

THE PERFECT VOICE



CM assures end of Maoism ... pg 2



No of domestic migrants estimated to have lowered by 12 pc ... pg 6



Tiger Woods' immediate goal: Keep his son from beating him ... pg 10

Election rule tweaked to restrict public inspection

New Delhi: The government has tweaked an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage as well as video recordings of candidates to prevent their misuse.



A voter being marked his finger with indelible ink during voting for Punjab Municipal Corporation elections in Amritsar on Saturday. Pic: PTI

Based on the recommendation of the Election Commission (EC), the Union law ministry on Friday amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspection.

According to Rule 93, all "papers" related to elections shall be open to public inspection.

The amendment inserts "as specified in these rules" after "papers".

Law ministry and EC officials separately explained that a court case was the "trigger" behind the amendment.

While documents such as nomination forms, appointment of election agents, results and election account statements are mentioned in the Conduct of Election Rules, electronic documents such as CCTV camera footage, webcasting

footage and video recording of candidates during the Model Code of Conduct period are not covered.

"CCTV coverage, webcasting of polling stations are not carried out under Conduct of Election Rules but are the result of steps taken by the EC to ensure a level playing field," a former EC official explained.

An EC functionary said, "There have been instances where such electronic records have been sought, citing the rules. The amendment ensures that only papers mentioned in the

rules are available for public inspection and any other document which has no reference in the rules is not allowed for public inspection."

EC functionaries said the misuse of CCTV camera footage from inside polling booths could compromise voter secrecy.

They also said the footage could be used to generate fake narrative using AI.

"All such material is available to candidates, including footage. After the amendment, too, it will be available to them. But other

people can always approach the courts to get such electronic records," said another functionary.

Candidates already have access to all documents and papers. Nothing has been amended in the rules in this regard, the functionary added.

Punjab and Haryana High Court, in the recent *Mahmoud Pracha vs EC* case, had directed sharing all documents related to the Haryana Assembly elections, including treating CCTV camera footage as permissible under Rule 93(2), with Pracha.

The rule mentioned election papers. The election papers and documents do not specifically refer to electronic records, the EC functionaries said.

In order to remove this ambiguity, the rule has been amended to safeguard the misuse of CCTV camera footage of polling stations, an EC official explained.

A law ministry official said all election papers and documents were otherwise available for public inspection.

-PTI

GoM for GST cess

Jaisalmer: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said the GST Council decided to form a group of ministers (GoM) to consider allowing states to levy cess under Goods and Services Tax to overcome financial distress after natural calamities.

Briefing media after the 55th GST Council meeting here, she said, "Everybody agreed, even Andhra Pradesh's minister agreed that a Group of Ministers be formed and Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Telangana, volunteered (to be a part of it)."

The Group of Ministers will decide what this cess should be named, whether every disaster can be given a consideration. "So the Group of Ministers will decide on all these details and then the council will decide," Sitharaman said.

Earlier in the day, Andhra Pradesh Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav said that there was a consensus that a GoM be formed to look into the demand for a 1 per cent calamity cess on certain luxury goods.

"The cess will be on luxury items and state specific levy," Keshav said.

In September-October, Andhra Pradesh was hit by floods. "To give us a leverage to come back to normalcy, we have suggested a 1 per cent cess. There was a general consensus to set up GoM," Keshav said.



Protesters carry a caricature of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol during a rally demanding his arrest in Seoul South Korea on Saturday. The sign, front, reads, Rebellion leader. Pic: PTI

Germany attacker is a psychotherapy specialist

TALEB A ALSO DESCRIBES HIMSELF AS A FORMER MUSLIM

Magdeburg (Germany): Germany on Saturday was still in shock and struggling to understand the suspect behind the attack in the city of Magdeburg.

Identified by local media as 50-year-old Taleb A, a psychiatrist and psychotherapy specialist, authorities said he has been living in Germany for two decades. He was arrested on site after plowing a black BMW into a Christmas market

crowded with holiday shoppers Friday evening, killing at least five people and wounding 200 others.

Prominent German terrorism expert Peter Neu-

mann posted on X that he had yet to come across a suspect in an act of mass violence with that profile.

Taleb's X account is filled with tweets and retweets focusing on anti-Islam themes and criticism of the religion while sharing congratulatory notes to Muslims who left the faith. He also described himself as a former Muslim.

He was critical of German authorities, saying they had failed to do enough to combat the "Islamism of Europe". He has also voiced support for the far-right and anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD)

party. Some described Taleb as an activist who helped Saudi women flee their homeland. Recently, he seemed focused on his theory that German authorities have been targeting Saudi asylum seekers.

Neumann, the terrorism expert, wrote: "After 25 years in this business" you think nothing could surprise you anymore. But a 50-year-old Saudi ex-Muslim who lives in East Germany, loves the AfD and wants to punish Germany for its tolerance towards Islamists - that really wasn't on my radar." -AP



People from Thailand pose at their stall during the International Health, Sports & Fitness Festival (IHFF) in Mumbai on Saturday. Pic:PTI

Stampede at Christmas charity, 10 die

Abuja: Ten people, including four children, have been killed in a stampede in Nigeria's capital city as a large crowd gathered to collect food items distributed by a local church at a Christmas event, the police said Saturday.

The stampede occurred in the early morning hours at the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Maitama, an up-market part of Abuja, police spokesman Josephine Adeh said in a statement, adding that more than 1,000 people have been evacuated from the church.

Viral footage that appeared to be from the scene showed lifeless bodies lay-

ing on the ground as people shouted for help. Some of the injured have been treated and discharged while others continue to receive medical care, Adeh said.

It is the second such stampede in a week in Africa's most populous country as local organisations, churches and individuals are increasingly organising charity events ahead of Christmas amid the country's worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation.

The recent stampedes in Nigeria have raised questions about safety measures in such events. Several children were killed earlier

in the week when a local foundation organised a funfair to distribute gift items to kids in southwestern Oyo state.

After the latest disaster, the police in Abuja announced that prior permission must be obtained before such charity events. The current economic hardship under Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, who promised "renewed hope" when he was sworn into office in May 2023, is blamed on surging inflation that is at a 28-year high and the government's economic policies that have pushed the local currency to record low against the dollar.

Allegations against me false: Arjun

Hyderabad: Actor Allu Arjun on Saturday said the incident in which a woman died and her son was injured during the screening of 'Pushpa-2' at a theatre here on December 4 was purely an accident and denied the allegations made by Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy.

Hours after Reddy slammed the actor for holding a roadshow and waving to the crowds at the theatre, without referring to anyone, the 'Pushpa 2' star refuted the allegations and said it was not a procession or a roadshow.

He asserted that he was not against any department or political leader individually or government.

"There is a lot of misinformation that I behaved in a particular way (irresponsibly). These allegations are wrong. It's humiliating and a character assassination. There is a lot of misinformation going on, a lot of false allegations, especially character assassination," he told reporters in a hurriedly held press conference. He said he built up his career and image with the hard work of 20 years and when it is being sabotaged, it really hurts.

Naxal organisations took part in Bharat Jodo: Fadnavis

By Correspondent

Nagpur: Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Saturday claimed that outfits described by a past Congress government as "frontal organisations" of the Maoists took part in Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo march.

Speaking at a press conference here along with his deputy Eknath Shinde at the end of the one-week-long winter session of the state legislature, he also said his government would find out illegal Bangladeshi immigrants living in Mumbai and deport them.

Fadnavis reiterated his allegation, made during the session, that urban Naxal outfits, acting as frontal organisations of the Maoists, participated in Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra.

"I am not saying this, but the reports of the Congress-led state and central governments prior to 2014 said so," he said.

