji takes as far as the Indapur seat is concerned."

Harshawardhan Patil,
Leader, BJP

Residents rescued

Thane: Around 50 occupants of a seven-storey residential building in Thane city of Maharashtra were rescued after a fire broke out at the electric meter room on its ground floor on Tuesday morning, an official said.

Several other residents rushed out of the building, located in Kasarvadavali area, soon after the blaze erupted around 7.15 am, he said.

Woman's headless body with severed limbs found

Pune: A woman's headless body with her limbs severed was found on the banks of the Mula river in Pune city, police said on Tuesday.

The police control room received a call about the body on the river bed in the Chandannagar area around 11 am on Monday, an official said.

As per preliminary probe, the woman was decapitated, and her hands and legs had been severed from the shoulders and hip joint, he said.

The body was sent for post-mortem, and a case was registered under sections 103 (murder) and 238 (causing the disappearance of evidence) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita with Chandannagar police station, the official said.

A probe is underway to ascertain the woman's identity, and the police are also examining missing person's complaints, he said. Sources said the woman's age could be between 18 to 20 years. The police are yet to find the perpetrator. - PTI

Blast death toll rises

Jalna: The death toll in the steel factory boiler blast that occurred in Jalna city of Maharashtra last week rose to two on Tuesday after a 34-year-old worker succumbed to burn injuries at a private hospital, police said.

The explosion in Gaj Kesari Steel Factory in Jalna's MIDC area on Saturday afternoon left 22 workers injured, including seven critically, after molten iron fell on them.

Teenager raped by father multiple times

Thane: A 16-year-old girl was allegedly raped and beaten up by her father on multiple occasions in Badlapur, police said on Tuesday.

The 54-year-old accused is on the run and the police have launched an operation to trace and nab him, they said.

"The accused used to beat up his minor daughter frequently and raped her several times. The latest incident took place on August 22, following which the girl ran away from home out of fear, but returned later. On Monday, she approached the police and lodged a complaint against her father," an official of Badlapur East police station said.

Based on her complaint, the police have registered a case against the man under section 64 (rape), 74 (assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) and 75 (sexual harassment) and 118 (voluntarily causing hurt or grievous hurt by dangerous weapons or means) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and also under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, the official said.

The accused is on the run and the police are on the lookout for him, he said.

Badlapur town has been rocked by the sexual abuse of two kindergarten girls by a male attendant at a private school. The incident led to a massive protest, following which the Maharashtra government set up a special investigation team (SIT) to probe the case.

Boy detained for stalking girls

Police have detained a 15-year-old boy from Bhiwandi for allegedly stalking girls, an official said on Tuesday.

As per the complaint lodged by a girl, the incident occurred around 8 pm on Monday.

The girl was walking alone on the road when the accused followed her and made objectionable gestures at her. He also followed three other girls who were friends of the victim, he added.

Following the complaint, the juvenile was detained sent to a remand home, an official of Bhiwandi police station said.

The police registered an FIR against the accused under section 78 (stalking) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and also the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, he said.

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj statue collapsed

Government under fire; contractor booked; Navy to probe

Govt passes buck to Navy

Fadnavis says bigger statue will be installed

MLA booked for vandalism

Contractor had admitted rush

PWD had complained of rust

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Under attack over the collapse of a Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj statue on Monday nearly nine months after it was unveiled, the Mahayuti government in Maharashtra on Tuesday said the structure was built by the Navy, while the opposition targeted the ruling alliance and sought Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's resignation.

As the collapse of the statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in Sindhudurg district threatened to snowball into a major controversy ahead of assembly polls, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said the state government has now decided to install a bigger statue of the 17th century warrior King at the same place.

School Education Minister Deepak Kesarkar, who hails from Sindhudurg, proposed a 100-foot statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj at the same location -- Rajkot Fort in Malvan tehsil in the coastal district -- around 480km from Mumbai. The collapsed statue was 35 feet high.

Following an outrage, the Sindhudurg police also registered a case against contractor Jaydeep Apte and structural consultant



Former Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan with Congress workers protest against the collapse of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's statue, in Karad on Tuesday. Pic-PTI

Chetan Patil, both involved in the project, over the statue collapse incident.

The Navy said it has noted with "deep concern" the damage caused to the statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj that was unveiled on Navy Day as a dedication to the citizens of Sindhudurg. "Along with the state government and concerned specialists, the Navy has deputed a team to immediately investigate the cause of this unfortunate accident and initiate steps to repair, restore and reinstate the statue at the earliest," according to a

statement by the naval force issued by its spokesperson in New Delhi.

The incident, which comes months ahead of the state Assembly polls, has caused an embarrassment to the state government and invited criticism from the opposition parties. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Tuesday alleged a scam in the structure's construction. He also claimed that even Aurangzeb and Mughals did not insult Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in such a manner.

Raut alleged that the contract to build the statue

was given to people close to the CM. Referring to Shinde's statement that the statue fell as winds were blowing at a speed of 45 km per hour, Raut said winds along the coast are bound to be gusty. In 1933, freedom fighter Lokmanya Tilak's statue was installed at Girgaon Chowpatty in Mumbai, but it still stands tall. In 1956, then-PM Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru installed at the Pratapgad Fort in Satara district a statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and it was still in the same condition, he maintained.

Sanjay Raut, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP:

"We need the resignation of the chief minister for hurting the feelings of (the people of) Maharashtra. Public Works Department (PWD) Minister Ravindra Chavan should be sacked. They did not even spare Shivaji Maharaj and indulged in corruption."



Jayant Patil, State President, NCP (SP):

"The government is responsible for it. The government organised only an event with the sole purpose of unveiling at the hands of the PM."



Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister:

"The construction of the statue was not overseen by the state government but by the Navy. The individuals responsible for the fabrication and installation of the statue might have overlooked important local factors such as high wind speed and the quality of the iron used. The statue might have become more prone to rust due to its exposure to ocean winds."



PWD letter

A letter by the PWD has surfaced revealing officials highlighting the structure gathering "rust" and its "unpleasant" looks.

The PWD letter revealed that an assistant engineer of

the department had written to a Navy officer about the parts of the structure catching rust and looking unpleasant. The letter was sent on August 20 by the assistant engineer attached to the PWD office in Malvan tehsil

A few govt projects stay incomplete



Mumbai: Two prominent projects that had been initiated by the Maharashtra government in the name of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj have not been completed several years after they were first conceived. The Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Memorial, which was initiated in 2016 and the Raigad Fort Restoration Project, initiated in 2018 are yet to be completed.

'Jalpujan' was performed at the hands of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 24, 2016 for the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Memorial in the Arabian Sea off Marine Drive coast. An allocation of over Rs 3600 crore too was made for the project. However, it remained a non-starter. Initially, in 2017 the project was stalled due to protests by local fishermen community. After that the project could not move due

to COVID pandemic between 2019 and 2021. It received all the environmental clearances in February 2021 and October 2022 was set as the date of completion for the project. However, hardly anything has moved on the project which is slated to have the world's tallest statue on the small island at 1.5 km from Mumbai coast.

The project for restoration of Raigad Fort in Raigad district was initiated in 2018. Rs 300 crore was allocated for the project and was expected to complete by 2021. However, till 2022 only one entry route to the fort was restored. The project involved fortification of existing structures, restoration of several buildings and creation of pathways. However, hardly anything of the project other than the ancient pathway has been completed.

Badlapur sexual abuse case: Education officer seeks stay on suspension

Mumbai: An education officer from Thane on Tuesday moved the Bombay High Court. Rakshe claimed he came to know about the sexual assault incident on August 18 and promptly contacted the Ambernath block education officer, asking him to visit the school in Badlapur in Thane district, conduct an enquiry, and the block education officer submitted a report on August 20 following which Rakshe issued a show cause notice to the school president/ secretary/ headmaster. The notice sought the school's explanation on defunct CCTV cameras on its premises, the plea stated.

Rakshe stated he had forwarded the enquiry report to the Director of Education (Primary) in Pune and the Deputy Director of Education (Primary) in Mumbai.

"On August 21, a Committee of Administrators was set up to manage the school in Badlapur. The petitioner also directed the headmasters of all primary, secondary and higher secondary schools to install CCTVs, complaint boxes, and a students' safety committee," the plea said.

Despite taking these measures, the Minister for School



Male dominance persists, says HC

Mumbai: Boys need to be educated about gender equality and sensitised from a tender age, and their mindset needs to be changed as well, the Bombay High Court said on Tuesday while hearing a plea on the Badlapur sexual assault case.

A division bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Prithviraj Chavan, hearing a plea taken up suo motu (on its own), said male dominance and chauvinism persist in society, and hence, boys need to be taught from a young age about right and wrong behaviour.

The court suggested setting up a committee to study the issue and recommend rules and guidelines to be followed in schools to avoid such incidents.

Education announced in the media that the education officer of Thane (Rakshe) has been placed under suspen-

sion, he stated. "The petitioner is placed under suspension despite the fact that he is in no way

concerned with the regulation and supervision of primary centres," the plea said. - PTI

Man guilty for winking at woman

Mumbai: A court here has convicted a 22-year-old man for outraging the modesty of a woman by winking at her and holding her hand but refused to impose any sentence on him considering his age and the fact that he has no criminal antecedents.

Magistrate Aarti Kulkarni observed that while the offence committed by the accused, Mohammed Kaif Fakir, deserves a sentence not less than life imprisonment, considering his age and the fact that he has no criminal antecedents, he should be given the benefit of probation.

The order was passed on August 22. "The court said it couldn't ignore the mental agony and harassment the woman underwent, but imposing a sentence on the accused would affect his future and his image in society."

The court convicted Fakir under section 354 (outraging the modesty of a woman) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The court ordered that Fakir be released after furnishing a bond of Rs 15,000 and directed him to appear before the probation officer

as and when called.

As per the complaint lodged at Byculla police station in south Mumbai in April 2022, the woman had ordered groceries from a local shop, and the accused, who worked at the establishment, came to her house to deliver the same.

The accused asked the woman for a glass of water, and when she was handing it over, he allegedly touched her hand inappropriately and winked at her.

He touched her hand the second time while handing over the bag of groceries and again winked at her, she alleged.

When the woman raised an alarm, the accused ran away. The woman then told her husband about the incident, and they lodged a police complaint.

The accused claimed that he had touched the woman's hand by mistake and had no intention to outrage her modesty.

The court held that although only the victim and the accused were present at the time of the incident, the evidence and the woman's statement were strong enough to prove the accused's complicity. - PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY



Manoj Jarange-Patil, Maratha reservation activist

"The government must act by September 30, or face the wrath of farmers. Farmers should express their dissatisfaction through their votes. Several people approached me to dissuade me from opposing the government and step into Sagar bungalow."

By Correspondent

Thane: An FIR has been registered against former Maharashtra Director General of Police (DGP) Sanjay Pandey and six others in Thane city on charges of extortion, criminal intimidation and preparation of fabricated documents, among others, police said on Tuesday.

The first information report (FIR) against the seven individuals, including Pandey -- who was appointed



DGP when the erstwhile MVA government was in office -- was filed on Monday at the Thane Nagar police station after Mumbai businessman Sanjay Punamiya submitted a complaint.

In the complaint, Punamiya claimed to have faced "significant troubles" at the hands of the accused between May 2021 and June 30, 2024. Besides the retired IPS of-

ficer, the FIR has named ex-ACP Sardar Patil, Inspector Manohar Patil, advocate Shekhar Jagtap, builder Shyamsunder Agrawal and two others - Subham Agrawal, and Sharad Agrawal -- as accused.

According to the complaint, the accused were unlawfully involved in investigation into a 2016 crime case registered with the Thane Nagar police. They also threatened the complainant and other businessmen with false cases, extorted money and prepared fabricated documents, while (one of them) posing as a Special Public Prosecutor to mislead courts, it said.

