

THE PERFECT VOICE



Will soon take a decision on future action: Bhujbal ... pg 2



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Visitors at three-day TechFest at IIT-Bombay in Mumbai on Tuesday. Pic: Bhushan Koyande

RSS keen on keeping Amit Shah in the cold

THE MAHAYUTI 2.0 CABINET CEMENTS MODI'S DOMINANCE AND THE RSS'S IDEOLOGICAL OVERSIGHT IN MAHARASHTRA

By Kiran D. Tare

Mumbai: The absence of ministers aligned with Home Minister Amit Shah in the new Mahayuti cabinet led by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis has raised eyebrows, triggering speculations that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) may have moved to curtail Shah's influence in the state.

Maharashtra expanded its cabinet on Sunday, swearing in 33 cabinet ministers and six ministers of state at Raj Bhavan in Nagpur. In keeping with the performance and contribution of each of the three Mahayuti parties in the coalition's stunning electoral success in the Assembly polls, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured the lion's share with 16 cabinet berths, followed by nine for Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena and eight for the Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

The reshuffle introduced a youthful tilt, with 18 new faces joining the council

while as many as 13 former ministers were dropped during the cabinet expansion that took place in Nagpur.

Notably absent from the new cabinet are individuals known to be close to Shah, a political tactician often credited with the BJP's meteoric rise over the past decade. As per sources who spoke to The Perfect Voice, the absence of veteran BJP leader from Chandrapur Sudhir Mungantiwar, considered to be a confidante of Shah in Maharashtra, underscored this pattern.

Over the past year, tensions between Shah and the RSS have bubbled to the surface. Dattatreya Hosabale, the Sarkaryavah (of the General Secretary) of the RSS, reportedly confronted Shah over the induction of senior Congress leader and former Maharashtra CM Ashok Chavan into the BJP. An apparently curt remark issued by Shah to Hosabale - "Politics is not your business. Let us do politics in our own way" - did little to endear him to the Sangh.

Relations further soured when, following a public



statement by BJP President J.P. Nadda that appeared critical of the RSS, Shah sought to meet RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat to clarify the party's position. As per sources, Shah's overtures were reportedly rebuffed as Bhagwat reportedly refused to meet the Home Minister, signalling a rare public rebuke to the powerful BJP satrap from the Sangh leadership.

"Amitbhai had gone to meet Mohanji at the Sangh's Jhandewalan's office in Delhi. Mohanji was present

there but he outrightly refused to meet Amitbhai," said a source.

Mungantiwar's exclusion is the latest consequences of this falling-out. Earlier, the ouster of C.T. Ravi as BJP general secretary was also seen as a stern message to Shah.

The biggest confirmation of Shah's diminishing influence came when his bete noire Devendra Fadnis was chosen for the coveted post of Maharashtra Chief Minister. By promoting Fadnis - a leader with whom Shah has clashed in the past - the RSS and PM Modi are reportedly sending a message about where ultimate authority lies.

The RSS, for its part, has little tolerance for figures who appear to put personal ambition above the organization's broader ideological goals. Shah's brusque style and political pragmatism, while effective in winning some elections, have also queered the pitch in some states where friction between the top BJP brass and the local leadership has translated into bad results

for the party. This has drawn criticism from Sangh stalwarts who prefer a more consultative approach.

Modi and Shah have long been seen as the twin architects of the BJP's dominance. Though their partnership is often described as seamless, divergences in strategy and priorities occasionally surface. Shah is known for his hard-nosed approach and backroom deals - the BJP's principal trouble-shooter.

The RSS's priorities often differ from those of Shah, whose realpolitik sometimes clashes with the Sangh's ideological purism. By sidelining Shah's allies in Maharashtra, the RSS is likely signalling its preference for a less transactional and more ideologically aligned leadership in the state.

Furthermore, with Nadda's term as party president nearing its end, speculation is rife that the next president will be someone at odds with Shah. This is likely to curtail Shah's influence over state BJP leaderships.

Present glorious way of life to world: Bhagwat

Pune: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Tuesday said it is India's prime responsibility to present its glorious way of life to the world so that others can attain happiness and prosperity.

Speaking at the inauguration of the Moraya Gosavi Sanjivan Samadhi ceremony in the industrial belt of Pimpri Chinchwad near Pune city, he also emphasized that the essence of Indian ethos lies in ensuring the well-being of all.

"It is everyone's responsibility to maintain balance and patience to ensure the smooth functioning of the world order. In Indian culture, there has always been a tradition of returning to nature. In today's terms, this can be described as 'giving back'. The structure of our dharma is built on this principle of 'giving back'.