Action was taken against some of these organisations under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, he noted.

To a question about the



Almost a week after the swearing-in the Mahayuti dispensation on Saturday allocated portfolios with CM Devendra Fadnavis keeping the Home Department and Law & Judiciary department. Deputy CM Eknath Shinde got Urban Development and Housing and Public Works department. Another Deputy CM Ajit Pawar got Finance Department.

Public Security Bill, aimed at 'curbing the urban Naxal menace', Fadnavis said it was sent to a joint select committee comprising 21 members from both Houses for scrutiny.

The decision was taken even without the Opposition making such a demand so that nobody should allege that it contains provisions to suppress legitimate dissent, he said.

The committee will be headed by the BJP leader and minister Chandrashekar Bawankule, he added.

To a question about Somnath Suryavanshi who died in police custody after being arrested following the violent protests in Parbhani city over vandalising of a replica of the Constitution, Fadnavis said Suryavanshi was asked by the magistrate when he was produced in the court whether the police had tortured him.

He replied in the negative, the chief minister pointed out.

Even the CCTV footage did not disclose signs of tor-

ture while a detailed medical report said he was suffering from a respiratory ailment and there were old injury marks on his body, Fadnavis added.

Same team, new match Speaking before Fadnavis, deputy CM Shinde said the BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP government was the same team playing a new match.

It was the continuation of the previous government (which he headed), he said, adding that all existing schemes will continue and development works undertaken in the last two and a half years will be expedited.

Criminals in any case, whoever they may be close to, will not be spared, the deputy CM assured.

Without naming Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, Shinde took swipes at his former boss' presence during the session.

"When someone resigned as CM, he had also announced that he would quit as MLC (Member of Legislative Council), but did not. He came like a tourist, to save his membership of the House."

Modi lauds Arabic translator of Ramayana, Mahabharata

Kuwait City: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday met two Kuwaiti nationals here and praised their efforts in translating and publishing India's iconic epics Ramayana and Mahabharata in Arabic.

The prime minister also signed copies of the Arabic versions of the two epics.

Expressing his appreciation, Modi in a post on X said, "I compliment Abdullah Al Baroun and Abdul Lateef Al Neseef for their efforts in translating and



publishing these epics. Their initiative highlights the global popularity of Indian culture."

He also shared some photographs of his meeting with Al Baroun and Al Neseef.

While Al Baroun translated both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Al Neseef managed their publication in Arabic, enabling a wider audience in the Arab world to engage with India's rich cultural heritage.

Modi had acknowledged their efforts during a 'Mann Ki Baat' address in October, emphasising their contributions to fostering cultural exchange and promoting Indian heritage on a global platform.

Highlighting their work, he had said that it was "not just a translation, but a bridge between two great cultures. It is developing a new understanding of Indian literature in the Arab world". Modi arrived in Kuwait

earlier in the day for a two-day visit, where he was greeted with a ceremonial welcome at the Amir terminal by senior Kuwaiti officials, including First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Sheikh Fahad Yusef Saud Al-Sabah, and Foreign Minister Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya.

The prime minister is visiting Kuwait at the invitation of Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His visit is the first of any In-

dian Prime Minister to the Gulf nation in 43 years. The last Indian prime minister to visit Kuwait was Indira Gandhi in 1981.

Upon the arrival at the hotel, Modi met with 101-year-old former Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer Mangal Sain Handa, who appeared deeply emotional during the meeting. Indian expatriates in Kuwait raised slogans of "Vande Mataram" in solidarity.

-PTI

Body of missing boy found, toll 15



Mumbai: The body of a seven-year-old boy missing in the ferry-Navy craft crash off the Mumbai coast was recovered on Saturday morning after a three-day-long search operation, an official said.

Naval boats have found the body of Johan Mohammad Nisar Ahmed Pathan, taking the toll in the December 18 tragedy to 15.

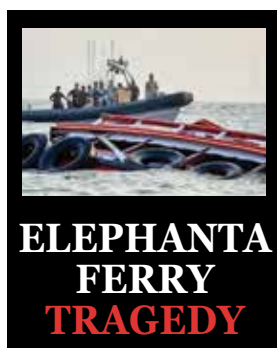
The Navy has launched a probe into one of the deadliest crashes in the city's harbour area.

A naval helicopter and boats of the Navy and Coast Guard were deployed to look for the missing passengers as part of the SAR operation, the official said.

Of the 113 persons on board both the vessels, 15 have died and 98, including two injured, were rescued.

There were six persons on board the Navy craft, of which two survived, the official said.

The tragedy struck when



ELEPHANTA FERRY TRAGEDY

the speeding Navy craft undergoing engine trials lost control and collided with a passenger ferry, 'Neel Kamal', off the Mumbai coast. The ferry, with more than 100 passengers, was on its way from the Gateway of India to the Elephanta Island, a popular tourist attraction which has a collection of ancient caves.

According to the documents issued by the Maharashtra Maritime Board (MMB), the boat had permission to carry 84 passengers and six crew members, but it was overloaded, a

police official said.

The MMB, which is conducting an investigation into the accident, has cancelled the licence of the ferry as the vessel was overloaded, thus violating the Inland Vessel Act. The ferry had a capacity of 90 persons, an official said.

A case has been registered against the Navy craft driver at the Colaba police station, the official said.

Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) sections invoked in the FIR included those related to causing death by negligence, actions that endanger the personal safety or life of others, rash or negligent navigation of a vessel and acts of mischief that cause wrongful loss or damage to individuals or the public.

The accident-affected craft is in the custody of the Navy, and police will demand it whenever needed for investigation, the official said.

May go solo in BMC polls: Raut

Mumbai: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Saturday hinted that his party might go solo in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) election without exiting the MVA.

Talking to reporters, Raut said party workers were insisting the organisation go solo in the local body polls, as there were more aspirants than for the Lok Sabha or state assembly polls. "Talks are on between Uddhav Thackeray and other party leaders (about whether to go solo) for the BMC polls. Workers want the party to contest the polls solo," he said.

The undivided Shiv Sena controlled the cash-rich BMC for 25 consecutive years — from 1997 to 2022.

The term of the previous elected representatives of the BMC ended in early March 2022, and fresh polls are due for nearly three years now.

Raut said the party's power in Mumbai is undisputed.

"If had we got more seats to contest in Mumbai (during the assembly polls), it would have won them," he said, claiming that it was necessary to win Mumbai or else the city would be separated from Maharashtra.

The Shiv Sena contested 24 seats in Mumbai and won 10, while the Congress fielded candidates for 10 seats and bagged four, and the NCP (SP) contested two seats unsuccessfully.

"Even when the (undivided) Shiv Sena was (in an alliance) with the BJP, we contested the BMC and other civic body polls independently. We are trying to find ways to do it. The MVA will exist in the Pune, Pimpri-Chinchwad and Nashik civic bodies," he said.



Veteran Bollywood actor Nana Patekar with actor Aamir Khan and film director Anil Sharma during a promotional event for his film 'Vanvaas' in Mumbai on Saturday.

Pic: PTI

Relief to Dharavi's upper floors

CERTIFIED RESIDENTS WILL GET 300 SQ FT HOME IN MUMBAI, BUT OUTSIDE DHARAVI, AT A NOMINAL RENT FOR 25 YEARS

By Correspondent

Mumbai: In a first-of-its-kind initiative under the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA), the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP) has introduced a unique policy to include residents of upper-floor tenements, making it the most inclusive and human-centric redevelopment plan in Maharashtra's history.