The FIR lists charges under multiple sections of the old IPC, including extortion, criminal conspiracy and false evidence, criminal intimidation, personating a public servant, giving false statements and obstruction of justice, assault, forgery and using forged documents, among others.

Over 40 pc consumers use digital payment daily

New Delhi: More than 40 per cent of consumers in Tier 3 to 6 cities use digital payment on a daily basis, while 45 per cent claimed to use it once in two days, a new survey report has said.

"This reflects the frequent usage of digital payments by consumers, even in Tier 3 to 6 locations of the country," said a report by Chase India on The State of Digital Payments in India.

The report identifies the key challenges faced by merchants and consumers in the adoption of digital payment services at the grassroots level.

According to the report, nearly half of the merchants who are not using digital payments in rural India are unaware of the service.

In contrast, a staggering 94 per cent of consumers who are not using digital payments are aware of it but still don't use it, as they face is-



sues like lack of internet connectivity, limited knowledge, mistrust in online payments and service-related problems.

The report added that around 74 per cent of consumers claimed to be using digital payment services for a transaction a family member made.

The report said around 41 per cent of merchants claimed to receive less than

25 per cent of their sales through digital payments, around 15 per cent of merchants claimed to receive over 50 per cent of their sales through digital payments.

"This shows the potential left to be tapped with respect to increasing the usage of digital payments at the grassroots level," the report said.

A total of 2,240 respon-

ents were surveyed for the report, including 1,184 consumers and 1,056 merchants, spread across 16 districts, covering eight states in different geographical zones of the country.

The report also said that lack of awareness about digital payments was a crucial finding. Around 46 per cent of merchants had never used digital payments because they were unaware of it.

The survey revealed that, on average, around 36 per cent of merchants claimed to be processing over 50 digital payment transactions every month. Also, around 23 per cent of merchants claimed to be processing not more than 1 digital payment transaction every alternate day. Most merchants process digital payment transactions of less than Rs 15,000 every month. Only a handful of merchants claimed to process digital payments of over Rs 1 lakh.

SC seeks SG's views on curative petition

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought the views of the solicitor general on issues related to a curative plea of the Centre and the Airports Authority of India (AAI) against its verdict allowing private firm GMR Airports to upgrade and operate Nagpur's Babasaheb Ambedkar International Airport.

The top court had on May 9, 2022 upheld the Bombay High Court order which

GMR IN NAGPUR AIRPORT

quashed a March 2020 communication issued by a joint venture firm cancelling a contract awarded to GMR Airports for the upgradation and operation of the airport.

The Centre and the AAI have filed the curative plea against the 2022 order of the top court.

-PTI

Focus on aviation, semiconductors

By Gurdip Singh

Singapore: The high-level meeting between senior ministers of India and Singapore has set the stage for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the city-state that will happen soon, its Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan has said.

Senior ministers from the two countries held a "productive" round of discussions at the second ministerial roundtable here and explored how the two countries can boost bilateral cooperation in digital, skill development, sustainability, healthcare, connectivity and advanced manufacturing.

This was the second time that ministers from Singapore and India met at the India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable (ISMR) after its inaugural edition was launched in September 2022

by then Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong during a five-day visit to India.



Balakrishnan said advanced manufacturing and semiconductors, as well as

INDIA-SINGAPORE TRADE

aviation and maritime connectivity, are the new areas that Singapore and India have added to a high-level platform for discussing ways to enhance bilateral cooperation.

These two additions to the India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable are areas of significant opportunity

for both countries, as well as their companies, the Singaporean foreign minister was quoted as saying by The Straits Times on Tuesday.

India is also likely to see tremendous growth in aviation in the coming years, having ordered more than 1,000 planes in the past year alone, the Singaporean foreign minister said, adding it represents great opportunities for services such as maintenance and air operations in the coming years -- another niche area where Singapore and its companies are globally competitive.

AI adds seven regional languages

Mumbai: Air India on Tuesday said it has enhanced its customer support services by adding seven new languages to its IVR system, including Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil, and Malayalam, besides the existing English and Hindi.

IVR (Interactive Voice Response) system will now automatically recognise the customer's language preference based on the user's mobile network, eliminating the need to manually choose a language, and thereby reducing the response time, the airline said in a statement.



The seven languages that have been in the airline's round-the-clock customer support services are Bengali, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu, the statement said.

Air India has recently set up five new contact centres, offering round-the-clock as-

sistance to its customers worldwide with dedicated desks for premium and frequent flyers.

Special assistance in Indian languages to Air India customers will be available from 0800 am to 2300 pm, every day, the airline said.

-PTI

CDSL, Citibank settle cases

New Delhi: Leading depository CDSL and global lender Citibank N.A. on Tuesday settled with Sebi cases pertaining to the alleged violation of regulatory norms after paying settlement charges.

CDSL and Citibank N.A. (DDP) paid Rs 1.3 crore and Rs 40.2 lakh, respectively, towards settlement charges, according to separate orders passed by SEBI.

-PTI

India ranks 31st in Transparency Index

Mumbai: Global property consultant JLL on Tuesday said that India's top real estate markets have entered into a "transparent" zone for the first time, driven by institutionalisation of commercial assets and improvement in data access.

JLL has released its 'Global Real Estate Transparency Index, 2024', which showed that India's tier-I markets have entered into the "transparent" zone for the first time with a composite score of 2.44. India ranks 31st in the list of 89 countries.

The consultant noted that "India has made a remarka-

ble leap forward in JLL's Global Real Estate Transparency Index 2024, reaching the transparent tier for the first time".

This progress is a result of institutionalisation in the commercial market and improved access to diverse real estate data sets, it said.

"India is the top global improver in the 2024 index, making significant strides in transaction processes and market fundamentals," JLL said, the country is leading the global front in enhancing transparency, with expanded data coverage and improved data quality across various



property sectors. There are 13 countries featured in the high-transparency zone.

The United Kingdom is at the top (with a score of 1.24) in the global list, followed by France, the United States, Australia, Canada, Netherlands, New Zealand, Ireland,

Sweden, Germany, Japan, Belgium and Singapore.

"India is the top global improver, with greater data coverage and quality across both core and niche property sectors -- ranging from industrial to data centres -- as institutionalisation in the market increases.

150 districts with better income

New Delhi: The majority of households with an annual income of Rs 5 lakh and above are concentrated in the top 20 per cent, or about 150, districts in the country, a report by MapmyIndia-backed data analytics firm ClarityX said on Tuesday.

The ClarityX District Potential Index 2024 Report based on MapmyIndia data repository and government data sources, found that luminosity across the county grew significantly from 17 to 30 per cent in last four years.

"60 per cent of households with annual income above Rs 5 lakh are in the top 20 per cent (about 150) districts of

India, and two-third of the total districts above All-India District median are in the western region -- which also has the highest share of fastest growing districts," the report said.

The report has measured growth of districts based on a district potential index (DPI) score covering socio-economic indicators like income distribution, social impetus like healthcare, education facilities per capita, infrastructure availability, financial activities like banking coverage, etc.

It compared the DPI score of 2019 with that of 2023 to measure the growth.



The report mentioned that the number of districts in India has grown to 788 across 36 states from 723 districts in 2019.

"Bengaluru Urban and Hyderabad districts emerge as the top two leaders with the highest score in 2023,

across all 788 districts. In central and east regions Jharkhand and Tripura emerge as the highest growing states. Some of the fastest growing states are in the North -- Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh," the report said.

Oral cholera vaccine launched

Hyderabad: Bharat Biotech International Ltd on Tuesday announced the launch of Hillchol, a novel single-strain oral cholera vaccine.

A press release from the vaccine maker said Hillchol (BBV131) was developed by Bharat Biotech under licence from Hilleman Laboratories (funded by Merck USA and Wellcome Trust) to combat Cholera. Global demand for Oral Cholera Vaccines (OCVs) exceeds 100 million doses annually, making them crucial for cholera control. Globally, there is a shortage of OCVs as there is only one manufacturer.

Discounts against scrappage certificate

New Delhi: Ahead of the festive season, several leading commercial and passenger vehicle manufacturers have agreed to offer discounts on new vehicle purchases against scrapped old vehicles, an official statement said on Tuesday.

The statement further said this initiative is a significant step forward in advancing India's circular economy, promoting the use of cleaner, safer and more efficient vehicles.

Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday

chaired a meeting with the SIAM delegation at Bharat Mandapam, where he addressed pressing issues in the automobile industry.

"During this interaction, responding positively to the advice of Hon'ble Minister RT&H and recognising the importance of Fleet Modernisation and Circular Economy, multiple Commercial Vehicle Manufacturers and multiple passenger vehicle manufacturers have agreed to offer discounts for a limited period against a certificate of deposit (Scrappage Certifi-



cate)," the statement said. It said commercial vehicle manufacturers are willing to offer discounts for a limited period of two years and passenger vehicle manufacturers are willing to offer discounts for a limited period of one year.

-PTI

Road developers to grow slower

New Delhi: Revenue growth of road engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) companies is expected to moderate to 5-7 per cent next fiscal, as lower national highway awarding weighs on their order books, rating agency Crisil said on Tuesday.

That said, the credit profiles of these companies will remain stable, supported by steady operating profitability and strong balance sheet, it added.

Zee, Sony amicably settle disputes

New Delhi: ZEE Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) and Sony Pictures Networks India on Tuesday said they have settled their six-month-long dispute related to the failed USD 10-billion merger and have agreed to withdraw all claims against each other.

As part of the "comprehensive non-cash settlement" between ZEEL and Culver Max Entertainment

Pvt Ltd (CMEPL), both "have mutually agreed to withdraw all respective claims against each other, in the ongoing arbitration at the SIAC and all related legal proceedings initiated in the NCLT and other forums," said a joint statement.

"The companies will also withdraw the respective Composite Schemes of Arrangement from the NCLT and inform the relevant reg-

ulatory authorities," it said. Both ZEE and Sony had claimed a termination fee of USD 90 million (around Rs 748.7 crore) from each other for not complying to the Merger Cooperation agreement (MCA) signed in De-

ember 2021. Sony had moved before the Singapore International Arbitration Center (SIAC) immediately two days after the termination of the deal, saying ZEEL did not satisfy the merger conditions, initiated arbitration proceedings and claimed a termination fee of USD 90 million.

This was contested by ZEEL before the SIAC, which denied any interim relief to

the Sony group against the Indian broadcaster.

ZEEL also moved the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) seeking implementation of the proposed merger and later withdrew its plea.

Later in May, ZEEL terminated the MCA by issuing a letter dated May 23, 2024, and it also sought a termination fee of USD 90 million from two Sony Group enti-

ties -- Sony Pictures Networks India (SPNI), now known as Culver Max Entertainment, and Bangla Entertainment (BEPL).

Sony Pictures Networks India is the consumer-facing identity of CMEPL, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Sony Group Corporation, Japan.

Under the settlement terms, none of the parties will have any "outstanding

or continuing obligations or liabilities" to the other, the joint statement said.

In January this year, Sony had pulled out from the proposed USD 10.5-billion merger with ZEE Entertainment Enterprises Ltd citing failure to meet certain "closing conditions" by the Indian firm.

ZEEL and SPNI have agreed to merge on December 22, 2021.