Our ancestors recognised and practised it as nature itself works on this aspect," Bhagwat said. He said our ancestors not

only understood the concept of balance in dharma but also led by example, demonstrating how to live peacefully while ensuring harmony and progress for all.

"This dharma ensures the well-being and progress of all, which is why India must survive, grow and lead the way. It is India's prime responsibility to show to the world its glorious way of life so that others can follow and attain happiness and prosperity," he said.

Netanyahu tours buffer zone inside Syria

Jerusalem: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu entered Syrian territory on Tuesday during a security tour of the buffer zone seized by Israel in the past few days since the fall of Bashar Assad.

It was apparently the first time a sitting Israeli leader entered Syrian territory.

Earlier in the day, Israel launched overnight attacks on Syrian air defence systems and ammunition depots. The action was a part of the country's aim to threaten country's military capability after the ousting of President Bashar al-Assad.

Israel wanted to destroy all the arms, ammunition, and equipments that could fall into hands of terrorists or rebels who have taken over in Syria and partially Israel has accomplished that goal. When US military had hastily left Afghanistan, in most un-planned and inhuman manner, only personnel were moved out. All the

ammunition, lethal weapons, guns and armored vehicles and tanks were left there, which easily fell into the hands of Taliban. This posed a serious security threat to India. Thereafter Kashmiri terrorists were spotted using such advanced weapons, obviously traded from Taliban of Afghanistan to Kashmiri terrorists.

In the similar way, a massive bulk of modern arms, ammunition, war planes, tanks, ships etc, supplied by Russia and Iran, were to be property of the Syrian rebel forces after ousted Syrian President Bashar-Al-Assad fled. This could have been a potential danger to Israel.

Israel has been conducting airstrikes in Syria for several years, primarily targeting Iranian military positions and militias. In April 2023, Israel had launched three airstrikes in Syria's Homs Governorate, killing two Iranian military advisers and injuring five Syrian soldiers.



Uddhav meets Fadnis, Speaker

Nagpur: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray and his MLA son Aadiya Thackeray on Tuesday met with Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and Assembly speaker Rahul Narwekar on the premises of Vidhan Bhavan in Nagpur.

Aadiya later told reporters that he and his father extended good wishes to Fadnis and Narwekar. "We talked about taking a step towards showing political maturity and working together in the interest of the people of Maharashtra," the former minister said.

Aadiya said no discussion was held on the post of

the leader of the opposition in the assembly.

Uddhav Thackeray was accompanied by Sena (UBT) legislators Anil Parab and Varun Sardesai during their meeting with Fadnis in the latter's chamber.

The winter session of the state legislature is currently underway in Nagpur.

The 15th legislative assembly is without LoP since none of the three parties of Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi could win 10 per cent of seats in the November 20 polls.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) bagged 20 seats, the Congress 16 and the NCP (SP)

10. Uddhav Thackeray, who is a member of the state legislative council, arrived in Nagpur on Tuesday to attend the ongoing session.

Ties between Fadnis and Thackeray strained after Shiv Sena (undivided) snapped its old association with BJP in November 2019 over the issue of sharing the chief minister's post and joined hands with the Congress and undivided NCP to form Maha Vikas Aghadi.

Uddhav had severely criticised Fadnis and BJP leadership at election rallies.

ONOE bills in LS

OPPOSITION CALLS THE MOVE UNCONSTITUTIONAL

New Delhi: Two bills that lay down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections in the country were introduced in Lok Sabha on Tuesday after a fiery debate, with the opposition terming the move "anti-constitutional" and Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal asserting that the legislation would not tamper with the powers enjoyed by states.

Amid uproar by the opposition, Home Minister Amit Shah told Lok Sabha that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said during a meeting of the Union Cabinet that the bill should be referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee for wider deliberations at every level.

The government is likely to move a resolution to refer the bill to the JPC on Wednesday in Lok Sabha.

The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha by Meghwal after a nearly 90-minute debate, followed by a division of votes - the first step towards completion of BJP's long-cher-

ished dream. As many as 269 members voted in favour of introduction of the bill and 198 against it.

Opposition Congress, DMK, Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party, NCP-SP, Shiv Sena-UBT, AIMIM among others objected to the introduction of the bill contending that it was an assault on the basic structure of the Constitution.

During the consultations held by former president Ram Nath Kovind-led high level committee on 'One Nation, One Elections', 32 political parties supported the measure and 15 parties opposed it.

YSRCP, which has four members in Lok Sabha, is the only non-NDA party to have declared support for the bill. BJD, another fence sitter, is yet to spell out its stand. BJD failed to open its account in Lok Sabha in elections this year, but has seven members in Rajya Sabha.