Traditionally, upper-floor tenements in slums have been deemed illegal and excluded from slum rehabilitation projects. This has led to outright displacement of residents, who are often left with no alternatives. These upper-floor residents often relocated to

other slums, creating new illegal structures and perpetuating a cycle of displacement. To address this issue and work towards a slum-free Mumbai, the state government has devised this thoughtful strategy under the Dharavi Redevelopment Project, ensuring housing provisions for those living in upper-floor dwellings as well.

As per a Government Resolution (GR), issued on October 4, 2024, all upper-floor tenement holders in Dharavi up till November 15, 2022, are qualified for rehabilitation on a hire-purchase scheme. Under this scheme, tenement holders will get 300 sq ft

home in Mumbai, but outside Dharavi, at a nominal rent for 25 years, after which they will gain ownership of the unit.

The policy also offers flexibility, allowing residents to make a lump-sum payment at any time within the 25 years' period to secure the title ownership of the unit. The rent and the unit purchase amount will be determined and collected by the DRP/State Government.

The GR states that only upper-floor residents who provide documents like electricity bill, registered sale or rental agreement, Aadhaar card, ration card, passport mentioning the floor, or an affidavit certi-

fied by the eligible ground-floor resident will qualify for the hire-purchase scheme.

"Under the hire-purchase scheme, Dharavikars will move into modern housing with essential amenities such as private toilets and kitchens, ensuring dignity, privacy, and a better quality of life," a DRP-SRA official said. The buildings will be maintained by the developer for 10 years post-rehabilitation, reducing financial burdens on residents. Moreover, 10% of the built-up area of the buildings will be developed commercially, creating a permanent income source for the housing societies.

School bus driver found drunk

AN ALERT TRAFFIC COP NOTICES BUS FERRYING STUDENTS SWERVING, HALTS IT

Thane: The alertness of a traffic policeman in Kalyan in Thane led to the detection of an inebriated driver who was ferrying 26 school students to a football tournament, an official said on Saturday.

The incident took place at Subhash Chowk on Friday when the bus was on its way from Ulhasnagar in the district to Virar in neighbouring Palghar, the official said.

"Constable Suresh Patil noticed the bus was swerving despite the road being clear and the driver did not seem to be in complete control. He got the bus to stop and subjected driver Surendra Gautam to a breathalyser test, which returned positive," Kalyan traffic police senior inspector Rajshirsat said.

"If Patil had not acted quickly, the bus could have met with an accident. The driver was fined and will face further action, while the bus has been seized and its owner notified. We arranged another bus for the students to reach Virar for the football tournament," Shirsat added.

Raut recce: Four staffers of telecom firm interrogated, released

Mumbai: Police interrogated four persons in connection with suspected recce outside Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut's bungalow here and later released them after verifying that they were employees of a telecom network services company, an official said on Saturday.

The men were employees of Insta ICT Solution, a telecom network services company, and were testing the network in the area on Saturday, the official said.

He said four men were interrogated and later released after the police verified their roles and designation with the company.

On Saturday, two men on a motorcycle were seen outside the Sena (UBT) leader's bungalow 'Maitri' in the Bhandup area around 9.30 am.

Finding it suspicious, some people waiting outside the bungalow alerted Raut's younger brother, MLA Sunil Raut.



Contestants flex their muscles as they compete in the bodybuilding event at the International Health, Sports & Fitness Festival (IHFF) in Mumbai on Saturday.

Pic: PTI

Vitor, Akanksha survive to make Squash finals

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Top seeds Viktor Byrtus and Akanksha Salunkhe scored hard-fought 3-2 wins in the men's and women's semi-final competitions of the 79th Western India Slam, a USD 9,000 prize-money Professional Squash Association (PSA) Challenger event and played at the CCI courts on Friday.

The Czech number one Byrtus had quite a fight on hand before he overcame Netherlands fourth seed Rowan Damming 7-11, 11-9, 11-5, 1-11, and 11-8 in a well-contested encounter.

India's top seed Akanksha Salunkhe also encountered a strong challenge from Egypt's fifth seed Jana Swaify before clinching an 11-5, 12-14, 15-13, 5-11, and 12-10 in a tight game.

Results - Women's semi-finals: 2-Anahat Singh (IND) bt. 3-Nour Khafagy (EGY) 3-1 (11-4, 12-14, 11-9, 11-9).

1-Akanksha Salunkhe (IND) bt. 5-Jana Swaify (EGY) 3-2 (11-5, 12-14, 15-13, 5-11, 12-10).

Men's semi-finals: 1-Viktor Byrtus (CZE) bt. 4-Rowan Damming (NED) 3-2 (7-11, 11-9, 11-5, 1-11, 11-8).

Rafi is my musical father, says Sonu Nigam

By Komal Pancharmatia

Mumbai: There can be no comparison between a father and a son. For Sonu Nigam, who considers Mohammed Rafi his "musical father", the very idea of comparing himself to the legendary singer is unthinkable.

After all, whatever he sings, he can never be quite like the master himself, said Nigam ahead of Rafi's 100th birth anniversary on December 24.

"Rafi sahab was the prime reference point. It was like 'Be like him, he can sing a qawwali, a bhajan, a sad song, a high-pitch song, a semi-classical'. So that's what a singer should be like. He was my inspiration," Nigam told PTI.

It began right in childhood itself.

Nigam's singer parents — Agam and Shobha — encouraged him to emulate the great Rafi who covered the spectrum of every genre and emotion through his

effortlessly versatile voice.

"He (Rafi) has helped me be what I'm today and I still keep learning from him. He is my musical father," Nigam said.

The 51-year-old, sometimes compared to Rafi, gave his career's first performance when he was just four. The song was "Kya Hua Tera Vada" from the 1977 film "Hum Kisi Se Kam Nahin".

And on Tuesday, Nigam will pay tribute to his guru with a special concert in



Mumbai to celebrate Rafi's 100th birth anniversary.

Regarded perhaps as the greatest playback singer of Hindi cinema, Rafi lent his

voice to evergreen songs such as "Main Zindagi Ka Saath Nibhata Chala Gaya", "Kaun Hai Jo Sapnon Mein Aaya", "Aaja Aaja", "Parda Hai Parda", "Gulabi Aankhein" and "Kya Se Kya Ho Gaya" among many thousand others.

Nigam, popular for tracks such as "Suraj Hua Madham", "Kal Ho Naa Ho", "Saathiya" and "Abhi Mujhmein Kahin", is not worried about comparisons with Rafi.

"They will compare but

they must understand but he is my father. You cannot compare a father and son. The father will always be the father. No matter what I sing, I will never be able to be like him," he added.

Rafi, the voice behind the movie greats like Dev Anand, Shammi Kapoor, Guru Dutt, Dharmendra and many other leading stars, passed away at the age of 55 in 1980 due to a heart attack. Nigam was only seven at the time.

"I've done hundreds of

cover versions of his songs. That has been my net practice. I used to make notes from his songs and add pointers. I've studied Rafi sahab properly. I've gone into the detailing of Mohammed Rafi like nobody else.

"Rafi sahab was an amazing versatile singer. I've tried to imbibe that quality in me. I've also tried to sing all kinds of songs. Rafi sahab was an introvert, I'm not an introvert, I speak. Rafi sahab wouldn't speak

that much," the self-confessed fan said.

He said he could never meet his idol but it doesn't matter.

"He lives inside me so I don't really miss not meeting him," he added.

"I'm touched and humbled that I'm getting this chance to perform his songs on his 100th birthday."

The concert, titled "Sau Saal Pehle" is organised by NR Talent & Event Management.

MY CORNER

Self-imposed Celibacy



By

Sudhir Brahme

These are not the celebrities ostentatiously delaying marriage, nor are they couples in live-in relationships, priests or ascetics. Instead, they are men and women who have consciously chosen to stay single, rejecting the idea of marrying a farmer or a man earning less than their salaried counterparts.