BSE SENSEX		TOP GAINERS	
August 27, 2024		PTI	
%	POINTS	%	POINTS
+2.07	Bajaj Finserv	1721.55	
+2.04	Maruti	12496.60	
+1.71	LT	3702.40	
+1.37	Bajaj Finance	6869.00	
+1.29	Infosys	1900.15	
+1.09	ICICI Bank	1226.15	
+1.02	Sun Pharma	1790.25	
+0.74	Axis Bank	1178.65	
+0.58	Bharti Airtel	1522.50	
+0.07	Nestle India	2520.75	

BSE SENSEX		TOP LOSERS	
August 27, 2024		PTI	
%	POINTS	%	POINTS
-2.19	Titan	3550.70	
-2.01	JSW Steel	943.75	
-1.90	Hindustan Unilever	2767.35	
-1.37	Tata Motors	1077.20	
-1.24	NTPC	409.60	
-1.01	ITC	500.60	
-0.90	Power Grid	335.05	
-0.78	Reliance	3000.45	
-0.75	Tech Mahindra	1627.05	
-0.61	Tata Steel	154.70	

SC stays Ayush Ministry's notification

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed a notification issued by the Ministry of Ayush, which omitted rule 170 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945

MISLEADING ADS

that prohibits misleading advertisements of Ayurvedic, Siddha, and Unani drugs.

A bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Sandeep Mehta said the notification issued by the ministry was in the teeth of its May 7, 2024 order.

Clamping down on misleading advertisements, the

apex court on May 7, 2024 had directed that before an advertisement is permitted to be issued, a self-declaration to be obtained from the advertisers on the line of the Cable Television Networks Rules, 1994.

"Instead of withdrawing the letter dated August 29, 2023, for reasons best known to the ministry, the notification dated July 1 to omit Rule 170 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945, has been issued which runs contrary to directions issued by this court.

QUOTE OF THE DAY



Bhavish Aggarwal,
Founder, Ola

"Every chip in the world passes through India, not physically, but design-wise. Every chip has some design (element) happening in India, but we have no Indian chip. We have the largest number of silicon chip designers in the world, but there is no Indian chip."

Doctor Rape and Murder

CBI to consult AIIMS experts on DNA

New Delhi: The CBI will consult experts from the All India Institute of Medical Science on the DNA and forensic reports related to the alleged rape and murder of a trainee doctor at RG Kar Medical College, officials said Tuesday.

In order to build a watertight case, the CBI will send the reports to AIIMS to seek their opinion in the case, they said.

The reports will also help the agency to ascertain if Sanjay Roy was the only accused who committed the crime or there were others involved, they said.

So far the agency is working on the leads that Roy was the only accused in the crime but involvement of others will only be ruled out after receiving the opinion of AIIMS experts, the officials said.

The rape and killing of the junior doctor in a seminar hall of the hospital has sparked widespread protests.

The medic's body with severe injury marks was found

inside the seminar hall of the hospital's chest department in the morning of August 9 by a doctor who was on round.

Kolkata Police had arrested Roy on August 10 based on CCTV footage in which he was seen entering the seminar hall at 4.03 AM on August 9 when the crime was allegedly committed.

Based on CCTV footage, Roy was put through extensive interrogation and the police had also noticed "recent injuries" on his left cheek, abrasion in left hand between his left and ring finger, abrasion over the back of left thigh among others showing signs of struggle.

His biological samples like urethral swab and smear, semen, hair, nail clippings and nail scrapping were collected during the medico-legal examination, they said.

On August 13, the Calcutta High Court ordered the transfer of the probe from the Kolkata Police to the CBI, which started its investigation on August 14.

The CBI took over all the

Protesters, policemen injured

Clashes broke out between police and protesters at different parts of Kolkata and its neighbouring Howrah on Tuesday, as the agitators tried to make their way through barricades to march towards the West Bengal secretariat. The protesters were attempting to reach 'Nabanna' to demand the resignation of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee over the rape-murder of a doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital here.

Clashes were reported at MG Road, Hastings Road and areas near the Princep Ghat alongside Santragachi and Howrah Maidan in which some protesters as well as policemen were injured.

Police lathicharged and used water cannons and tear gas to disperse protesters who threw stones and bricks at the security forces, and attempted to topple barricades blocking their way to the state secretariat.

forensic evidence from Kolkata Police and also subjected Roy, former principal of the medical college Sandip Ghosh, four doctors who were on duty with the victim, and a civic volunteer to polygraph tests to get further leads about the crime.

The initial reports from CFSL are being analysed and corroborated with evidence to get further direction to the probe, the officials said.

A polygraph test can help

in assessing inaccuracies in statements of suspects and witnesses. By monitoring their psychological responses - heart rate, breathing patterns, sweating and blood pressure - investigators can determine if there are discrepancies in their response.

However, these are not admissible evidence during the trial and can only be used to get further leads in a case.

- PTI



Police personnel try to stop students who were marching from Howrah Maidan towards the state secretariat in protest against the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital incident, in Howrah on Tuesday. Pic-PTI

BJP demands polygraph test on CM

The BJP has also demanded that the CBI conduct a polygraph test on Banerjee and Police Commissioner Vineet Goel, who the party alleged had initially said that the victim died by suicide.

The BJP condemned the incident of lathicharge by the West Bengal Police on the students, who had taken out a rally in Kolkata demanding justice for the victim and the chief minister's resignation.

"Whatever is happening in West Bengal is worrisome. It's akin to tearing the Constitution to shreds. It's clearly visible that if at all there is a dictator in the country, it's Mamata Banerjee," BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia told a press conference at the party headquarters here. The BJP has called for a 12-hour strike on Wednesday.



Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) chief Dushyant Chautala and Azad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram) leader Chandra Shekhar Azad at a press conference after forming an alliance for the Haryana Assembly elections, in New Delhi on Tuesday.

Legal notice to 'Emergency' producers

Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has sent a legal notice to the producers of the film "Emergency", which the apex religious body of the Sikhs claims misrepresents the character and history of Sikhs.

In the notice sent by Advocate Amanbir Singh Siali, legal advisor of SGPC, the pro-

ducers of the film, including Kangana Ranaut, have been asked to remove the trailer released on August 14, from public and social media platforms and submit a written apology to the Sikh community.

On August 21, the Akal Takht, the highest temporal seat of the Sikhs, and SGPC had demanded an immediate

ban on the "Emergency" film starring actor-MP Ranaut, claiming it tries to "character assassinate" Sikhs.

SGPC secretary Partap Singh, while expressing strong objection to the film, on Tuesday said separate letters were written to the Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting and Central Board of Film Certifica-

tion's Chairperson to ban this film.

Partap Singh said following the directions of SGPC president Harjinder Singh Dhali, a legal notice has been sent to the producers of the film including Kangana Ranaut, who is also a BJP MP from Mandi.

He said that after the release of the film's trailer,

many "anti-Sikh scenes had come to light, which deeply hurt the sentiments of the Sikh community".

Dhali had recently sought the registration of an FIR against Kangana Ranaut, the film's writer, director, producer and lead actor.

"Emergency" is slated to hit the screens next month. - PTI

Only free-ranging cheetah dies

Sheepur (MP)/New Delhi: The only free-ranging cheetah in MP's Kuno National Park has died, with officials suggesting drowning to be the primary cause of death.

Wildlife activists, however, suspect poaching although there were no external injuries on the Namibian cheetah Pawan.

Supreme Court remarks HC "totally misdirected" itself

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Tuesday also dealt with the observations made by the high court on whether Kavitha was entitled to benefit from the proviso to section 45 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) being a woman.

Section 45 of the PMLA provides for the twin conditions which are required to be satisfied before granting bail to an accused under the anti-money laundering law. The twin conditions are that the judge should be prima facie satisfied that the accused has not committed the offence and that he is not likely to commit any offence while on bail.

The high court had noted in its verdict that the proviso provides the exception to the general rule if the accused is a woman.

The bench said day in and day out, it was argued before the court by the prosecution that all accused should be treated equally irrespective of whether they are a Chief Minister or a lawmaker.

"However, the single judge (of the High Court) in the present case, while denying the benefit of proviso to section 45 (1) comes to a heartening conclusion that the appellant



(Kavitha) is a highly qualified and well-accomplished person, having made significant contributions to politics and social work...." the bench noted.

It said the high court proceeded to observe that Kavitha can't be equated to a "vulnerable woman".

The bench, which referred to an earlier judgement delivered by the top court, said the High Court had "totally misdirected" itself while denying the benefit of the proviso to Kavitha.

It noted that in the earlier verdict, the apex court had not said that merely because a woman was highly educated, sophisticated or a lawmaker, she should be denied the benefit of the proviso.

During the hearing, the bench said it would set aside these observations of the high court as it would at least apply to all courts in the jurisdiction

THE TIMELINE

- March 15, 2024: Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrests Kavitha in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam.
- April 11: Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arrests Kavitha in connection with corruption case linked to the alleged scam.
- May 6: Delhi court denies bail in both cases.
- May 9: Kavitha moves Delhi HC seeking bail in ED's case.
- May 15: Kavitha approaches Delhi HC for bail in corruption case lodged by CBI.
- July 1: Delhi HC dismisses Kavitha's bail pleas in both cases.
- Aug 12: SC seeks response from CBI and ED on Kavitha's pleas seeking bail.
- Aug 27: SC grants bail to Kavitha.

of Delhi and might mean that no educated woman can get bail.

Raju claimed that Kavitha had destroyed/formatted her mobile phone and her conduct amounted to tampering with evidence.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, who termed the allegation as "bogus", said Kavitha had given some of her old phones to her staff as she up-

graded her equipment.

Kavitha, the daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, has been accused of being part of the 'South Group', a cartel of businessmen and politicians, which allegedly paid kickbacks of Rs 100 crore to Delhi's ruling AAP in return for liquor licences. She has denied all allegations. - PTI

Chief secretaries of 18 states, UTs appear in SC

New Delhi: Chief secretaries of 18 states and union territories appeared before the Supreme Court on Tuesday over alleged non-implementation of the Second National Judicial Pay Commission's (SNJPC) recommendations on payment of pension arrears and retirement benefits to judicial officers.

The top court took note of compliance affidavits of states and union territories like Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Meghalaya, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Kerala and Delhi and ordered the closure of proceedings against them.

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud and Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said the chief secretaries and finance secretaries of states which have complied with the top court's directions on payment of arrears relating to pay, pension and allowance to judicial officers need not appear before the court any more.

"We have (find) no pleasure in calling the chief and finance secretaries of the states, but consistently the counsels of states have been absent during the hearings," it said.

BJP's allegation against Congress President Scam in allocation of land to Kharge family trust

New Delhi: The BJP on Tuesday alleged a "scam" in allocation of a piece of land to a trust run by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's family in Karnataka and demanded a CBI probe into the matter.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters here, party national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia demanded Mallikarjun Kharge's resignation as the Congress president and that of his son Priyank Kharge, who is a minister in the Karnataka government.

He also demanded Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's resignation. "There is a consistency in the Congress' acts of corruption. Wherever we will go we will do corruption is the new slogan of the Congress. It will not be wrong to say that the Congress has become synonymous with corruption," Bhatia said.

"We saw the MUDA scam and Valmiki Development Corporation scam happening under the nose of Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. Now a case of allocation



of five-acre land to a trust run by Mallikarjun Kharge and his family in Karnataka has emerged," he added.

The land has been allocated to the Kharge family-run trust by flouting of rules, the BJP spokesperson said, claiming that Mallikarjun Kharge, his wife, his son-in-law Radhakrishna and sons - Priyank Kharge and Rahul Kharge - are in the trust.

"As per information with us, several companies and organisations had given application for the land but it was allocated to the Kharge family-run trust by flouting the rules," Bhatia claimed.

The BJP spokesperson demanded that Mallikarjun Kharge immediately resign as the Congress president and his son Priyank Kharge as the state minister.

"There should be an impartial probe into it by an independent agency CBI to ascertain the truth," he said.

BJP leader Lahar Singh Siroya, also a Rajya Sabha member, had on Sunday questioned the alleged allocation of Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB) land to a trust run by Kharge's family and asked when did they become aerospace entrepreneurs to be eligible for the land.

He had also sought to know whether the case was about misuse of power, nepotism and conflict of interest.

Karnataka Large and Medium Industries Minister M B Patil said on Monday that the educational trust run by AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge's son Rahul Kharge was allotted a Civic Amenity (CA) plot at Aerospace park at a prescribed price in accordance with the norms.