Meghwal also introduced The Union Territories Amendment Bill, which seeks to align elections in

the Union territories of Puducherry, Delhi, and Jammu and Kashmir with the Lok Sabha polls.

He said the proposed bills did not attack the "basic structure doctrine of the Constitution, as claimed by the opposition".

"Detailed discussions can take place in the JPC. The report of the JPC will be approved by the Cabinet. Then again, there will be a discussion on this (bills) in the House," Shah said.

Meghwal said he would move a resolution referring the Bills to a joint committee of Parliament.

The government would require a two-thirds majority for the passage of the bill in both the Houses in separate votes - numbers it does not enjoy in Parliament currently.

Congress member Manickam Tagore pointed out that the government did not have a two-thirds majority among the 461 members who took part in the voting on Tuesday. In Lok Sabha, 269 members voted in favour of the bill against the two-thirds-mark of 307.

New books for classes 9-12 by 2026: Pradhan



New Delhi: NCERT textbooks for some classes will cost less from next year, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan announced on Tuesday.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), which currently prints five crore textbooks a year, is working to augment capacity to 15 crore from next year, he said.

The minister also informed that the new textbooks, according to the updated curriculum for classes 9-12, would be available from the 2026-27 academic session.

"In the next academic year, NCERT will publish 15 crore

quality and affordable books... Currently, it publishes nearly five crore textbooks. Earlier, there were concerns about demand and supply about the textbooks. However, that will be addressed now," Pradhan told reporters.

"Since the volume of printing of books is going to be high, the prices of textbooks for some classes will be reduced. However, the price will not be increased for any class to ensure there is no financial burden on parents," he added.

The minister informed that the process of updating textbooks, according to the new National Curriculum Frame-

work (NCF), was underway.

"The process is on and textbooks for classes 9-12 will be ready by the 2026-27 academic session," he said.

"New textbooks have been made available for seven out of 15 grades, with textbooks coming out for four more grades in the next academic year. Textbooks for arts, physical education, and wellbeing (classes 3-8) and vocational education (classes 6-8) are being developed. Textbooks are being prepared in all scheduled Indian languages and made accessible via online platforms," the minister said.

Pradhan informed that the number of schools affiliated

to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) had more than doubled, rising from 14,974 in 2014 to 30,415 in 2024.

"Admissions, transfers and CBSE affiliation processes are now fully online. Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas and the CBSE are operating on 100 per cent e-office platforms.

Schools offering vocational courses have risen from 960 in 2014 to 29,342 in 2024. Student enrolment in skill education has surged from 58,720 in 2014 to over 30.8 lakh in 2024," he said.

Detailed report: Page 5

NTA will be restructured in 2025

The NTA will not conduct any recruitment exams from 2025, instead focusing only on higher education entrance tests, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan announced on Tuesday. The agency will be restructured next year and new posts are being created, he added. The move is part of examination reforms based on the recommendations of a high-level panel set up earlier this year following alleged leaks in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) medical entrance exam and a series of cancellations of others due to suspected leaks and other glitches. The education ministry is also in conversation with the health ministry on conducting NEET in the traditional pen-and-paper mode or switch to a Computer Based Test (CBT). "The National Testing Agency (NTA) will be limited to conducting only entrance exams for higher education and not conduct any recruitment exams from next year," Pradhan told reporters. He clarified that the Common University Entrance Test - Undergraduate (CUET-UG) would continue to be held once a year.

DIGI-EXAM system, policy to allot centres, transition to CBT

New Delhi: A DIGI-EXAM system to check impersonation, multi-stage and multi-session testing, test centre allocation policy, setting up secured test centres in each district and mobile testing centres in rural and remote areas are among the recommendations made by the Centre's high-level panel on exam reforms.



Representation Picture

The report by the seven-member panel headed by former Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chief R Radhakrishnan was made public on Tuesday.

The panel noted that there was a strong case for transition from pen-and-paper based tests to Computer Based Test (CBT) as the preferred methodology while the challenges in reaching out to underserved areas could be network, test infrastructure and competent human resources.

The panel recommended the introduction of a DIGI-EXAM system on the lines of DIGI-YATRA to ensure that only the candidate writing the exam joined the intended programme.

"Essentially, multi-stage authentication of the candidate's identity is envisaged which makes use of Aadhar and biometrics and AI-based data analytics," it said.

The panel noted that the National Testing Agency (NTA) outstretched itself to accommodate diverse requests from many test intending agencies for handling end-to-end operations of tests.

"The NTA should primarily conduct entrance examinations. Enhancing its scope for other examinations may be considered after the capacity of the NTA is augmented," the panel said in its report.