In rural Maharashtra, a generation of men and women in their 40s is opting to remain unmarried, challenging long-held traditions that prioritize early marriage. This trend, particularly noticeable in the last decade, has escalated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Once restrictions were lifted, mass weddings took place—but they were largely for the working class. This shift has ignited discussions about how careers, social expectations, and changing attitudes are reshaping marriage in these communities.

At the heart of this shift is 85-year-old Ratnakar Pagare, a veteran community organizer from Sangamner. Through his Vadhu-Var Suchak Mandal, which connects educated professionals, he has witnessed many women, particularly from the tech sector, reject marriage proposals from farmers, despite their parents' desire for a rural, land-rich life. For these women, the allure of a city-based career far outweighs the appeal of rural living.

Women raised in urban areas are increasingly rejecting the prospect of farm life, despite its potential for significant financial returns. Interestingly, it is often the mothers of these women who are the real deterrents, discouraging their daughters from marrying farmers, fearing that rural life would hinder their daughters' career ambitions.

This issue goes beyond individual preferences and speaks to deeper societal shifts. An anonymous political leader from the region points to a worrying

trend: in some communities, nearly 98 percent of families are fixated on securing an heir to their property, but the new generation of educated women is increasingly uninterested in this traditional expectation. They are prioritizing their careers over family life, even if it means foregoing marriage.

The allure of urban life, with its promise of career stability and high-paying jobs, has only intensified this shift. The relative financial security of city-based jobs—often tied to the IT sector—has further discouraged rural men and women from considering marriage. For these urban dwellers, the prospect of returning to their ancestral land seems less appealing.

The rapid pace of urban development has contributed to a disconnect from rural life. This growing urbanization has made village life seem less desirable while the constant migration to cities and, increasingly, abroad, offers an escape from what many see as a stagnant rural economy.

But while urban life offers a degree of financial assurance, it is not without its emotional toll. Dr. Neha Kode, a psychologist from Nashik, warns that the decision to remain unmarried can result in feelings of inferiority and depression, particularly for men. In rural areas, where family and community often define an individual's identity, the absence of marriage can lead to stigma, and in some cases, suicidal thoughts. She argues that the emotional impact of this societal shift deserves attention and calls for a broader debate in Maharashtra's Legislative Assembly.

As the desire for professional success and financial stability continues to shape the lives of rural women in Maharashtra, the question remains: will the institution of marriage ever return to its traditional form, or is this a permanent transformation in the way people approach family life in India? The generational divide is clear, and its implications are only beginning to unfold. In rural Maharashtra, it seems, the future of marriage may no longer be shaped by tradition, but by the choices of a new, career-focused generation.

(The author is a senior journalist. Views personal.)

FORGOTTEN HISTORY

Navigating Empire: Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers in the Far East



By

Laurence Westwood

The year was 1810, the place was Canton—a city on the edge of Qing Dynasty China, where trade and tension often mingled in precarious balance. Captain Francis Austen, commanding the Royal Navy's *St Albans*, found himself in an unenviable position. The charges were serious: three British sailors, perhaps from the East India Company's *Royal Charlotte*, had allegedly ventured ashore, sparking a violent altercation with the local Chinese. In the aftermath, a shoemaker named Hoan a Xing lay dead, his life claimed by a knife's edge. The Chinese authorities, unyielding in their demands, insisted that the culprits be handed over before they would allow the East India fleet to depart. Yet Austen's dilemma was far from simple. The fleet's departure could not be delayed—costs would mount, and the monsoon loomed, a looming menace to their journey home. But sailing without Chinese consent was a gamble that could imperil not just this voyage, but the future of Britain's trade with China itself.

With no one more senior to turn to, at the far reaches of the expanding British Empire, responsibility lay heavy across the shoulders of Royal Navy captains—not just for naval concerns but also for matters of high diplomacy and trade. As it was, Francis Austen was a remarkable man, extremely talented and able, destined by the end of his stellar career to be knighted and promoted to Admiral of the Fleet, the highest rank of the Royal Navy.

But he was not an easy man to serve under. A devout Evangelical, reserved, and severe in his private life, he was a strict disciplinarian and commanded what was known, sarcastically, as a 'praying ship'—though any criticism of him should perhaps be tempered somewhat by the violent and gruelling times through which he lived. He was also a somewhat disap-

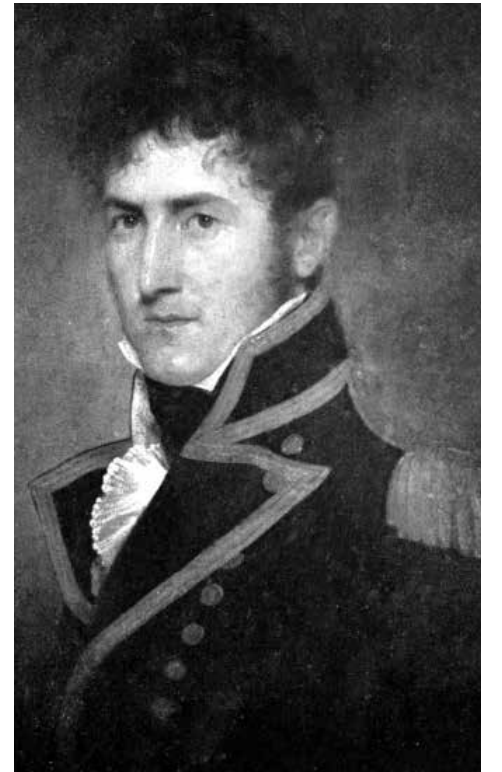
pointed man, having commanded the 84-gun *Canopus* back in 1805 when, just prior to the Battle of Trafalgar, it had been detached from Nelson's fleet to pick up supplies, thereby narrowly missing the famous action as well as all the fame and wealth that would have resulted from it—if he had survived, that is.

He had a younger brother also in the service, who would also enjoy an extraordinary career, rising to the rank of Rear Admiral. But Charles Austen, though just as religious as his elder brother, was a very different sort of man: warm, easy-going, and blessed with a natural charm. His crews adored him. In 1810, at the time of his elder brother's diplomatic problem in Canton, Charles Austen was in command of the 74-gun *Swiftsure*, on the North American station, blockading American trade with Napoleonic Europe, looking out for Royal Navy deserters serving on American ships, and intercepting slave traffic between the British West Indies and the southern American states.

Both men would regularly write home. One can only imagine what it was like for their sister, in 1810 living a quiet life in a cottage in the village of Chawton, Hampshire, reading letters from her brothers sent from the farthest ends of the world. In two of her novels, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, she, Jane Austen, would feature sailors strongly. But, in these novels, naval officers would be seen only in an English domestic setting. There would be no descriptions in her novels of the brutalities of life in the Royal Navy: the bloody battles, the maimed and killed, the diseases, the floggings, or indeed the drunkenness and fighting on shore that was giving Francis Austen a diplomatic headache in Canton.

Francis Austen resolved the Canton crisis by demanding credible witnesses to the killing of Hoan a Xing before any British sailors could be handed over. On February 11, 1810, he cross-examined two witnesses whose accounts were vague and contradictory. With no clear evidence linking British sailors to the crime—especially as American sailors, similarly dressed, were also in the area—Chinese officials allowed the fleet to depart, though Austen vowed to continue his investigation. The East India Company praised Francis Austen for his skill and tact.

Francis would indeed continue to investigate, discovering that three British sailors



from Cumberland, another East India Company ship, had been involved in a fight with some Chinese in Canton, though they denied murder. Again, with changing stories and contradictory statements, he was unable to establish who had actually murdered Hoan a Xing.