In a statement, Patil dismissed the allegations made by Siroya and insisted that no rules were violated in the process.

- PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY



Ritabhari Chakraborty, Actor, Bengali Cinema

"The hero/producer/directors with such filthy mind and behaviour continue to work without facing any consequences of their actions and even seen holding candles for the Kar victim as if they think of women as anything better than flesh. Let's unmask these predators. I am calling my fellow actresses to stand against these monsters."

Omar Abdullah to fight from Ganderbal

Srinagar: National Conference vice president Omar Abdullah will contest the Jammu and Kashmir assembly elections from the Ganderbal segment, the party said on Tuesday, in what marks a U-turn for the former chief minister who had vowed to not fight for a seat in the legislature of a union territory.

The party released a list of 32 candidates which included Omar Abdullah for the Ganderbal assembly seat, a constituency that he represented from 2009 to 2014 when he was the chief minister of the NC-Congress coalition government.



Omar Abdullah had dropped hints on Monday that he is likely to reconsider his decision of not contesting the polls.

Speaking to media after the NC and Congress announced their seat-sharing arrangement on Monday, Omar Abdullah said he does not want to send out a "wrong signal" by asking his party colleagues to contest and the people to cast their votes for an assem-

bly "that I may be suggesting that I look down upon".

"I am conscious of one thing which I had not thought over fully, which is my mistake. If I was not ready to contest an election for an assembly, how can I get the people ready to vote for that assembly?"

"How can I hope that my colleagues will seek votes for an assembly which I am not ready to accept or may be suggesting that I look down upon? It has put a pressure on me and I do not want to give a wrong signal to the people," he said.

- PTI

J and K Assembly polls Cong-NC alliance no bearing on BJP: Singh

Jammu: Exuding confidence of the BJP forming the next government in Jammu and Kashmir, Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Tuesday said the pre-poll alliance between the Congress and National Conference for the upcoming assembly elections will have no bearing on his party.

Singh was in Doda district, which is part of his Udhampur parliamentary constituency, to accompany

former minister Shakti Raj Parihar and Gajay Singh Rana who filed their nomination papers from the Doda-West and Doda assembly constituencies, respectively.

Tuesday was the last day for filing of nomination papers for 24 assembly segments - 16 in south Kashmir and eight in Doda, Kishtwar and Ramban districts of Jammu region - which are going to polls in the first phase on September 18.

Kuno : Prey, predator challenges; Second site not ready

By Gaurav Saini

New Delhi: Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park, the first home to translocated cheetahs in India, continues to struggle with a high leopard population and a low prey base, while the twin challenges have delayed preparations at the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary that will be the second site for cheetah introduction.

Summary records from meetings of the Centre's Cheetah Project Steering Committee reveal that prey augmentation and leopard management are among the major challenges facing the grand initiative since the reintroduction of cheetahs in India in September 2022.

The low prey density is also one of the reasons why cheetahs spent an extended period in enclosures in Kuno after being brought back from the wild in August last year, following the death of three cheetahs due to septicemia.

As an interim solution, authorities have been introducing prey into both Kuno and Gandhi Sagar that is also in Madhya Pradesh. The high leopard population in both areas also prompted the initiation of a leopard translocation drive.

But members of the committee have time and again emphasised the importance of "in-situ prey build up", saying "active prey augmentation through translocation cannot happen indefinitely".

In a meeting on June 18,



Sanjay Raikhere, DFO Mandasaur, reported that there were 24 leopards in the 64 sq km enclosure being prepared for the new batch of cheetahs in Gandhi Sagar. According to sources, 15 leopards have been relocated from there so far.

Sources have told PTI that Gandhi Sagar is "not 100 percent ready" for cheetahs, largely owing to the leopard and prey base challenges.

"We are working on making the fencing leopard-proof. We also need to improve the prey population both inside and outside the enclosure," a source said.

Gandhi Sagar is spread across 368 sq km and has an additional 2,500 sq km area

surrounding it.

According to the "Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in Gandhi Sagar", five to eight cheetahs will be released into a 64 sq-km predator-proof fenced area in the first phase with a focus on breeding.

The long-term goal is to establish a metapopulation of 60-70 cheetahs in the Kuno-Gandhisagar landscape.

According to experts, the presence of dominant predators like leopards and lions influences cheetah's home range and space use.

Cheetahs, known for their exceptional speed and agility, are adapted to hunt primarily in open habitats.

In contrast, leopards are highly adaptable to a wide

range of habitats and have a more versatile diet. As a result, cheetahs tend to avoid direct confrontation with leopards by choosing habitats and times when leopards are less active.

According to Project Cheetah's annual report for 2022-23, in Kuno, leopards were observed being chased away during encounters with cheetah coalitions.

Records obtained by PTI through an RTI application show that committee members have expressed serious concerns over prey and leopard-related challenges in nearly every meeting held so far.

According to the summary record of the meeting dated June 18, Rs 3.75 crore has been spent on grass re-

vival in an area of around 5,000 hectares in Kuno, as part of habitat improvement efforts to sustain a healthy prey base.

In the same meeting, Qamar Qureshi, a scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), expressed concern over the low chinkara population in Gandhi Sagar (outside the enclosure) and emphasised the need to manage the high leopard density there.

Steering Committee Chairman Rajesh Gopal stressed the need for an ecological, niche-based long-term solution to address the relative abundance of leopards.

In a meeting held on March 12, S P Yadav, the former head of Project

Numbers Speak

- 368 sq km – Area of Gandhi Sagar
- 2,500 sq km – Area surrounding it
- 64 sq km – Area of Cheetah enclosure in Gandhi Sagar
- 24 – No leopards in Gandhi Sagar
- 15 – No of leopards relocated from Gandhi Sagar
- 5-7 – No of Cheetahs to be relocated to Gandhi Sagar enclosure
- 60-70 – No of Cheetahs to be established in Kuno-Gandhisagar landscape
- Rs 3.75 crore – Money spent on grass revival in an area of around 5,000 hectares in Kuno
- 17 – Average no of prey animals per sq km in Kuno
- 26 – No of leopards per 100 sq km.

Cheetah and advisor to the steering committee, said the high density of leopards at Kuno, along with comparatively low prey density, is a cause for concern.

Gopal said grass revival should be carried out in a time-bound manner to support in-situ prey revival and that the translocation of leopards should follow a

standard operating procedure.

"This is important since the habitat is devoid of bigger cats like tiger or lion causing spatial/niche separation of leopards. High density of leopards would reduce the standing prey biomass," he said.

In another meeting in December last year, Qureshi said prey assessment at Kuno revealed an average of 17 prey animals per sq km, with hotspots harbouring around 30-35 prey animals per sq km. The leopard population was found to be high, at 26 per 100 sq km.

In a meeting held on September 4 last year, shortly after the cheetahs were returned to enclosures from the wild, Gopal said the big cats should be released back into the wild "only when we are confident with the prey density outside, which ideally should be 30-60 chital units per sq km". At that time, only 18-20 chital units per sq km were available.

During the meeting, P.R. Sinha, former head of WII, said that while external prey supplementation must continue, "we should not lose sight of the task of building a natural prey base through habitat manipulation". "This task is difficult, but this is our ultimate goal," he added.

Qureshi gave a presentation on Kuno's prey base, noting that it had 91 leopards, and that the prey population was "too low to release all the cheetahs into the wild".

Air pollution in India increased death risk

New Delhi: In Indian districts, air pollution exceeding national standards have been shown to increase death risk across all age groups – by 86 per cent in newborns, 100-120 per cent in children under five years of age and 13 per cent in adults, according to a study.

A team of researchers, including those at the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, looked at fine particulate matter (PM2.5) pollution levels across over 700 districts. Data for analysis was taken from the National Family and Health Survey (fifth round) and the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS).

In households not having a separate kitchen, the study found higher chances of deaths among newborns and adults. Among newborns and children aged under five, the chances "appeared to be almost two-fold and more than two-fold higher, respectively, in the districts of India where the PM2.5 concentration is up to the NAAQS level," the authors said in the study published in the journal GeoHealth.

Analysing the interaction between PM2.5 exceeding NAAQS (of 40 micrograms per cubic metre) and household air pollution, the team found that it substantially increased deaths among newborns by 19 per cent, children by 17 per cent and adults by 13 per cent. "The results demonstrate that PM2.5 exhibits a stronger association with mortality across various life stages. Notably, when (household air pollution) is considered in conjunction with ambient pollution, this association is further heightened," the authors wrote.



This drone photo taken by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, shows the landslide in Ketchikan, Alaska.

Pic - AP/PTI

Local emissions in most NCAP cities to rise by at least 11 pc by 2030

New Delhi: Local emissions in most cities covered under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) are projected to rise by at least 11 per cent by 2030 compared to 2019 levels, according to a new study.

The study, conducted by the think tank Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), examined 76 out of the total 131 NCAP cities over a period of 2.5 years.

The findings revealed that only 8 of the 76 cities are likely to achieve a 40 per cent reduction in four major pollutants – PM10, PM2.5, sulphur dioxide, and nitrogen oxides -- by 2030, compared to 2019 levels.

"Our study shows that most cities covered under the NCAP will not be able to achieve a 40 per cent reduction in local emissions even by 2030," said Anirban Banerjee, project lead at

CSTEP.

Local emissions are expected to increase by 11 to 45 per cent in the studied cities by 2030, relative to 2019 levels, significantly worsening pollution, the study said.

The study estimated the share of the four major pollutants for the base year 2019 and projected their contributions from different sources until 2030. These outcomes were validated against transport and domestic fuel consumption surveys conducted in over 70 per cent of the studied cities.

The findings suggest that without targeted interventions, local emissions will likely rise by 2030.

The study recommends prioritising targeted interventions for major emission sources such as industries, transportation, construction, and open burning in these cities to meet NCAP



targets and achieve cleaner air.

A portal visualising the study's findings will be launched on Wednesday at the sixth edition of the India Clean Air Summit (ICAS), a premier conference on air pollution organised by CSTEP, taking place from August 26-30.

Launched in 2019, the NCAP is India's first national initiative to set clean air targets, aiming for a 20-30 per cent reduction in PM10 pollution by 2024, with 2017 as the base year. The revised target is a 40 per cent reduction by 2026, using 2019-20 as the base year.

-PTI

UN chief calls rising seas 'worldwide catastrophe'

By Seth Borenstein and Charlotte Graham-McLay

Nuku'alofa (Tonga): Highlighting seas that are rising at an accelerating rate, especially in the far more vulnerable Pacific Island nations, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued yet another climate SOS to the world. This time he said those initials stand for "save our seas."

The United Nations and the World Meteorological Organization Monday issued reports on worsening sea level rise, turbocharged by a warming Earth and melting ice sheets and glaciers. They highlight how the Southwestern Pacific is not only hurt by the rising oceans, but by other climate change effects of ocean acidification and marine heat

waves.

Guterres toured Samoa and Tonga and made his climate plea from Tonga's capital on Tuesday at a meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum, whose member countries are among those most imperiled by climate change.

"This is a crazy situation," Guterres said. "Rising seas are a crisis entirely of humanity's making. A crisis that will soon swell to an almost unimaginable scale, with no lifeboat to take us back to safety."

"A worldwide catastrophe is putting this Pacific paradise in peril," he said. "The ocean is overflowing."

A report that Guterres' office commissioned found that sea level lapping against Tonga's capital Nuku'alofa had risen 21 cen-

timeters between 1990 and 2020, twice the global average of 10 centimeters. Apia, Samoa, has seen 31 centimeters of rising seas, while Suva-B, Fiji has had 29 centimeters.

"This puts Pacific Island nations in grave danger," Guterres said. About 90 per cent of the region's people live within 5 kilometers of the rising oceans, he said.