Suggesting restructuring of the NTA, the committee recommended 10 specific verticals, headed at the director level. The verticals will be related to technology, products and operations, test security and surveillance.

"The NTA needs to be manned with internal domain-specific human resources and a leadership team with domain expertise, proven experience and skill sets who should take charge of the testing process in the future," it said.

The committee also noted that the NTA should have an "empowered and accountable" governing body with three designated sub-committees to oversee test audit, ethics and transparency; nomination and staff conditions; and stakeholder relationships.

"Multi-session testing, spread over typically a few days to a couple of weeks could be adopted, especially

when registered participants exceed say, two lakh. The parameters and methodology of normalisation process that is integral to multi-session testing should be well defined, established, documented and communicated transparently for each test," according to the report.

"Multi-stage testing for NEET-UG (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test- Undergraduate) could be a viable possibility that needs to be followed up. An acceptable framework with thresholds and test objectives of scoring and ranking at each stage, and number of attempts may be evolved," the panel said.

It recommended that the NTA could target developing at least 1,000 secure standard testing centres in a phased manner in reputable government institutions.

This process may require a "war-footing" approach, it noted.

"The committee envisions a testing centre allocation policy to ensure that ideally the candidates should get a choice of testing centre in their district of residence," it said.

Trusted question bank, secured and trusted testing platform that facilitates secure storage of question paper, setting up one secure Standard Testing Centre (STC) in each district and Mobile Testing Centres (MTCs) to facilitate aspirational districts from rural, remote and inaccessible areas are among the recommendations made in the report.

"Typically, a large bus with seating capacity of 40-50 persons could accommodate 30 test takers and multiples of it could be deployed as necessary. MTCs should be equipped with secure servers that are connected to the command centre," it said.

Laying down a roadmap for testing centres, the panel suggested that it was possible to integrate such testing centres from Kendriya Vidyalyas, Navodaya Vidyalayas, reputable universities and institutes to establish a nationwide network of about 400-500 testing centres within a time frame of a year or so, which would provide about 2-2.5 lakh testing capacity for conducting CBT in one session nationwide.

The panel has also made some long-term recommendations, including harmonisation and unification of tests for undergraduate (UG) admissions, migration to Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT), transition to online mode for exam and coping with Information Security Advancements, among others.

-PTI



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma attends the celebrations of 117th National Day of Bhutan in Thimphu, Bhutan. PicPTI

Indians died in Georgia are from Punjab

Amritsar: Congress MP Gurjeet Singh Auja on Tuesday urged the Punjab government to take steps to bring back the bodies of Punjabis who were among 11 Indians who died in a restaurant in Georgia.

Eleven Indian nationals were found dead at a restaurant in Georgia's mountain resort of Gudauri, the Indian mission had said on Monday.

Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs had said the initial inspection found no signs of injury or violence. All victims died from carbon monoxide poisoning, local media reported, citing police.

The Indian mission in Tbilisi had said it was saddened to learn of the unfortunate passing of 11 Indian nationals in Gaudauri and extended its deepest condolences to their families.

ED raids against Pakistani-owned betting portal

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate Tuesday said it has conducted fresh searches against the operations of a betting website, owned by some Pakistani nationals, that also was involved in "illegal" broadcast of Men's T20 Cricket World Cup matches.

The searches were undertaken by the federal agency between December 10-12 in Delhi, Mumbai and Pune in the case against the portal, 'Magainwin'.

The ED's case, filed under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), is based on an FIR registered by the cyber crime unit of the Ahmedabad Police in Gujarat.

Bank deposits worth Rs 30 lakh were frozen during the raids apart from seizure of "incriminating" documents, the ED said in a statement.

Magainwin, according to

the agency, is a "betting" website "guised" as a gaming portal which is "actually owned" by Pakistani nationals. The operations of this website are mostly handled by Indian nationals working or settled in Dubai, it said.

"The betting games being shown on the website are originally played in the Philippines and other countries which allow betting activities," it said.

However, as per the investigation, the same is "re-telecast" on Magicwin's website by copying the APIs (application programming interface) of the original games.

The agency said betting activities like deposits, placing of betting and withdrawal are "controlled" by the "owners" of Magicwin.

The ED claimed its probe found that that the money, deposited in the

bank accounts by the players/bettors, was "diverted" through layers of "shell and mule" bank accounts and further the profit part of the owners were invested in crypto assets, withdrawn in cash or sent to Dubai through Hawala channels.

The winning amounts of the players/bettors were transferred to their bank accounts through merchant accounts of various shell companies maintained with payment gateways. These amounts were also transferred to the player's bank account though domestic money transfer (DMT), it said.