After many more adventures, Francis Austen would eventually die peacefully at home in Hampshire at the age of 91, outliving his literary sister by many years. Charles Austen, whose career was every bit as successfully eventful as that of his elder brother, would succumb to cholera at the age of 71 while leading British forces during the Second Burmese War, much to the distress of his adoring men.

By the 1920s, long after her illustrious naval brothers had been forgotten, Jane Austen would at last be recognised by scholars as a great English novelist. She would also get to see China for herself, her novel *Pride and Prejudice* finally being translated there in 1935.

(The author is a novelist with an abiding passion for Chinese history. Views personal.)

NEWSMAKER OF THE WEEK

The Reluctant Heiress Takes Centre Stage



By

Shoumojit Banerjee

The winter session of Parliament offered a rare tableau: the three Gandhis—Sonia, Rahul, and Priyanka—walking into the Lok Sabha together. Among them, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, freshly elected as the MP from Wayanad, stood out, not only for her sartorial choices but also for her audacious political messaging. As she took the oath holding a copy of the Constitution, dressed in a traditional Kerala Kasavu saree, it was clear she was embracing both the symbolism of her new role and the weight of her family's political legacy.

Her first parliamentary session was as theatrical as it was symbolic. Whether carrying a bag emblazoned with "Palestine" or wielding props inscribed with slogans against the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Priyanka signaled her intent to challenge the government on its policies and its messaging. The Palestine tote, in particular, drew ire from BJP members, who accused her of pandering to minority voters. Priyanka dismissed the controversy as "patriarchy," asserting her right to wear and carry what she pleased.

For decades, Priyanka has been seen as the 'reluctant Gandhi,' a figure who could electrify Congress party loyalists yet preferred the shadows to the spotlight. Her grandmother, Indira Gandhi, was India's first female Prime Minister, a symbol of charisma and iron will. Priyanka, with her striking resemblance to Indira, has often been cast as the political heir apparent. Yet, until now, she resisted fully stepping into that role.

Priyanka's trajectory has been

anything but linear. Born into India's most prominent political dynasty, she grew up amidst the privileges and perils of power. The assassination of her grandmother in 1984 and her father, Rajiv Gandhi, in 1991 deeply influenced her guarded approach to public life. After pursuing psychology and a master's degree in Buddhist studies, she married Robert Vadra, a businessman, and largely avoided political headlines, preferring to raise her two children in relative privacy.

When she did step into the limelight, it was often as a behind-the-scenes strategist, crafting campaigns and canvassing votes for her brother, Rahul Gandhi, and her mother, Sonia Gandhi. Her eloquence and ability to connect with crowds earned her a devoted following. Party workers donned "Priyanka Sena" t-shirts, and her roadshows in Uttar Pradesh were marked by fervent support, despite Congress's electoral struggles in the region.

Her official entry into electoral politics came in 2019, as Congress's general secretary in charge of eastern Uttar Pradesh. The assignment was widely seen as a test run, though Congress faltered in the elections. This year's landslide victory in Wayanad, however, marked a turning point. Priyanka entered Parliament not just as a Gandhi, but as a politician with a constituency to represent.

While her gestures in Parliament were controversial, they also underlined a broader strategy of personalizing her opposition to the BJP's policies. Priyanka has projected herself as a voice for the disenfranchised, whether Muslims in India or Palestinians abroad, a tactic that has evoked both admiration and criticism.

Her political ascent is not without complications. Her husband, Robert Vadra, has been embroiled in allegations of money laundering and questionable land deals. The accusations have cast a shadow over Priyanka's public image.

Internally, her rise has also reig-



nited debates about dynastic politics within Congress. For a party struggling to revive its fortunes after successive defeats, Priyanka represents both hope and risk. While her surname carries weight, critics argue it underscores Congress's dependence on the Gandhi family rather than fostering new leadership.

Priyanka's speeches blend sharp critiques of the government with appeals to India's pluralistic traditions, echoing her grandmother's style. But the India she seeks to lead is vastly different from the one Indira governed. Polarized along religious and ideological lines, today's electorate demands more than nostalgia for Congress's past glories.

As Priyanka settles into her role, her challenge will be to transcend the symbolic and deliver substantive results. Whether addressing economic disparities, or environmental challenges, she must prove her mettle not just as a Gandhi but as a leader for a new India.

For now, she remains the onereluctant heir who has finally stepped into the spotlight, eclipsing even Rahul Gandhi in the current Parliamentary session.

STATES WATCH

A Grim Reminder of Unkept Promises

The farmers of Punjab, whose fields have long been the crucibles of India's agricultural success, are now setting the stage to highlight rural despair. The 2020-21 farmers' protests, which forced the government to repeal controversial agricultural laws, were seen by many as a victory. Yet, two years later, a new wave of protests reveals that the core issues, most notably a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Prices (MSP), remain unresolved.

The latest agitation, led by factions like the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, reflects a mix of frustration and determination. These groups have camped at Punjab-Haryana border points since February, undeterred by the barricades, the arrests, or the Centre's reticence. Jagjit Singh Dallewal, a 70-year-old farmer leader whose fast-unto-death has now crossed over three weeks, embodies this struggle.

The farmers' demands are pressing. Chief among them is the legal guarantee of MSP—a measure that could provide much-needed financial stability to millions of farmers. Other demands include rolling back the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, waiving farm loans, and ensuring justice for victims of past violence like the Lakhimpur Kheri massacre.

Farmers' organizations have also rejected the Centre's draft National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing, warning of a more intense agitation than in 2020 if the policy is implemented.

At a meeting with Punjab Agriculture Minister Gurmeet Singh Khuddian, leaders of 32 farmers' unions, aligned with the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, voiced unanimous opposition, declaring that the poli-



PUNJAB

cy's push toward corporatisation of marketing would be resisted stronger than before. Farmers demanded that grain storage infrastructure remain in the public sector and accused the Centre of withholding Punjab's Rural Development Fund to promote corporate interests.

Farmer leaders have suggested reopening trade routes through Pakistan's Wagah border to access Middle Eastern markets, while urging support for crop diversification to reduce India's \$15 billion annual oilseed imports.

Khuddian assured farmers that Punjab would block the policy's implementation if it jeopardized their interests, vowing further consultations. However, as anger grows, the Centre risks reigniting a movement that reshaped India's agrarian landscape just three years ago.