Since 1980, coastal flooding in Guam has jumped from twice a year to 22 times a year. It's gone from five times a year to 43 times a year in the Cook Islands. In Pago Pago, American Samoa, coastal flooding went from zero to 102 times a year, according to the WMO State of the Climate in the South-West Pacific 2023 report.

"Because of sea level rise, the ocean is transforming



from being a lifelong friend into a growing threat," Celeste Saulo, secretary-general of the World Meteorological Organization, told reporters in Nuku'alofa on Tuesday.

While the western edges of the Pacific are seeing sea level rise about twice the global average, the central Pacific is closer to the global average, the WMO said.

Sea levels are rising faster in the western tropical

Pacific because of where the melting ice from western Antarctica heads, warmer waters and ocean currents, UN officials said.

Guterres said he can see changes since the last time he was in the region in May 2019.

While he met in Nuku'alofa on Tuesday with Pacific nations on the environment at their leaders' annual summit, a hundred local high school students

and activists from across the Pacific marched for climate justice a few blocks away.

One of the marchers was Itinterunga Rae of the Barnaban Human Rights Defenders Network, whose people were forced generations ago to relocate to Fiji from their Kiribati island home due to environmental degradation. Rae said abandoning Pacific islands should not be seen as a solution to rising seas.

The Pacific is getting hit hard despite only producing 0.2 per cent of heat-trapping gases causing climate change and expanding oceans, the UN said. The largest chunk of the sea rise is from melting ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland. Melting land glaciers add to that, and warmer water also expands based on the laws of physics.

Antarctic and Greenland "melting has greatly accelerated over the past three to four decades due to high rate of warming at the poles," Williams, who was not part of the reports, said in an email.

About 90 per cent of the heat trapped by greenhouse gases goes into the oceans, the UN said.

Globally, sea level rise has been accelerating, the UN report said, echoing peer-reviewed studies. The rate is now the fastest it has been in 3,000 years, Guterres said.

Between 1901 and 1971, the global average sea rise was 1.3 centimeters a decade, according to the UN report. Between 1971 and 2006 it jumped to 1.9 centimeters per decade, then between 2006 and 2018 it was up to 3.7 centimeters a dec-

ade. The last decade, seas have risen 4.8 centimeters.

The UN report also highlighted cities in the richest 20 nations, which account for 80% of the heat-trapping gases, where rising seas are lapping at large population centers. Those cities where sea level rise in the past 30 years has been at least 50 per cent higher than the global average include Shanghai; Perth, Australia; London; Atlantic City, New Jersey; Boston; Miami; and New Orleans.

New Orleans topped the list with 126 centimeters of sea level rise between 1990 and 2020. UN officials highlighted the flooding in New York City during 2012's Superstorm Sandy as worsened by rising seas. A 2021 study said climate-driven sea level rise added \$8 billion to the storm's costs.

Allegations by Philippines

Chinese ships blocked food delivery

By Jim Gomez

Manila: China deployed "an excessive force" of 40 ships that blocked two Philippine vessels from delivering food and other supplies to Manila's largest coast guard ship in a disputed shoal in the latest flare-up of their territorial disputes in the South China Sea, Philippine officials said Tuesday.

China and the Philippines blamed each other for the confrontation on Monday in Sabina Shoal, an uninhabited atoll both countries claim that has become the latest flashpoint in the Spratlys, the most hotly disputed region of the sea passage that is a key global trade and security route.

China and the Philippines have separately deployed coast guard ships to Sabina in recent months on suspicion the other may act to take control of and build structures in the fishing atoll.

The hostilities have particularly intensified between China and the Philippines since last year and Monday's confrontation was the sixth the two sides have reported in the high seas and in the air. The confrontations have sparked concerns of a larger conflict that could involve the United States, the longtime treaty ally of the Philippines.



The Philippine coast guard said the "excessive force" of Chinese coast guard and navy ships, along with 31 suspected militia vessels, illegally obstructed the delivery of the food supplies, including an ice cream treat for the personnel aboard the BRP Teresa Magbanua as the Philippines marked National Heroes' Day on Monday.

The Philippine coast guard said it "remains steadfast in our commitment to uphold national interests and ensure the safety and security of our waters" and urged "the China coast guard to abide with the international law

and stop deploying maritime forces that could undermine mutual respect, a universally recognized foundation for responsible and friendly relations among coast guards."

In Beijing, China's coast guard said that it took control measures against two Philippine coast guard ships that "intruded" into waters near Sabina Shoal. It said in a statement that the Philippine ships escalated the situation by repeatedly approaching a Chinese coast guard ship. The Chinese coast guard did not say what control measures it took.

China has rapidly expanded its military and has

become increasingly assertive in pursuing its territorial claims in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety. The tensions have led to more frequent confrontations, primarily with the Philippines, though the longtime territorial disputes also involve other claimants, including Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei.

Chinese and Philippine coast guard ships have collided near Sabina, which Beijing calls Xianbin and Manila refers to as Escoda prior to Monday.

Sabina Shoal lies about 140 kilometers west of the

Philippine province of Palawan, in the internationally recognized exclusive economic zone of the Philippines.

Sabina is near the Second Thomas Shoal, another flashpoint where China has hampered the Philippine delivery of supplies for Filipino forces aboard a long-grounded navy ship, the BRP Sierra Madre. Last month, China and the Philippines reached an agreement to prevent increasingly hostile confrontations at the Second Thomas Shoal, allowing a Philippine vessel to deliver food supplies a week later without any hostilities.

Modi speaks to Putin on Ukraine



New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin as he shared his "insights" from his recent visit to Ukraine and reiterated India's firm commitment to supporting an early, abiding and peaceful resolution of the conflict with Ukraine.

In a post on X, Modi said the two leaders also discussed measures to further strengthen special and privileged strategic partnership between the two countries.

He said, "Exchanged perspectives on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and my insights from the recent visit to Ukraine. Reiterated India's firm commitment to support an early, abiding and peaceful resolution of the conflict."

The prime minister had on Monday briefed US President Joe Biden on his visit to Ukraine and conveyed India's full support for early return of peace to the region through dialogue and diplomacy.

The Ministry of External Affairs in a statement later said Modi during his telephone conversation with Putin recalled his "successful visit to Russia" last month to participate in the 22nd India-Russia Bilateral Summit.

Insulting Taipei

Taiwan bans concert by Chinese rapper



Taipei: Taiwan has cancelled a planned Taipei concert by a Chinese rapper after he used the insulting term "Taipei, China" in promotional materials.

Wang Yitai's scheduled Sept. 14 concert has been scrapped and the performer from the southwestern city of Chengdu banned from the island, the Taiwanese government's Mainland Affairs Council announced late Sunday.

The term is insulting because it describes Taipei, the island's capital, as a Chinese city under Beijing's rule, echoing the government's position on eventually annexing Taiwan by force if necessary and denigrating the island's lively democracy.

Not widely known outside China, Wang is signed to a rap label in Chengdu, a city with a lively arts scene that has become famous for eclectic performers and venues. Its also home to the rap group CD Rev, which won international notoriety for hard-line nationalist tracks including ones that compare Taiwan to the semi-autonomous Chinese city Hong Kong and made obscene

and misogynist references to former President Tsai Ing-wen.

China regularly bans Taiwanese artists, many of whom are popular in the mainland, for any sign of support for the ruling Democratic Progressive Party that favors the island's de-facto independence from China.

While Taiwan regularly welcomes Chinese artists and its government considers musical interactions in a positive light, the Mainland Affairs Council said that "cross-strait exchanges should be conducted based on the principles of reciprocity and mutual respect, and any publications or promotions that belittle Taiwan's status will not be tolerated."

While Taiwan's official name is the Republic of China, after the government that fled to the island in 1950 amid civil war, it is widely known simply as Taiwan, and competes at the Olympics as "Chinese Taipei" in deference to Beijing, whose pressure has reduced the island's number of formal diplomatic allies to just 12.

- AP



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil Mauro Vieira during a meeting, in New Delhi on Tuesday. Pic-PTI

Telegram CEO's custody extended

Paris: A French investigative judge extended police custody for the CEO of the popular messaging app Telegram, Pavel Durov, prosecutors said on Tuesday.

Durov was detained Saturday at Le Bourget airport as part of a judicial inquiry opened last month involving 12 alleged criminal violations. They include complicity in selling child sexual abuse material and in drug trafficking, fraud, abetting organized crime transactions and refusing to share information or documents with investigators when required by law. Durov's police custody order was extended on Monday evening for up to 48 hours.

Interfaith Asian trip Pope to visit Istiqlal mosque in Indonesia

Jakarta (Indonesia): When Pope Francis begins his Asia tour next week, one of his early stops will be at Indonesia's iconic Istiqlal mosque.

The 87-year-old head of the Catholic Church will hold an interfaith meeting with representatives of the country's six officially recognized religions as the populous Southeast Asian nation faces growing challenges to its tolerant image.

Francis, who has suffered a slew of health problems and has become increasingly reliant on a wheelchair, has a rigorous schedule during his forerunner's visit. He will start his trip in Jakarta on Sept. 3, where he will meet Indonesian President Joko Widodo.

In Istiqlal mosque, the Argentine Jesuit, known for promoting religious dialogue, will meet delegates of Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Catholicism and Protestantism. Indonesia's constitution recognizes the latter two as separate religions.

Istiqlal mosque's Grand Imam Nasaruddin Umar told The Associated Press that Francis choosing Indo-



NUMBERS SPEAK

- 280 million – Population of Indonesia
- 87 per cent – Muslim proportion
- 2.9 per cent – Catholic proportion
- 3 – Indonesia is third-largest Christian population in Asia after the Philippines and China

nesia as the first stop of his Asian visit makes "the Muslim community proud." He also said they will use the pope's visit "to discuss the

common ground between religious communities and emphasize the commonalities between religions, ethnicities and beliefs."

- AP

British PM warns of 'painful' budget

London: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Tuesday gave the first indication of some tough tax measures in store in the October budget in the first keynote address of his premiership since taking charge at 10 Downing Street last month.

In a planned speech at the Rose Garden before a gathering of apprentices, medics and other professionals, Starmer declared the state of the public finances was left in

a much worse condition by the previous Conservative Party regime than the Labour government had expected.

He declared that his job was now to fix the foundations which would involve "short-term pain for long-term good" and admitted that "unpopular" decisions would have to be made.

"There is a Budget coming in October and it is going to be painful. We have no other choice given the situation that

we are in," said Starmer.

"I promised that this government would serve people like you – apprentices, teachers, nurses, small business owners, firefighters, those serving our community and our country every day," he said, with reference to the Downing Street gathering.

The keynote, timed a week before Parliament resumes after its summer recess next week, was designed to assert that "it won't be business as

usual because we can't go on like this any more".

"Things will have to be done differently. We will do the hard work to root out 14 years of rot, reverse a decade of decline and fix the foundations. Between now and Christmas, we will carry on as we started: action not words. We will introduce legislation and take decisions to protect taxpayers' money," said Starmer.

- PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY



Yoshimasa Hayashi, Chief Cabinet Secretary, Japan

"The Chinese military aircraft's incursion into Japan's airspace not only is a serious violation of our territorial rights but also a safety threat. We found it absolutely unacceptable."

If anything happens to me, Army, ISI responsible: Imran

Islamabad: Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on Tuesday reiterated that the Army and the ISI are responsible for his condition and expressed fear for his life.

Khan, 71, lodged at the Adiala Jail since last year, also blamed the current dispensation for being averse to criticism, for deteriorating law-and-order situation across the country, and also for ruining Pakistan's cricket that is facing repeated defeats.

In a post on X from jail,



Khan repeated claims about rigged elections and said only a government with a genuine mandate will be able to plan for fundamental reforms.

"The ISI controls all administrative matters related to my imprisonment. I'm saying it again: if anything happens to me, the Army Chief and DG ISI will be re-

sponsible," the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said in a detailed post on X.