A "launch party" for the portal, where several "B-town celebrities" attended and endorsed Magicwin, is also under the scanner of the agency.

These celebrities also did video and photo-shoots for Magicwin. -PTI

Children help police nab convict who jumped furlough



New Delhi: A breakthrough provided by two children led to the arrest of a murder convict who had been evading the police since being released on furlough in the Narela area of Outer North Delhi, an official said on Tuesday.

The convict was apprehended on Monday after the children, both related to him, cooperated with the police to track him down.

According to the police, Sanjay had been sentenced to life imprisonment in a 2010 murder case.

He was out on furlough and was due to surrender on June 18, 2024, the police

said, adding that he had requested the Supreme Court for interim relief, which was granted by the apex court.

However, Sanjay evaded the police even after the interim relief period expired.

"On December 2, the Supreme Court of India passed an order directing the Delhi Police to immediately arrest Sanjay and take all necessary steps in accordance with the law," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North) Nidhin Valsan said.

The court also directed the police to file a compli-

ance affidavit by January 2, 2025, he added.

Police said that despite extensive searches, they struggled to track Sanjay and their efforts to seek co-operation from his surety provider proved futile as he refused to assist.

"Our teams later reached out to the children of the surety provider -- a nine-year-old and a 10-year-old girl, appealing for their help. Initially reluctant, the children were explained the seriousness of the matter and the police emphasised that their uncle was absconding in connection with a heinous crime," the DSP said.

"Through careful communication and repeated efforts, the police gained the trust of the children. In a crucial breakthrough, the children provided a phone number linked to Sanjay," said the DCP.

The police used technical surveillance to track Sanjay's location following which he was apprehended, he said.

-PTI



President Droupadi Murmu with a recipient during the first convocation of AIIMS Mangalagiri in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday. Pic: PTI

Bail in gangrape case canceled

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has set aside the Allahabad High Court order granting bail to two persons, accused of kidnapping and gangraping a 14-year-old minor, and expressed displeasure for not making the survivor a party during the bail plea hearing.

A bench comprising Justices Bela M Trivedi and Satish Chandra Sharma asked the accused -- Khargesh alias Golu and Karan -- to surrender before the trial court on or before December 30.

The bench in the process allowed the survivor's plea, filed through advocate Pra-

nav Sachdeva, seeking cancellation of the bail granted by the Allahabad High Court.

Taking a strong exception to the fact that neither the accused nor the public prosecutor nor the Allahabad HC informed the minor survivor about the bail hearing, the bench said, "In the instant case, there is gross violation of the said statutory provisions contained in Section 439(1A) of CrPC and Section 15A(3) of the SC/ST Act, at the instance of the respondents."

The high court in the impugned order also did not

consider the mandatory requirement of both the Acts and granted bail to the respondents in a very casual and cursory manner, without assigning any cogent reasons, though they were prima facie involved in a very serious offence, noted the bench's order on December 13.

The apex court held the bail orders were in "utter disregard" of the mandatory provisions of Code of Criminal Procedure and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act while setting them aside.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The reason that fixed terms ended in 1969 is because of the fact that we have in our country a parliamentary system... different Houses, different majorities, different coalitions, may rise and fall at different times."



Shashi Tharoor, MP, Congress

Winter management plan to shield animals from pollution

New Delhi: From water sprinkling to control dust, to replacing firewood with stubble padding and using eco-friendly vehicles, Delhi Zoo authorities have implemented a range of measures as part of their winter management plan to protect the animals from pollution and cold weather.

The zoo officials have outlined proactive steps to mitigate both the direct and indirect effects of pollution on the premises as air quality in the national capital continues to deteriorate in the third week of Decem-

ber, officials said.

While the zoo's location in a relatively lower-lying area offers some natural protection, efforts to safeguard animals remain a top priority, an official told PTI.

"Pollution levels here are relatively lower due to the zoo's geography, but we are still taking various steps to protect the animals," he said.

To address local sources of pollution, the zoo has minimised the use of diesel vehicles, switching to eco-friendly alternatives. "We have already re-



duced the number of high-polluting vehicles in the zoo and replaced them with cleaner, mini diesel-free op-

tions," the official said.

Regular water sprinkling is also being carried out, particularly near the ring

road and other areas prone to pollutants from outside, the official added, noting that fogger machines are being used to spray water and further suppress dust and airborne pollutants.

Highlighting long-term measures, the official added that extensive tree plantations within the zoo premises are helping maintain a clean and green environment. These green initiatives, combined with other steps, contribute to better air quality within the premises.