Thus far, the government's re-

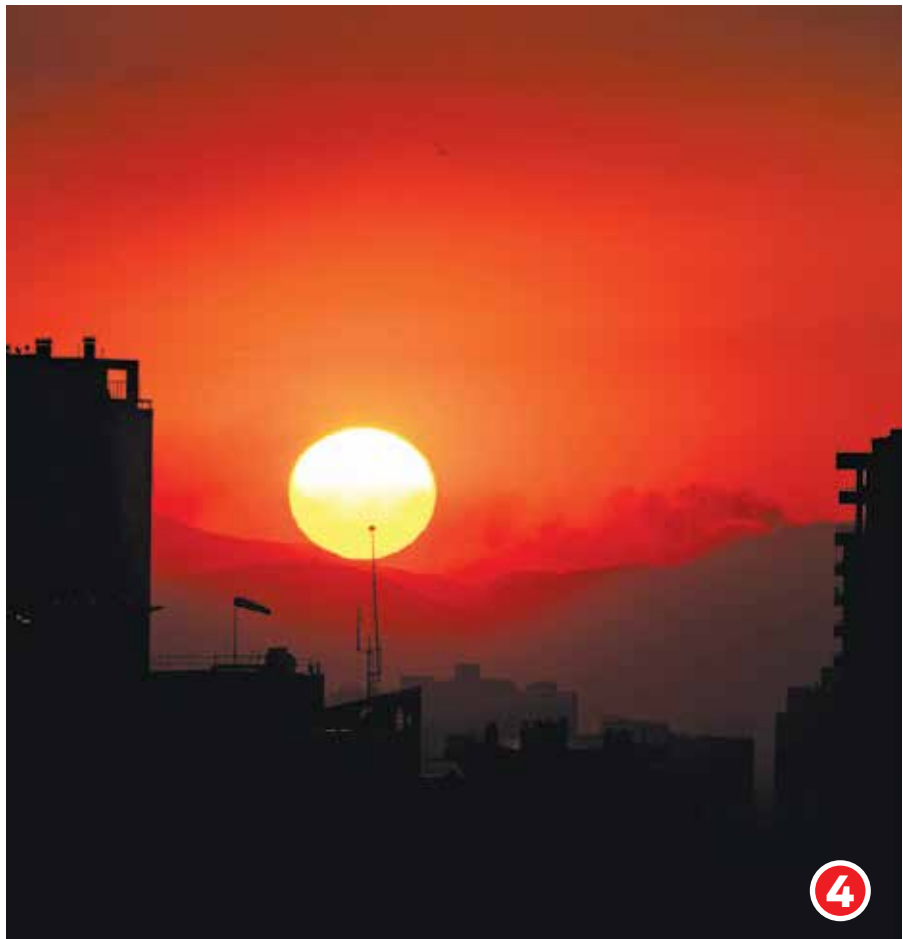
sponse has been both predictable and inadequate. It has reiterated commitments to agricultural reforms while sidestepping the core issue of MSP. The irony is glaring: a parliamentary panel has recommended exactly what the farmers demand—a legally binding MSP—stating it could reduce suicides and uplift the rural economy. Yet, the Centre has not acted, seemingly paralyzed by fears of fiscal strain and political fallout.

For Punjab's farmers, this is not just about economics but about trust. From their perspective, the BJP-led government's unfulfilled promises—whether from Narendra Modi's Gujarat days or the pledges made during the Ramlila Maidan protests in 2018—have eroded the faith

that once bound the farmers to the state. This betrayal of trust, amplified by historical neglect of reports like the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, fuels the current unrest.

The consequences of inaction are perilous. Protests have disrupted rail services and trade in Punjab, and tensions at border crossings hint at wider unrest. Dallewal's deteriorating health casts a sombre shadow over a movement that could escalate into a crisis with dire humanitarian and political implications.

Needless to say, the Centre will have to act swiftly if it wants to prevent a reprise of the 2020-21 protests. Legal guarantees for MSP, though fraught with logistical challenges, are not insurmountable. They represent a moral and political imperative for a government that claims to champion farmers. Ignoring these demands risks not only economic instability in India's breadbasket but also a broader erosion of trust in democratic institutions.



KALEIDOSCOPE

1. A woman plucks aster flowers at an orchard, in Nadia on Saturday.
2. Sadhus of Shri Panchayati Akhada Niranjani arrive at Prayagraj railway station ahead of the Mahakumbh festival in Prayagraj on Saturday.
3. Snow falls as a couple walks along the Commonwealth Avenue Mall in the Back Bay neighborhood in Boston on Friday.
4. The sun sets in Santiago, Chile on Friday as a forest fires burns on the outskirts of the capital.
5. School students during Christmas celebrations in Moradabad on Saturday.

All Pictures PTI, AP

EXPLAINER

Why Are Thousands of Jews Leaving Israel?

Leaving Israel is easier, Shira Z. Carmel thinks, by saying it's just for now. But she knows better.

For the Israeli-born singer and an increasing number of relatively well-off Israelis, the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack shattered any sense of safety and along with it, Israel's founding promise: to be the world's safe haven for Jews. That day, thousands of Hamas militants blew past the country's border defences, killed 1,200 people and dragged 250 more into Gaza in a siege that caught the Israeli army by surprise and stunned a nation that prides itself on military prowess. This time, during what became known as Israel's 9/11, the army didn't come for hours.

Ten days later, a pregnant Carmel, her husband and their toddler boarded a flight to Australia, which was looking for people in her husband's profession. And they spun the explanation to friends and family as something other than permanent — "relocation" is the easier-to-swallow term — acutely aware of the familial strain and the shame that have shadowed Israelis who leave for good.

"We told them we're going to get out of the line of fire for a while," Carmel said more than a year later from her family's new home in Melbourne. "It wasn't a hard decision. But it was very hard to talk to them about it. It was even hard to admit it to ourselves."

Thousands of Israelis have left the country since October 7, 2023, according to government statistics and immigration tallies released by destination countries such as Canada and Germany. There's concern about whether it will drive a "brain drain" in sectors like medicine and tech. Migration experts say it's possible people leaving Israel will surpass the number of immigrants to Is-

rael in 2024, according to Sergio DellaPergola, a statistician and professor emeritus of Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

"In my view, this year people entering will be smaller than the total of the exit," he said. "And this is quite unique in the existence of the State of Israel."

Early information points to a surge of Israelis leaving

The October 7 effect on Israeli emigration is enough for prominent Israelis to acknowledge the phenomenon publicly — and warn of rising antisemitism elsewhere.

"There is one thing that worries me in particular: talks about leaving the country. This must not happen," former premier Naftali Bennett, a staunch critic of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, tweeted in June after a conversation with friends who were leaving. Israel, he wrote, needs to retain the talent. "Who wants to return to the days of the wandering Jew, without real freedom, without a state, subject to every anti-Semitic whim?"

Thousands of Israelis have opted to pay the financial, emotional and social costs of moving out since the Oct. 7 attack, according to government statistics and families who spoke to The Associated Press in recent months after emigrating to Canada, Spain and Australia. Israel's overall population continues to grow toward 10 million people.

But it's possible that 2024 ends with more Israelis leaving the country than coming in. That's even as Israel and Hezbollah reached a fragile ceasefire along the border with Lebanon and Israel and Hamas inch toward a pause in Gaza.

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics estimated in Septem-



ber that 40,600 Israelis departed long-term over the first seven months of 2024, a 59 per cent increase over the same period a year earlier, when 25,500 people left. Monthly, 2,200 more people departed this year than in 2023, CBS reported.

The Israeli Ministry of Immigration and Absorption, which does not deal with people leaving, said more than 33,000 people have moved to Israel since the start of the war, about on par with previous years. The interior minister refused to comment for this story.

The numbers are equally dramatic in destination countries. More than 18,000 Israelis applied for German citizenship in 2024, more than double the same period in 2023 and three times that of the year before, the Interior Ministry reported in September.

Canada, which has a three-year work visa program for Israelis and Palestinians fleeing the war, received 5,759 applications for work permits

from Israeli citizens between January and October this year, the government told The Associated Press. In 2023, that number was 1,616 applications, and a year earlier the tally was 1,176 applications, according to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

They want to wake up in the morning and enjoy life

Other clues, too, point to a notable departure of Israelis since the October 7 attacks. Gil Fire, deputy director of Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center, said that some of its star specialists with fellowship postings of a few years in other countries began to waver about returning.

"Before the war, they always came back and it was not really considered an option to stay. And during the war we started to see a change," he said. "They said to us, We will stay another year, maybe two years, maybe more."

Fire says it's "an issue of concern" enough for him to

plan in-person visits with these doctors in the coming months to try to draw them back to Israel.

Michal Harel, who moved with her husband to Toronto in 2019, said that almost immediately after the attacks the phone began ringing — with other Israelis seeking advice about moving to Canada. On Nov. 23, 2023, the couple set up a website to help Israelis navigate moving, which can cost at least 100,000 Israeli shekels, or about \$28,000, Harel and other Israeli relocation experts said.