Khan's comments come two days after the Pakistan government said that the former prime minister's trial in cases concerning the violence on May 9 last year might go to the military courts. "The events and vandalism on May 9 last year invited the application of the Army Act since military installations were attacked and damaged," Government spokesperson for legal af-

fairs Barrister Aqeel Malik had said.

On May 9 last year, violent protests erupted after Khan's arrest by paramilitary Rangers from the premises of the Islamabad High Court in connection with an alleged corruption case. His party workers allegedly vandalised a dozen military installations, including the Jinnah House, the Mianwali airbase and the ISI building in Faisalabad. A mob also attacked the Army headquarters in Rawalpindi.

- PTI

EDITORIAL

A Tactical Redrawing

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs' recent announcement to create five new districts in the Union Territory of Ladakh is more than a mere administrative reshuffle. While the official narrative emphasizes the benefits of improved governance and infrastructure development, the subtext signals New Delhi's intention to tighten its grip on a strategically sensitive region.

On the surface, the creation of these new districts—Sham, Nubra, Changthang in Leh, and Zaskar and Drass in Kargil—appears to be a boon for the people of Ladakh. The Modi administration has framed this move as part of its broader vision to enhance local governance, bringing administration closer to the far-flung and sparsely populated areas of the region.

Ladakh has been at the centre of a complex tug-of-war involving local demands for autonomy, environmental concerns, and the looming shadow of Sino-Indian tensions. The move has sparked a blend of cautious optimism and scepticism among Ladakhis. By carving out these new districts, the government aims to ensure that public services reach every corner of Ladakh, fulfilling a long-standing demand of its residents.

On one hand, this redistricting can be seen as a response to the long-standing grievances of marginalized communities within Ladakh, such as those in Nubra and Zaskar, who have often felt neglected by the central administration. By bringing governance closer to the people, the government hopes to quell discontent and bolster local participation in the development process. This could also help in better resource allocation and infrastructural development in some of the most inaccessible parts of India.

On the other hand, the move has raised concerns among Ladakh's political leadership and civil society groups. There is apprehension that the redrawing of boundaries might dilute the unique cultural and demographic composition of the region, leading to fears of demographic change—a sensitive issue in a region with a fragile ethno-religious balance. The new districts, particularly those like Nubra and Nyoma, which are closer to the Line of Actual Control with China, may also signal a strategic military recalibration, reflecting New Delhi's resolve to assert its presence in the face of Chinese assertiveness.

This reorganization comes at a time when Ladakhis have been vociferously demanding statehood and constitutional safeguards under the Sixth Schedule to protect their land, culture, and identity. The announcement, while addressing some administrative issues, sidesteps these larger political demands. The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council elections are around the corner, and this move could be seen as an attempt by the central government to consolidate its influence in the region.

PUBLIC INTEREST

Can MMYKPY Initiative Solve Youth Unemployment?

By
Abhijit Mulye

Following the successful implementation of the Mukhya Mantri Ladki Bahin Yojana (MMLBY), the Maharashtra government has now initiated

Maharashtra's latest initiative, the Mukhyamantri Yuva Karya Prashikshan Yojana (MMYKPY), targets youth unemployment through training and financial support. The state's comprehensive youth policy also enhances educational infrastructure, promotes entrepreneurship, and addresses health and social inclusion, striving to create equitable opportunities for all young residents.

the launch of the Maharashtra Mukhyamantri Yuva Karya Prashikshan Yojana (MMYKPY). This new scheme is aimed at tackling the growing problem of unemployment among the youth in the state. This scheme is designed to provide training for educated unemployed youth who currently lack employment opportunities. Additionally, this scheme is designed to provide these unemployed youth with financial assistance each month.

India is one of the youngest countries in the world, with 65% of its population under the age of 35 and 50% below the age of 25. Maharashtra, the leading state in India, is renowned for its economic dynamism and cultural vibrancy. Recognising the pivotal role that youth play in shaping the state's future, the Maharashtra government has taken proactive steps to empower its younger generation. To this end, the state's youth policy has been developed as a comprehensive framework. This policy is designed to empower young people by providing them with the necessary resources and opportunities. The goal is to ensure that every young person in Maharashtra has the chance to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to the state's continued growth and prosperity.

The policy places a strong emphasis on improving access to quality education and vocational training for all the youth in the state. As part of this focus, several initiatives have been introduced to enhance the state's educational infrastructure, ensuring that schools and training centres are accessible and well-equipped. In addition, the policy promotes STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education, recognising its importance in today's world. To further support educational aspirations, the policy also includes provisions for offering scholarships to deserving students.

To tackle and address the challenges



of youth unemployment, the policy puts a strong emphasis on job creation and also actively promotes entrepreneurship. This comprehensive approach aids in fostering a favourable business environment, providing extensive skill development programs, and supporting ventures led by young entrepreneurs.

Going beyond youth employment, this policy recognises the importance of physical and mental health. This policy is designed to improve access to healthcare facilities, promote healthy lifestyles, and address issues such as substance abuse and mental health concerns.

The policy also aims to ensure that all youth, regardless of background, have equal and fair opportunities to participate fully in society. This comprehensive approach includes targeted initiatives to address critical issues such as gender inequality, discrimination, and social exclusion, ensuring a more inclusive environment for every young person.

The policy places a strong emphasis on youth participation in decision-making processes. It encourages the formation of youth councils and platforms to provide a voice for young people. These initiatives are designed to ensure that their perspectives and opinions are considered and integrated into the development of policies.

The key initiatives under the policy include the Youth Entrepreneurship Development Programme wherein financial assistance, mentorship, and training are offered to young entrepreneurs, en-

couraging them to start businesses. Other initiatives like setting up Skill Development Centres would provide vocational training in various fields, equipping youth with the skills needed to find employment or start their enterprises; scholarships to meritorious students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, helping them pursue higher education; and youth leadership programmes aimed at developing leadership skills in young people, enabling them to become active participants in their communities and contribute to social change.

However, some challenges must be addressed while implementing this policy. These include ensuring equitable access to opportunities across different regions of the state, addressing the digital divide, and promoting mental health awareness. Would the new Mukhyamantri Yuva Karya Prashikshan Yojana be able to do all this? That is the key question. While the state's Youth Policy tries to provide a comprehensive framework that seeks to empower its young population by focusing on education, employment, health, and social inclusion, implementation remains the key.

Also, there are issues with the migrant youth population. Mumbai is the financial capital of India and still maintains its status as the 'dream city' for most of the youth of the country. A large proportion of young migrants move to the cities for aspirational reasons. The 'educated', however small it might be, look down upon employment in the agriculture sector. When they say they are looking for employment, most of them are looking for 'formal' employment with some kind of 9-to-5 job. However, data reveals that the proportion of such formal jobs to total employment between 1989 and 2010 was just 35%, and it has been declining thereafter. How to bridge this gap between aspirations and ground reality is the key that needs to be the focus of any government policy.

GLOBAL WATCH

China and Japan, a New Flashpoint

Tensions between Japan and China, long simmering beneath the surface, have recently bubbled to the forefront following a dramatic accusation from Tokyo. Japan has claimed that a Chinese military intelligence-gathering aircraft violated its territorial airspace near the remote Danjo Islands in the East China Sea. This incident marks a significant escalation in a fraught relationship, highlighting the growing strains in Sino-Japanese relations and casting a shadow over regional stability.

According to the Japanese Defense Ministry, the alleged breach occurred on Monday when a Y-9 reconnaissance plane from the People's Liberation Army Air Force entered Japanese airspace for approximately two minutes. The aircraft was reportedly flying a circuitous route off the eastern side of the Danjo Islands when it briefly veered into the territorial zone extending 12 nautical miles from the islands' coast. Japan's response was swift: Air Self-Defense Force fighter jets were scrambled to intercept the intruding aircraft, though no direct confrontation was reported.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry responded with heightened rhetoric,

Recent claims of a Chinese military aircraft violating Japanese airspace have intensified long-standing tensions between the two Asian powerhouses, raising concerns about regional stability.



summoning Shi Yong, the Chinese charge d'affaires in Tokyo, to issue a formal protest. The ministry's demand for prevention of future incidents underscores the gravity of the situation, marking this as the first instance where Tokyo has accused Beijing's military of an airspace violation.

While Japanese forces frequently scramble jets to confront Chinese military aircraft approaching their airspace—an average of 479 times over the past fiscal year—this is the first reported instance of an actual incursion into Japan's sovereign airspace by a Chinese military plane. Such incursions are particularly alarming given the recent uptick in China's military activities in the region.

The Danjo Islands, uninhabited and designated as a national monument and wildlife protection area, are situated approximately 100 miles southwest of Nagasaki on Japan's Kyushu island. This region, alongside the Senkaku Islands—which China refers to as the Diaoyu—has long been a contentious flashpoint. The Senkaku chain, roughly 1,200 miles southwest of Tokyo but just 205 miles from China's east coast, has been a persistent source of friction between the two nations.

Historically, the Sino-Japanese rivalry has been fraught with ten-

sion with Japanese brutalities in the 1930s and World War II remaining deeply etched in Chinese minds even today. Despite the post-war rapprochement and economic cooperation, underlying resentments and strategic mistrust have persisted.

Historical claims over the Senkakus date back centuries, with both Japan and China holding deep-seated views on their sovereignty. Tensions spiked in 2012 when Japan's acquisition of some of the islands from a private Japanese owner was perceived by Beijing as a direct affront to its claims. Since then, China has intensified its presence in the region, regularly dispatching Coast Guard vessels and maintaining a notable record of 158 consecutive days near the islands earlier this year.

The Danjo Islands' latest incident underscores the risk of broader regional conflict, particularly given Japan's mutual defense treaty with the United States. Washington has unequivocally stated that it views the Senkakus as covered under the treaty, further complicating the situation. The potential for a wider conflict loom as any altercation involving the Senkakus could trigger U.S. involvement, given the treaty obligations.

STATES WATCH

The Crumbling Facade of Kerala's Cinema

The Malayalam film industry, once the pride of Kerala, is now at a crossroads. The release of the Justice Hema Committee's report on the maltreatment of women in the industry has laid bare the extent of the problem.

As skeletons from the cupboard of Bollywood continue to tumble relentlessly, actor Mohanlal resigned as president of the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA). Earlier, an AMMA meeting in Kochi was abruptly postponed. Officially, the cause given was Mohanlal's 'inconvenience'. Unofficially, the meeting's postponement is emblematic of a much larger issue: the Malayalam film industry is facing a reckoning, as a growing number of women come forward with harrowing tales of sexual harassment and misconduct.

The recent scandals are only the latest in a series of troubling revelations that have rocked Kerala's film industry. Just before the emergency meeting was postponed, actor Siddique, the AMMA's general secretary, resigned following allegations of sexual assault by actor Revathy Sampath.

Filmmaker Ranjith also resigned from his position as chief of the Kerala Chalachitra Academy after being accused of sexual misconduct by Bengali actor Sreelekha Mitra.

As the litany of allegations against senior male actors in the Malayalam film industry continue unabated, the spate of resignations has snowballed into a crisis of accountability, putting the government in a spot.



Then, actor Minu Muneer came forward with her disturbing experiences, accusing Mukesh, a CPI(M) legislator, of harassing her and denying her membership in AMMA after she refused his advances.

Muneer has also alleged that actors Maniyanpilla Raju, Edavela Babu, and Jayasurya physically and verbally abused her in 2013, forcing her to leave the industry and seek refuge in Chennai. The accused, predictably, have denied the allegations.

Last week, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) comprising senior women police officers was established to investigate the claims.

The allegations have ignited a political storm in Kerala, considered India's educated and most progressive states. The opposition parties have accused the government of shielding perpetrators by delaying action on a report submitted nearly four years ago.