Dust control has been in-

tegrated into the zoo's daily cleaning routine. "Before sweeping roads or animal enclosures, water sprinkling is done to prevent dust from rising. Zookeepers have been instructed to avoid unnecessary activities that could contribute to pollution," the official said.

The air quality in the national capital was in the 'severe' category on Tuesday morning, with an AQI of 427, while the minimum temperature was 5.9 degrees Celsius, two notches below normal.

-PTI

15-year-old girl fatally shoots teacher

Madison: A 15-year-old student opened fire inside a study hall at a small Christian school in Wisconsin, killing a teacher, teenager and prompting a swarm of police officers responding to a second grader's 911 call. The female student wounded six others in Monday's shooting at Abundant Life Christian School, including two students who were in critical condition, Madison Police Chief Shon Barnes said. A teacher and three students were taken to a hospital with less serious injuries, and two of them were later released.



"Every child, every person in that building is a victim and will be a victim forever. ... We need to figure out and try to piece together what exactly happened," Barnes said. Police said the shooter, identified as Natalie Rupnow, was found with a self-inflicted gunshot wound when officers arrived and died en route to a hospital. Barnes declined to offer additional details about the shooter, partly out of respect for the family. Abundant Life is a nondenominational Christian school — prekindergarten through high school — with approximately 420 students in Madison, the state capital.

Barbara Wiers, the school's director of elementary and school relations, said when they prac-

tice safety routines, leaders always announce that it's a drill. That didn't happen Monday, just a week before Christmas break. "When they heard, Lockdown, lockdown," they knew it was real," she said. Wiers said the school does not have metal detectors but uses other security measures including cameras. A motive for the shooting was not immediately known, nor was it clear if the victims were targeted, Barnes said.

"I don't know why, and I feel like if we did know why, we could stop these things from happening," he told reporters. Barnes said police were talking with the shooter's father and other family members, who were cooperating, and searching the shooter's home. "He lost someone as well," Barnes said of the shooter's father. "And so we're not going to rush the information. We'll take our time and make sure we do our due diligence." The first 911 call to report an active shooter came in shortly before 11 a.m. First

responders who were in training just 3 miles (about 5 kilometers) away dashed to the school for an actual emergency, Barnes said. They arrived three minutes after the initial call.

Investigators believe the shooter used a 9mm pistol, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the ongoing investigation. Police blocked off roads around the school, and federal agents were at the scene to assist local law enforcement. No shots were fired by police.

Children and families were reunited at a health clinic about a mile (1.6 kilometers) from the school. Parents pressed children against their chests while others squeezed hands and shoulders as they walked side by side. Abundant Life asked for prayers in a brief Facebook post. Wiers said they're still deciding whether they will resume classes this week.

Bethany Highman, the

mother of a student, rushed to the school and learned over FaceTime that her daughter was OK. "As soon as it happened, your world stops for a minute. Nothing else matters," Highman said. "There's nobody around you. You just bolt for the door and try to do everything you can as a parent to be with your kids." In a statement, President Joe Biden cited the tragedy in calling on Congress to pass universal background checks, a national red flag law and certain gun restrictions.

"We can never accept senseless violence that traumatizes children, their families, and tears entire communities apart," Biden said. He spoke with Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers and Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway and offered his support. Evers said it's "unthinkable" that a child or teacher would go to school and never return home. The school shooting was the latest among dozens across the US in recent years, including especially deadly ones in Newtown, Connecticut; Parkland, Florida; and Uvalde, Texas.

The shootings have set off fervent debates about gun control and frayed the nerves of parents whose children are growing up accustomed to doing active shooter drills in their classrooms. -AP



Destroyed Syrian naval vessels from previous Israeli airstrikes are seen in the port of Latakia Syria. Pic: AP/PTI

AKD visits Mahabodhi

Gaya: Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Tuesday visited Bodhi Gaya in Bihar's Gaya district and prayed at the Mahabodhi Temple, a UNESCO world heritage site.

After arriving at Gaya International Airport, Dissanayake went straight to the 1,500-year-old Mahabodhi Temple, one of the four holy sites related to the life of the Lord Buddha, and particularly to the attainment of Enlightenment.

The Sri Lankan president was received by Bihar ministers Prem Kumar and Santosh Kumar Suman and senior officials of the district administration at the airport.

Dissanayake, accompanied by Gaya District Magistrate Thiyagarajan SM, Bodhgaya Temple Management Committee (BTMC) secretary Mahashweta Maharathi and others, offered prayers at the temple.

He also offered prayers and flowers under the sacred Bodhi Tree.