Not everyone in Israel can just pack up and move overseas. Many of those who have made the move have foreign passports, jobs at multinational corporations or can work remotely. People in Gaza have even less choice. The vast majority of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced by relentless Israeli bombing since Oct. 7, 2023, yet no one has been able to leave the enclave since May. Before then, at least 100,000 Palestinians are believed to have left Gaza.

Health officials in Gaza say Israeli bombing has killed more than 45,000 people.

Speaking by phone last month, Harel reported that the site has received views from 100,000 unique visitors and 5,000 direct contacts in 2024 alone.

"It's people who want to move quickly with families, to wake up in the morning and enjoy life," she said. "Right now (in Israel), it's trauma, trauma, trauma."

"Some of them," Harel added, "they want to keep everything a secret."

Leaving Zion, a threat to Israel and a shame?

Aliya — the Hebrew term for used for immigration, literally the "ascent" of Jews into Israel — has always been part of the country's plan. But "yerida" — the term used for leaving the country, literally the "descent" of Jews from Israel to the diaspora, emphatically has not.

For Israel's first decades of independence, the government strongly discouraged departing Israelis, who were seen in some cases as cowardly and even treasonous. A sacred trust and a social contract took root in Israeli society. The terms go — or went — like this: Israeli citizens would serve in the military and pay high taxes. In exchange, the army would keep them safe. Meanwhile, it's every Jew's obligation to stay, work and fight for Israel's survival.

"Emigration was a threat, especially in the early years (when) there were problems of nation-building. In later decades, Israel became more established and more self-confident," said Ori Yehudai, a professor of Israel studies at Ohio State University and the author of "Leaving Zion," a history of Israeli emigration. The sense of shame is more of a social dynamic now, he said,

but "people still feel they have to justify their decision to move."

Shira Carmel says she has no doubt about her decision. She'd long objected to Netanyahu's government's efforts to overhaul the legal system, and was one of the first women to don the blood-red "Handmaid's Tale" robes that became a fixture of the anti-government protests of 2023. She was terrified as a new mom, and a pregnant one, during the Hamas attack, and appalled at having to tell her toddler that they were gathering in the bomb shelter for "hugging parties" with the neighbors. This was not the life she wanted.

Meanwhile, Australia beckoned. Carmel's brother had lived there for two decades. The couple had the equivalent of a green card due to Carmel's husband's profession. In the days after the attack, Carmel's brother alerted her to the possibility of a flight out of Israel for free, if on very short notice, which she confirmed with the Australian embassy in Israel. Basic logic, she says, pointed toward moving.

And yet. Carmel recalls the frenzied hours before the flight out in which she said to her husband in the privacy of their bedroom: "My God, are we really doing this?"

They decided not to decide, opting instead for: "We're just getting on a plane for now, being grateful." They packed lightly. On the ground half a world away, weeks became months. And they decided: "I'm not going to go back to try to give birth in the war." In December, they told their families back in Israel that they were staying "for now."

"We don't define it as forever," Carmel said Tuesday. "But we are for sure staying for the foreseeable future."

-AP

TIGER WOODS' IMMEDIATE GOAL: Keep his son from beating him

Orlando: Tiger Woods turns 49 at the end of the month and he has one pressing goal that relates to his golf. He wants to prolong that inevitable day when his son beats him over 18 holes.

They will be playing with — not against — each other this week for the fifth straight year at the PNC Championship, a 36-hole tournament so meaningful to them and everyone else in the field that Woods was determined to play for the first time since a sixth back surgery in September.

Word got out, however, that 15-year-old Charlie finally beat his 15-time major champion dad.

"He beat me for nine holes," Woods said, an important clarification to him.

"He has yet to beat me for 18 holes. That day is coming. I'm just prolonging it as long as I possibly can."

As for the details, Woods talked about the typical banter between them and how much fun they have. It was clear he was not going to share the hole-by-hole of the loss.

Winning is a goal, but not the priority, at the PNC Championship. It's a happy end of the year for all 20 teams at the Ritz-Carlton Golf Club Orlando, an event that pairs the winners of majors or The Players Championship with a family member.

Woods played five tournaments this year and com-



pleted only one of them, making the cut at the Masters for a record 24th consecutive year. He had to play 23 holes on Friday at Augusta National in a raging wind, posting a 72 for his best round of the year. He followed that with an 82, an example of ups and downs from a player whose body has been wracked with injury.

"I'm not going to feel what I'm used to feeling," Woods said.

"The recovery has gotten to be the hardest part. But over the course of rounds, weeks, months, it gets harder."

He missed the cut in the next three majors and then had surgery on his lower back in September to alleviate some of the spasms he had been feeling. The tim-

ing of the surgery was related to the PNC Championship.

Woods chose not to play the Hero World Challenge in the Bahamas two weeks ago, saying he wasn't competitively sharp enough to handle Scottie Scheffler, Patrick Cantlay and Justin Thomas among a 20-man field of players from the top 40 in the world.

This might as well be his fifth major because he plays with his son.

"That was one of the reasons why I had the surgery done earlier, so that hopefully I could give myself the best chance to be with Charlie and be able to play," Woods said.

"I'm not competitive right now, but I just want to be able to have the experience again. This has always

year, filling out and pounding the golf ball. Woods plans to rely on his son's tee shots in the scramble format.

They will play the opening round Saturday with Justin Leonard and son Luke, who goes to The Benjamin School in North Palm Beach with Charlie and is going to Villanova next year.

Charlie Woods went through US Open qualifying for the first time this year and failed to advance out of the first stage. He qualified for the U.S. Junior Amateur at Oakland Hills but didn't come close to making it to match play.

Woods appreciated that his son is under a spotlight few others his age face.

"I was always reminding him, Just be you. Charlie is Charlie. Yes, he's my son. He's going to have my last name and it's going to be part of his core. But I just want him to be just himself and be his own person. That's what we can only do," Woods said.

"I always encourage it, for him to carve his own name, carve his own path and have his own journey," he said.

"I think he's doing a great job. In this day and age where everyone is basically media, with all the phones, being constantly filmed and constantly people watching, that's just part of his generation, and that's part of the world that he has to maneuver through." -AP



Players of Saint Joseph (in green) and SRM Welkin in action during a football match, on the first day of Chillai-Kalan, a 40-day harshest winter period, in Srinagar on Saturday.

Pic: PTI

Mithun Manjunath, Sourabh Varma progress

Bengaluru: Former champions Mithun Manjunath and Sourabh Varma relied on their experience to pack off their much younger opponents in the second round of the 86th Senior Nationals Badminton tournament here on Saturday.

Defending champions Chirag Sen and Anmol Kharb also had easy outings.

Mithun defeated third seed Bharat Raghav 21-9, 21-18 before Varma got the better of Abhinav Garg 21-17, 21-17 in the men's singles second round

matches.

Chirag Sen also started his campaign in style with a 21-15, 21-15 win over Jeet Patel.

In women's singles, Anmol hammered Deepali Gupta 21-8, 21-6, while last edition's runner-up Tanvi Sharma also eased into the third round with a 21-8, 21-6 win over Flora Engineer.

While the favourites put their best foot forward, there were a few upsets that underlined the depth of talent in Indian badminton.

In women's singles, Rujula Ramu shocked 10th

seed Surya Charishma Tamiri 21-19, 19-21, 21-17 while Jiya Rawat came from a game behind to beat ninth seed Shruti Mundada 25-27, 21-14, 21-10.