These incidents highlight the longstanding misogyny in the Malayalam film industry, once known for socially conscious cinema but now criticized for reinforcing regressive stereotypes and patriarchy.

Films from the 1980s and 1990s, which featured performances by stalwarts like Mammooty and Mohanlal, are still celebrated. Yet, even

then, they often reinforced sexist ideologies with male characters exhibiting machismo and dominating female counterparts.

In the late 1990s, Malayalam cinema underwent a transformation for the worse. High-decibel dialogues and scripts tailored to male machismo replaced realistic narratives of earlier decades.

Over the past decade, a revival has restored Malayalam cinema's pride, with a new generation of directors and actors bringing fresh ideas and nuanced storytelling to both Indian and international audiences.

Just as this renaissance was underway, the abduction and assault of a leading Malayalam actor in 2017 cast an ugly shadow on the industry. Actor Dileep was arrested for allegedly orchestrating the crime. The assault catalysed the formation of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), an organization of female actors and technicians who have been vocal in their fight against gender-based violence and discrimination.

As more women in Kerala's film industry find the courage to speak out, the onus is now on the industry and the State government to address these deep-rooted issues. The SIT's investigation may lead to some accountability, but the real test lies in whether the industry can undergo a meaningful transformation.



1



2



3



4



KALEIDOSCOPE

- 1 Children perform a dance during celebrations of 'janmashtami', at Manjummel Sreekrishna Temple in Kochi on Monday.
- 2 Indian Navy personnel pull out the wreckage of the missing trainee aircraft (Cessna-152 VT -Taj) from Chandil Dam under Saraikela-Kharsawan district of Jharkhand on Monday night.
- 3 Classmates of the 43 Ayotzinapa students who went missing almost 10 years ago march to demand justice for their loved ones in Mexico City on Monday.
- 4 White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan (second right) walks near U.S. Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns upon arriving at the VIP terminal of the Beijing Capital International Airport in Beijing on Tuesday.
- 5 Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang during a meeting, in New Delhi on Monday.



5

All Pictures PTI, AP

CONTROVERSY

Why was Telegram's CEO arrested in Paris?

Pavel Durov, the founder and CEO of the messaging app Telegram, was arrested in Paris over the weekend over allegations that his platform is being used for illicit activity such as drug trafficking and the distribution of child sexual abuse images.

Durov, who was born in Russia, spent much of his childhood in Italy and is a citizen of France, Russia, the Caribbean island nation of St. Kitts and Nevis and the United Arab Emirates. He was taken into custody at Paris-Le Bourget Airport in France on Saturday after landing from Azerbaijan.

In a statement posted to its platform, Telegram said it abides by EU laws and its content moderation is "within industry standards and constantly improving." Durov, the company added, "has nothing to hide and travels frequently in Europe."

Telegram is an app that allows for one-on-one conversations, group chats and large "channels" that let people broadcast messages to subscribers. Unlike rivals such as Meta's WhatsApp, Telegram's group chats allow as many as 200,000 people, compared to a maximum of 1,024 for WhatsApp. Experts have raised concerns that misinformation spreads easily in group chats of this size.

Telegram offers encryption for their communications, but — contrary to a popular misconception — this feature is not on by default. Users have to switch on the option to encrypt their chats. It also doesn't work with group chats. That contrasts with rival Signal and Facebook Messenger, where chats are encrypted end-to-end by default.

Telegram says it has more than 950 million active users. It is widely used in France as a messaging tool, including by some officials in the presidential palace and in the ministry behind the investigation into Durov. But French investigators have also found the app has been used by Islamic extremists



and drug traffickers.

Telegram was launched in 2013 by Durov and his brother Nikolai. According to Telegram, Pavel Durov supports the app "financially and ideologically while Nikolai's input is technological."

Before Telegram, Durov founded VKontakte, Russia's largest social network. The company came under pressure amid the Russian government's crackdown after mass pro-democracy protests rocked Moscow at the end of 2011 and 2012. Durov said government authorities demanded that the VKontakte take down the on-line communities of Russian opposition activists. It later asked the platform to hand over the personal data of users who took part in the 2013 uprising in Ukraine, which eventually ousted a pro-Kremlin president.

But Durov sold his stake in VKontakte after pressure from Russian authorities in 2014. He also left the country. Today, Telegram is based in Dubai, which Durov called "the best place for a neutral platform like ours to be in if we want to make sure we can defend our users' privacy and freedom of speech" in an April interview with conservative talk show host Tucker Carlson.

Why was Durov arrested?

French media has reported that Durov was detained on an arrest warrant alleging his platform has been used for money laundering,

drug trafficking and other offenses. As of Monday afternoon, he had not been charged, and few details were available on the investigation.

On Sunday night, a French investigative judge extended Durov's detention order, French media reported on Monday. Under French law, Durov can remain in custody for questioning for up to four days. After that, judges must decide to either charge him or release him.

Russian government officials have expressed outrage at Durov's detention, with some calling it politically motivated and proof of the West's double standard on freedom of speech. The outcry has raised eyebrows among Kremlin critics: in 2018 Russian authorities themselves tried to block Telegram but failed, withdrawing the ban in 2020.

Elsewhere, Elon Musk, the billionaire owner of X who has called himself a "free speech absolutist," has been speaking out in support of Durov and posted "#freePavel" following the arrest.

In a statement posted on its platform after his arrest, Telegram said it abides by EU laws, and its moderation is "within industry standards and constantly improving."

"It is absurd to claim that a platform or its owner are responsible for abuse of that platform," Telegram's post said. "Almost a billion users globally use Telegram as a

means of communication and as a source of vital information. We're awaiting a prompt resolution of this situation. Telegram is with you all."

Does Telegram moderate content?

Western governments have often criticized Telegram for a lack of content moderation, which experts say opens up the messaging platform for potential use in money laundering, drug trafficking and the sharing of material linked to the sexual exploitation of minors.

Compared to other messaging platforms, Telegram is "less secure (and) more lax in terms of policy and detection of illegal content," said David Thiel, a Stanford University researcher, who has investigated the use of online platforms for child exploitation, at its Internet Observatory.

In addition, Telegram "appears basically unresponsive to law enforcement," Thiel said, adding that messaging service WhatsApp "submitted over 1.3 million CyberTipline reports in 2023 (and) Telegram submits none."

In 2022, Germany issued fines of 5.125 million euros (\$5 million) against the operators of Telegram for failing to comply with German law. The Federal Office of Justice said that Telegram FZ-LLC hasn't established a lawful way for reporting illegal content or named an entity in Germany to receive official communication.

Both are required under German laws that regulate large online platforms.

Last year, Brazil temporarily suspended Telegram over its failure to surrender data on neo-Nazi activity related to a police inquiry into school shootings in November.

Telegram said in response to the arrest that it abides by EU laws and its content moderation is "within industry standards and constantly improving."

- AP

EXPLAINER

What is the Israel-Hezbollah conflict?



The latest exchange of fire between Israel and Hezbollah, an Iran-backed Shia militant group, is part of a broader escalation that began between the two on October 8, 2023 - a day after Israel launched its military campaign in Gaza. The situation intensified on August 25, when 100 Israeli jets bombed southern Lebanon, prompting Hezbollah to retaliate with around 300 projectiles aimed at Israel. This marks one of the most significant confrontations between the two since the 2006 war.

Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, has made clear that the group's recent attack on the Gilot base, north of Tel Aviv, was a direct response to Israel's assassination of senior Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukur in Beirut last month. The

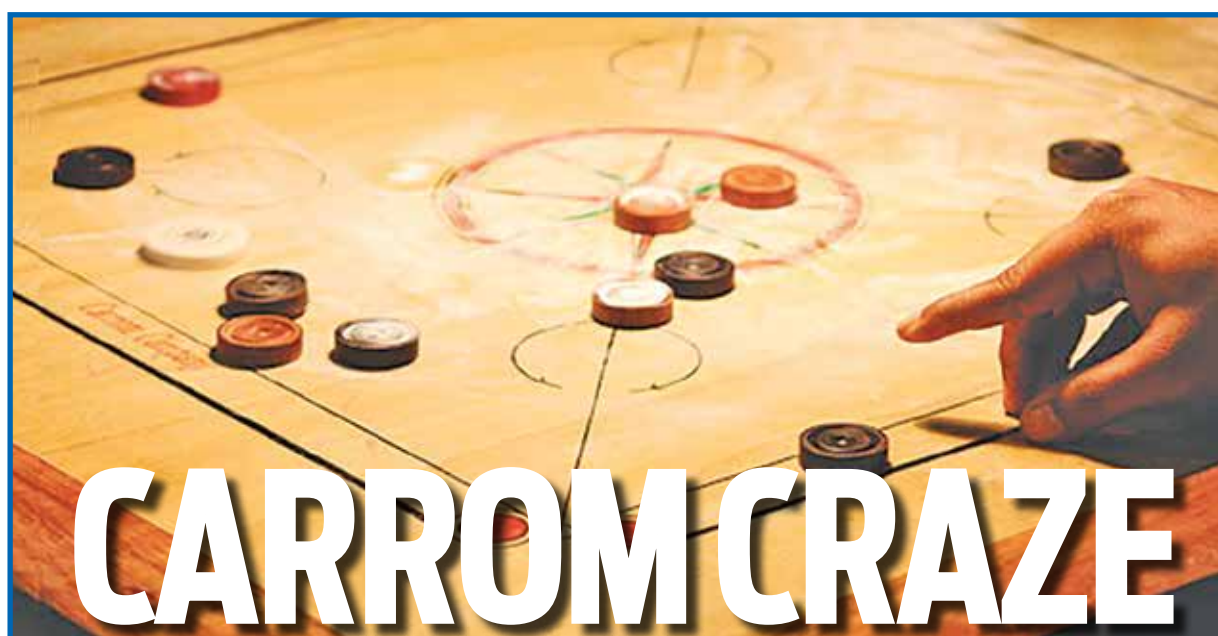
Gilot base, a crucial hub for Israel's Mossad and military intelligence Unit 8200, was specifically targeted to strike deep into Israeli territory, marking a significant shift from Hezbollah's previous focus on northern Israel and the Golan Heights.

Hezbollah was established in 1982 with the primary goal of ending Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon. Over the decades, it has evolved into one of Israel's most formidable adversaries, boasting a well-equipped force of 100,000 fighters and an arsenal of precision rockets capable of striking any part of Israel. The United States estimates that Hezbollah with hundreds of millions of dollars annually, bolstering its military capabilities and political influence in Lebanon.

Hezbollah's stature in Lebanon is unparalleled; it

is often described as a 'state within a state' with a vast network that extends into both the political and military spheres. Its influence grew notably after Syria, a close ally, withdrew from Lebanon following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. Despite Israel's unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, Hezbollah remains committed to resisting Israeli occupation, a stance that continues to resonate with its base.

As tensions between Hezbollah and Israel escalate, there are growing fears of a wider conflict that threaten to destabilize the Middle East already reeling under Israel's campaign in Gaza. Whether this latest exchange will spark a larger confrontation remains to be seen, but the stakes have never been higher.



CARROM CRAZE

Maharashtra leads the way in South Asia's growing passion for the game. In second part today we are presenting another champion. By Anand Mishra.

THE CURRENT WORLD CHAMPION: SANDEEP DIVE

Sandeep Dive (33) from Maharashtra has etched his name in the carrom game history by winning the gold medal in the Men's Singles category at the World Carrom Championship held in Malaysia in 2022. His victory not only highlighted his exceptional skills but also added another feather to India's cap in the world of carrom. The Championship in Malaysia saw participation from 18 countries, including India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and others from across Asia, Europe, and the Americas. As carrom continues to grow in popularity worldwide, Indian players like Dive are setting new benchmarks, inspiring the next generation of carrom enthusiasts.