Pope reveals bombing plot during 2021 Iraq visit

Rome: Pope Francis turned 88 on Tuesday and marked the occasion with revelations that he almost didn't make it. According to excerpts of his upcoming autobiography, suicide bombers had planned to attack him during his 2021 visit to Iraq, but were killed before striking.

Italian daily Corriere della Sera on Tuesday ran excerpts of "Hope: The Autobiography," written with Italian author Carlo Musso, which is being released in more than 80 countries next month. The New York Times ran other excerpts Tuesday, Francis' 88th birthday.

In the Italian excerpts, Francis recalled his historic March 2021 trip to Iraq, the first ever by a pope. COVID-19 was still raging and security concerns were high, especially in Mosul. The devastated northern city had been the headquarters of Islamic

State militants, whose horrific reign had largely emptied the region of its Christian communities.

According to the book, British intelligence informed Iraqi police as soon as Francis arrived in Baghdad that a woman wearing explosives was heading toward Mosul and was planning to blow herself up during the papal visit. "And that a truck was heading there fast with the same intention," Francis says in the book.

The visit went ahead as planned, albeit under tight security, and became one of the most poignant of all of Francis' foreign trips: Standing in the wreckage of a Mosul church, Francis urged Iraq's Christians to forgive the injustices against them by Muslim extremists and to rebuild.

In the book, Francis said he later asked his Vatican security detail what became of the suicide

bombers. "The commander replied laconically: 'They're no longer here,'" Francis writes. "Iraqi police had intercepted them and made them explode. This struck me as well: Even this is the poisonous fruit of war."

The book, originally planned to be published after Francis' death, is coming out at the start of the Vatican's big Holy Year, which Francis will officially inaugurate on Christmas Eve.

According to Italian publisher Mondadori, "Hope" is the first autobiography ever published by a pope. Francis, however, has published other first-person, memoir-style books or book-length interviews with biographers and journalists, including "Life: My Story Through History," published earlier this year.

-AP

NSA Ajit Doval in Beijing



Beijing: National Security Advisor Ajit Doval arrived here on Tuesday to take part in the India-China Special Representatives' talks to be held on Wednesday aimed at restoring the bilateral ties stalled for over four years' due to the military standoff in eastern Ladakh.

Doval will hold the 23rd round of the Special Representatives' (SR) talks with his Chinese counterpart and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and was expected to discuss a range of issues to rebuild the bilateral ties following the October 21 agreement of disengagement and patrolling in eastern Ladakh between the two countries.

Ahead of crucial talks, China said on Tuesday that it is ready to honour commitments based on the common understandings

reached between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping during their meeting at Kazan in Russia on the sidelines of the BRICS summit on October 24.

The External Affairs Ministry said on Monday said, "as agreed during the meeting of the two leaders in Kazan on October 23, the two SRs will discuss the management of peace and tranquility in the border areas and explore a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the boundary question."

After Modi-Xi meeting, which was their first after five years, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Brazil followed by a meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordina-

"China stands ready to work with India to deliver on important common understandings reached between our two leaders, enhance mutual trust and mutual confidence through dialogue and communication, honour our commitments and promote our bilateral relations to go back to the sound and steady growth."

Lin Jian, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman

tion on China-India Border Affairs (WMCC).

The military standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh began in May 2020 and followed by a deadly clash at the Galwan Valley in June that year resulted in a severe strain in ties between the two neighbours.

-PTI



Debris in a street in the Indian Ocean French territory of Mayotte displaying the aftermath of Cyclone Chido. Pic: AP

Two cops killed in terror attack

Peshawar: Terrorists hurled grenades at a police check-post in Pakistan's restive northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Tuesday, killing at least two policemen and injuring three, police said.

The terror attack took place in the Chakesar area in the mountainous Shangla district. The terrorist threw the hand grenade and opened fire on the check-post before fleeing the scene, officials said.

Two policemen were killed and three others wounded in the terrorist grenade attack on the police check-post in Chakesar, police said.

The injured police officers were immediately transported to a hospital in Battagram, they added.

However, no one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

Terrorist attacks have been rampant in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, targeting especially the law enforcement and security forces.

The third quarter (July-September) of 2024 saw a sharp increase in fatalities of terrorist violence and counter-terrorism campaigns, with a 90 per cent surge in violence, according to a report issued by

the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS).

A total of 722 people were killed, including civilians, security personnel, and outlaws, while 615 others were wounded in as many as 328 incidents recorded during the period under review.

Nearly 97 per cent of these fatalities occurred in Khyber and Balochistan — marking the highest percentage in a decade, and over 92 per cent of these incidents of terror attacks and security forces' operations were recorded in the same provinces.