In the men's singles section, Rohan Gurbani proved too good for 11th seed K Lokesh Reddy, winning 21-15, 21-1, while Raghu M defeated 15th seed Karthik Jindal 21-19, 21-16.

In women's doubles, Kanika Kanwal and Bharti Pal combined to upset sixth seeds Amrutha P and Radhika Sharma 25-23, 21-17.

-PTI



Roma Hemvani holds 'Aquatic Meditation Mudra' while floating on water in Lucknow on Saturday. Hemvani set a new record for holding 'Aquatic Meditation Mudra' while floating on water.

Pic: PTI

Fastest List A hundred by an Indian

Ahmedabad: Anmolpreet Singh smashed the quickest List A hundred by an Indian, a 35-ball effort, to guide Punjab to an easy nine-wicket win over Arunachal Pradesh in a Group C Vijay Hazare match here on Saturday.

Anmolpreet, who went unsold in the recent IPL auction, broke the record of former India all-rounder Yusuf Pathan, who had scored a hundred off 40 balls for Baroda against Maharashtra in 2009-10.

This knock is also the third fastest List A hundred

behind Aussie Jake Fraser McGurk, who smashed a 29-ball ton for South Australia against Tasmania in 2023-24, and South African AB de Villiers' 31-ball hundred against the West Indies at Johannesburg in 2014-15.

The right-handed Anmolpreet made 115 off 45 balls (12x4, 9x6) as Punjab chased down a target of 165 in just 12.5 overs, reaching 167 for one.

After the early fall of skipper Abhishek Sharma (10), Anmolpreet and Prabhsimran Singh (35 not

out, 25b) milked 153 runs for the unbroken second wicket alliance to guide Punjab home.

Earlier, Arunachal were bowled out for 164 with pacer Ashwani Kumar and leg-spinner Mayank Markande taking three wickets apiece.

Brief scores: Arunachal Pradesh: 164 all out in 48.4 overs (Tech Neri 42, Hardik Varma 38; Ashwani Kumar 3/37, Mayank Markande 3/31) lost to Punjab: 167/1 in 12.5 overs (Anmolpreet Singh 115 not out) by 9 wickets. -PTI

Tendulkar praises girl's bowling

New Delhi: Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar has lauded a young girl's "smooth and effortless" bowling action, likening it to former India pacer Zaheer Khan, who too praised her technique in a social media exchange that created a lot of buzz.

On Friday, Tendulkar shared a video on 'X' featuring the young girl, Sushila Meena, delivering a ball with an extraordinarily fluid left-arm pace bowling action, reminiscent of Zaheer's signature style.

The barefooted Sushila, a Class 5 student from Rajasthan, showcased her natural flair and passion for the game, with her action, including a signature jump before delivery, bearing striking similarities to Zaheer's bowling style.

The video highlights the immense raw talent emerging from rural India, underscoring the country's potential in nurturing future cricket stars.

-PTI

McSweeney feel 'devastated' after being axed from team

Melbourne: Rookie Australia opener Nathan McSweeney admitted feeling "devastated" after being dropped for the last two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India but vowed to work hard to reclaim his spot in the national team.

McSweeney was on Friday dropped by the national selectors, who handed a maiden call-up to teenage sensation Sam Konstas.

"Yeah, I mean devastated, I get the dream come true and then didn't quite work the way I wanted," McSweeney told Channel 7.

"But it's all part of it, and I'll get my head down and get back in the nets and work really hard and hopefully be ready to go for the next opportunity."

The 25-year-old, who made his Test debut in the series-opener in Perth, struggled at the top with scores of 10, 0, 39, 10 not out, 9, and 4 in his six innings. He was dismissed by Indian pacer Jasprit Bumrah four times during the series.

"It's the game we're in. If



opened for Australia A against India A before the squad for the first Test was announced. Despite his lack of experience as an opener, he had shown promise in Adelaide's first innings, negotiating challenging conditions alongside Marnus Labuschagne.

Australia great Mike Hussey sympathised with McSweeney, calling the decision "tough."

"I really feel for McSweeney. I think it's tough on him. Tough call," Hussey said on Fox Cricket.

"I don't know (if it was the right call). It's a tough one on him. It's not easy. The ball's been moving around quite a lot for the openers. A lot of batters at the top of the order have been battling away."

With all-rounder Cameron Green set to return from injury later in the year, competition for spots in the Australian middle-order is expected to intensify, making McSweeney's path back to the team even more challenging.

-PTI

India to host ISSF Junior World Cup

New Delhi: India has been awarded the hosting rights for next year's Junior World Cup involving competitions in rifle, pistol and shotgun disciplines, the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) said on Saturday.

This will be the country's third top International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) event in recent times after the senior World Cup in Bhopal in 2023 and the season-ending World Cup Final earlier this year, reinforcing India's stature as one of the sport's top destinations in the world.

The dates of the tournament though are yet to be finalised. The national federation's president Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo, said, "We had a fruitful executive committee meeting of the ISSF in Rome last month and all member federations as well as the ISSF president Luciano Rossi was all praise with the way India has been hosting top international shooting competitions.

'It is time to set the burden of being you down'

ASHWIN'S WIFE PENS HEARTFELT TRIBUTE AFTER HIS SUDDEN RETIREMENT

Chennai: Ravichandran Ashwin's wife Prithi Narayanan has penned a heartfelt tribute for her husband following his recent retirement from international cricket, saying "it is time to set the burden of being you down" and embrace life beyond the game.

Ashwin made a surprise announcement of his retirement after the drawn third Test at Brisbane. The veteran off-spinner picked up just one wicket during the tour, including the 10-wicket loss at Adelaide.

The 38-year-old retired with a stellar record of 537

Test wickets at an average of 24, in addition to scoring 3,503 runs, including six centuries. He also claimed 156 wickets in ODIs and 72 in T20Is.

Describing her tribute as a "Love letter from a fan girl", Prithi wrote on Instagram: "Dear Ashwin, from not knowing how to put a kit bag together to following you to stadiums all over the world, rooting for you, watching you and learning from you, it has been an absolute pleasure. The world you introduced me to give me the privilege to watch and enjoy a sport that I love

from close quarters. "It also showed me how much passion, hardwork and discipline is needed to keep your head above water. And sometimes even that is not enough. I remember us talking about why you, R Ashwin, had to do all of this and a lot more to even stay relevant in the scheme of things."

Ashwin, who debuted in 2011 against the West Indies, earned a reputation for his relentless pursuit of excellence. His near-equal tally of 269 wickets against right-handers and 268 against left-handers high-



lights his versatility.

"How awards, the best of stats, the POMs, the accolades, the records didn't matter if you didn't sharpen your skill sets constantly and did not put in the work. Sometimes, nothing is enough," Prithi continued.

"As you end your wonderful international run, I only want to tell you that it's all good. It is all going to be good. It is time to set the burden of being you down. Live life on your terms, make space for those extra calories, make time to

do absolutely nothing, share memes all day, create a new bowling variation, bug our kids out of their minds. Just do it all."

Prithi, who has been a constant companion on Ashwin's cricketing journey, reflected on his meticulous approach to his craft.

"When I saw Ashwin's PC, I thought of small and big moments. Many many memories over the last 13-14 years. The big wins, the MOS awards, the quiet silence in our room after an intense game, the sound of the shower running for much longer than usual on

some evenings post play, the scratch of pencil over paper as he scribbled thoughts down, the constant streaming of footage videos when he is making a game plan, the calm of meditative breathing before leaving for each game, certain songs playing on repeat while he unwinds.

"The times we wept in joy - after the CT final, after the MCG win, after the Sydney draw, The Gabba win, after making a comeback in T20s...the times we sat in silence and the times when we had our hearts broken," she wrote. -PTI