From Ghatkopar to Malaysia

Going down memory lane, Sandeep says that he started playing carrom with his papa and later taking part in tournaments by playing district level games in Ghatkopar that reached up to winning the World Carrom Championship held in Malaysia. Giving full credit to his wife behind his success, he says that it was love at first who proved to be lucky for a lifetime. At the age



of 23 years in 2014, Dive played state level matches at Shivaji Park and thereafter he never looked back. Air India offered him a job on scholarship and played a national level tournament in 2018. Dive's journey to becoming a world-class carrom player is a story of dedication, perseverance, and passion for the sport. His career, marked by numerous achievements, reflects his commitment to excelling in carrom, a game that holds significant cultural value in India, particularly in Maharashtra.

Constantly evolved his technique

Like many athletes, Sandeep Dive faced challenges on his journey to the top. Balancing his passion for carrom with other responsibilities required immense discipline and sacrifice. Additionally, the competitive nature of the sport meant that Sandeep had to constantly evolve his techniques and strategies to stay ahead of his opponents. However, his love for the game and unwavering determination helped him overcome these obstacles.

Grand Chess tour Gukesh holds Caruana

Saint Louis (USA): Grandmaster D Gukesh played out a hard-fought draw yet again, signing peace with top seed and local favourite Fabiano Caruana, while Frenchman Alireza Firouzja stretched his lead by a full point after the seventh round of Sinquefeld Cup, which is a part of the Grand Chess Tour.

The other Indian in fray, R Praggnanandhaa, drew his seventh game on the trot to remain on a fifty per cent score. Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia was happy with a quick draw as Praggnanandhaa decided to save his energy.

With just two rounds to come, Firouzja, who put it across world champion Ding Liren of China, has five points in his kitty and Caruana continues to trail him a full point behind.

As many as five players -- Wesley So of United States, Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France, Gukesh and Praggnanandhaa -- share the third spot on 3.5 points each. A half point behind are Liren and Nepomniachtchi while Dutchman Anish Giri is still at the bottom of the table on 2.5 points.

Besides Firouzja's victory, Abdusattorov halted So's party with a clinical performance. In the other game of the day, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave drew with Giri. Gukesh continued with his uncompromising play but found Caruana adequately prepared in an Italian opening game.

The Indian was much worse in the ensuing endgame but Caruana missed out on his 39th turn when he could have gotten a real advantage.

Legends Tour

Jeev, Jyoti among stars to compete



Indian golfers Jeev Milkha Singh (right) and Jyoti Randhawa (left) with New Zealand's golfer Michael Shane Campbell during the curtain raiser press conference of HSBC India Legends Championship golf tournament, in New Delhi.

New Delhi: Indian golfing greats Jeev Milkha Singh and Jyoti Randhawa will be among 64 international players vying for top honours in the inaugural HSBC India Legends Championships to be played at Jaypee Greens course at Greater Noida from August 30 to September 1.

The first Legends Tour tournament in the country, which will have USD 0.5 million as prize purse, will also see 2005 US Open champion Michael Campbell of New Zealand in action.

The winner of the HSBC India Legends Championship is set to take home USD 74,250, while the runner-up will receive USD 49,000. The third-place finisher will pocket USD 32,700.

The event will be played over 54 holes and it will be preceded by a star-studded Pro-Am event on August 28 and 29, which will see top golfers play alongside

amateurs.

The Legends Tour is a professional golf tour for male golfers aged 50 and over, run by the PGA European Tour. It began as European Senior Tour in 1992 and was rechristened as Legends Tour in 2020.

Jeev is the host of the tournament, co-sanctioned by the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI). The event will see a participation from 17 countries.

Randhawa qualified after winning the Legends Tour's tough and challenging Qualifying School finals in Turkey.

"Since I am the host, I will ensure that I don't win the tournament this weekend," the 52-year-old Jeev joked at the press conference to launch the tournament.

"It's great for the country's golfers and for world golf in general. Golfing career is over when you are 40

or 45. But with the Legends Tour, you can have a second innings after reaching 50 years.

"Now, you can play golf as a career till 60."

Randhawa, also 52, said not only the money, a golfer can also maintain the competitive spirit by continuing to play in the Legends Tour.

"It's good for the budding Indian golfers and amateurs. They will now know that a golfer can play another 10 years after retirement," he said.

"By playing in the Legends Tour, you are keeping your golfing passion and competitive spirit intact as well as keeping yourself fit."

Jeev (twice Asia No. 1 in 2006 and 2008) and Randhawa (once Asia No. 1 in 2002) are well-known names around the world with numerous appearances in Majors too.

- PTI

Slug - U-19 Badminton

Taarini clinches double crowns

Mumbai: Taarini Suri from Mumbai clinched girls' doubles and mixed doubles' titles in the Kotak India Junior U-19 International Badminton tournament, held in Hyderabad.

The tournament was held at the Gopichand Badminton Academy in Hyderabad.

The 17-year-old Taarini, who trains at the Cricket Club of India under Hrish Nariman, teamed up with Shravani Walekar to beat the Indonesian combination of Keyla Putri and Micha Wardoyo 21-10, 21-15 in the girls' doubles final.

Taarini and Bhavya Chhabra then produced an upset against the top seeded Attawat Sreepeaw and Pannawee Polyiam of Thailand 21-13, 19-21, 21-14 in the mixed doubles final. Taarini and the Nashik-based Shravani have been playing together since their U-13 days but it was only earlier this year that they decided to focus only on doubles.

In the semifinal, Taarini and Shravani had beaten



the Thailand pair of Kodchapon Chaichana and Pannawee Polyiam.

Chhabra trains at the National Centre of Excellence in Guwahati, Assam, and has also kept her focus on doubles.

Taarini is a part of the Indian team which will participate in the World Junior Championship in Nanchang, China from September 30.

- PTI

All India SRFI Squash

Semwal, Nirupma clinch titles

Mumbai: Om Semwal and Nirupma Dubey clinched the men's and women's open titles respectively in the second edition of the Garware Club House All India SRFI Squash Championship here.

In the men's open final, Mumbai's Semwal defeated his Sri Lankan opponent and No 2 seeded Shamil Wakeel 3-2 to clinch the Sharad Pawar Trophy, winning 11-4, 4-11, 6-11, 13-11, 11-4.

In the women's final, Nirupma trumped compatriot Tanishka Jain 3-1 as she won 11-6, 12-10, 3-11, 11-9 in the final of the tournament held here from August 19 to 25.

The event, held under the aegis of the Squash Racquets Federation of India (SRFI), witnessed more than 470 entries with 70 per cent children from over 20 states in the country. It had prize money of USD 1000 each for the men's open and women's open categories.

"We were able to deliver a thoroughly professional event," said Mohit Chaturvedi, GCH director and chairman of squash committee.



Indian women's cricket team captain Harmanpreet Kaur and Olympic medallist shooter Sarabjot Singh dance during the launch of the new 'race day t-shirt' for Vedanta Delhi Half Marathon 2024, in New Delhi on Tuesday.

Pic-PTI

Smriti to play for Adelaide Strikers

Adelaide: Adelaide Strikers have finally secured the services of Indian star Smriti Mandhana for the Women's Big Bash League after chasing her for years.

The Indian opener has previously played for three WBBL teams -- Brisbane Heat, Sydney Thunder and Hobart Hurricanes. She joined the reigning champions Strikers ahead of the draft on Sunday under the

league's new overseas player pre-season signing provision.

However, Mandhana might not be available for the start of the league with India scheduled to host New Zealand for three ODIs in late October. The WBBL begins on October 27.

India are also scheduled to play three ODIs against Australia right after the WBBL final on December 1.

"Excited is an understatement," Strikers captain Tahliia McGrath told cricket.com.au.

"We've been trying to get her for a few years now, in constant comms (with her) and her batting is just unbelievable.

"She's a very elegant batter and has the ability to take away games from opposition very quickly."

- PTI

Rallye des Vallées 2024

Pragathi finishes third

Remiremont (France): Indian rallyist Pragathi Gowda made a memorable international debut by finishing third at the Rallye des Vallées 2024 in the Rally-5 car class with a timing of 23:51.8.

After three months of rigorous training in Europe, the 26-year-old Pragathi, along with French co-driver Gabriel Morales, not only blazed to the podium in her category but also finished an impressive 37th overall.

Driving a Renault Clio Rally 5 car, Pragathi improved upon her first-stage position of fifth in her class as the rally progressed. With a better grip on the track, she went on to improve her timing by 32 seconds across the second and third special stages to finish on the podium.

The Rallye des Vallées 2024 is a high-speed rally on narrow asphalt roads which requires impeccable precision.

"My first international rally in France was an incredible experience. We had



a very productive test day and a perfect recce in the build-up to this beautiful rally," Pragathi said.

"It was a challenging rally for me but with each kilometre I drove I gained confidence in the car and with my co-driver. I was able to match the speed of other top drivers, I was doing about 165kmph in some places and averaged about 102kmph speed through the race on these narrow roads."

- PTI

Hope to play LA 2028 Olympics: Manpreet Singh

By Saumjojyoti S Choudhury

New Delhi: He will be on the wrong side of 30s and maintaining fitness would be no stroll in the park but veteran Indian hockey midfielder Manpreet Singh foresees an unprecedented fifth Olympic appearance for himself in the 2028 Los Angeles Games before he calls time on his career.

The 32-year-old is a two-time Olympic medallist. He captained the side that ended a 41-year-old Olympic medal drought in Tokyo 2020, before remaining a part of the squad under

Harmanpreet Singh for an encore in Paris 2024.

"My target is till Los Angeles but it all depends upon my fitness. If I can maintain my fitness and game, I will surely be there in LA," the ace mid-fielder told PTI in an exclusive interview.

"In today's hockey fitness is very important so at the end everything will boil down to my fitness," added the player, who has rarely faced any fitness issues in his career.

Former greats Udham Singh, Leslie Claudius, and Dhanraj Pillai along with Manpreet's recently-retired

contemporary P R Sreejesh also have four Olympic appearances to their credit.

And Manpreet, a veteran of 378 international games and 44 goals, is now aiming to go one better on them by making the cut for LA 2028. The easy-going player, who hails from Mithapur village in Punjab, is grateful for all that he has achieved with the team.

"Winning back-to-back medals is a something wonderful for me. It was after a long time that we won back-to-back medals and every athlete aspires to win an Olympic medal.



"I have played four Olympics. In the first two, I didn't get any medal but in the last two, I won medals and you can't imagine my happiness," he said.

A multi-faceted player, Manpreet can play in a defensive position as well

when the team needs. His skills came in handy in India's 4-2 penalty shootout win over Britain in the quarterfinals of the Paris Olympics despite being down to 10 men with 42 minutes remaining in the match. "I have trained a lot for

"I am always prepared to play in every scenario. I always adjust to every position which the team demands. When (Amit) Rohidas got the red card, I immediately realised that I had to play in the defence."

that, even in Pro League matches. So, it was not very difficult for me. I knew my roles and responsibilities, I just had to execute my plans," Manpreet said.

The show against Britain tested the Indian team's mental toughness and Man-

preet credited a short three-day camp at renowned adventurer Mike Horn's base in Switzerland before the Olympics for that.

"That camp was very useful for us. It changed our mindset and taught us to be strong. When we went there, nobody knew what we were supposed to do there," he recalled.

"That camp taught us how to tackle adverse situations with a strong mentality. That camp also taught us how to be together and help each other in difficult situations." We learnt to play as a team and be unit-

ed," he said.

Manpreet's Malaysian wife Ilii Najwa Saddique and their two-and-half-year-old daughter Jasmine were there in Paris when he won his second Olympic medal and the star said it was the best moment of his life to share the joy with his family.

"After the medal ceremony, my daughter and wife were with me at the ground and my daughter was running around the ground. I had a photo of my daughter wearing the medal, it was a really proud feeling," he said.

- PTI