-PTI

Russian general killed by bomb

Moscow: A senior Russian general was killed Tuesday by a bomb hidden in a scooter outside his apartment building in Moscow, a day after Ukraine's security agency levelled criminal charges against him.

A Ukrainian official said the country's security service carried out the attack. Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, the chief of the military's nuclear, biological and chemical protection forces, was killed as he left for his office.

Kirillov's assistant also died in the bombing, which was triggered remotely, according to Russian news reports. Images from the scene showed shattered windows and scorched and blackened brickwork.

Kirillov was under sanctions from several countries, including the UK and Canada, for his actions in Moscow's war in Ukraine. On Monday, Ukraine's Security Service, or SBU, opened a criminal investigation against him, accusing him of directing the use of banned chemical weapons.

An official with the SBU said the agency was behind the attack. The official, who spoke on condition of ano-

nymity because they were not authorised to release the information, described Kirillov as a "war criminal and an entirely legitimate target."

The SBU has said it recorded more than 4,800 occasions when Russia used chemical weapons on the battlefield since its full-scale invasion in February 2022. In May, the US State Department said in a statement that it had recorded the use of chloropicrin, a poison gas first deployed in World War I, against Ukrainian troops.

Russia has denied using any chemical weapons in Ukraine and, in turn, has accused Kyiv of using toxic agents in combat.

Kirillov, who took his current job in 2017, was one of the most high-profile figures to level those accusations. He held numerous briefings to accuse the Ukrainian military of using toxic agents and planning to launch attacks with radioactive substances — claims that Ukraine and its Western allies rejected as propaganda.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine, several prominent figures have been killed in targeted attacks. -AP

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I wanted to stay in the country after rebels captured the capital, but the Russian military evacuated me from their base in western Syria after it came under attack. At no point during these events did I consider stepping down or seeking refuge."



Bashar Assad,
Ousted President, Syria

Ukraine looks for creative ways to raise money

Kyiv: The concert took place in an old movie studio in Kyiv, the location kept secret until the final moment in case it was the target of a Russian attack.

More than 1,000 soldiers and young people gathered to listen to the artists who joined forces with a military brigade in an innovative effort to raise funds for Ukraine's embattled troops.

This was the first and only live performance of the charity album "Epoch," a collaboration between the 3rd Assault Brigade and eight Ukrainian bands.

The project's ambitious target is to raise 50 million hryvnias (about USD 1.2 million) to buy an M113 armoured personnel carrier to help get infantry to the front and evacuate the wounded for medical treatment. Since it launched on streaming platforms a month ago, the initiative has raised 9 million hryvnias (around USD 214,000).

Grassroots fundraising for Ukrainian fighters dates back to 2014, the year Russia first annexed the southern region of Crimea and Moscow-backed separatists



launched an uprising in eastern Ukraine. At that time, Ukraine's defence was made up of a regular army supported by volunteer battalions who weren't financially supported by Kyiv's government. Self-

funding was critical.

Now, advertisements pasted along the sidewalk in Kyiv ask for donations to help fill financial gaps across the military. By scanning a QR code, people can help buy anything from

body warmers and drones to armoured cars for soldiers defending the nearly 1,000-kilometre front line.

But some charities are seeing a decline in individual donations in part because of the economic situation in the country.

Oleksandr Borodyn, one of the project's organisers, says the idea for the collaboration came from the challenge of continuing to drum up funds to support troops as the war is on the cusp of marking a three-year milestone.

"To raise the same

amount of money as at the beginning of the war, you need much more effort. That's why we came up with the idea that a musician could donate his or her art, and that art would earn money for the army," said Borodyn, a press officer for the 3rd Assault Brigade.

The initiative comes as US President Joe Biden is rushing out billions of dollars more in military aid before Washington's support for Kyiv's defences is thrown into question when Donald Trump takes office next month. -AP

EDITORIAL

Caste Tinderbox

The custodial death of Somnath Vyankat Suryawanshi, a 35-year-old law student and anti-caste activist, in Parbhani district jail serves as a grim reminder of the potential for violence and unrest in Maharashtra. Suryawanshi, who had been detained alongside over 50 Dalit Bahujan youths for their alleged involvement in a recent outbreak of violence, died just hours after being sent to judicial custody. The circumstances surrounding his death, particularly the fact that he had been granted bail but died in police custody nonetheless, have sent shockwaves through the state. His tragic demise follows an already tense episode in Parbhani earlier this week when the desecration of a replica of the Constitution triggered violence.

What makes this event even more concerning is that it takes place days before the upcoming celebrations of the historic 1818 battle of Bhima-Koregaon (in Pune district) – an incident viewed as a symbol of Dalit pride. The Parbhani case echoes the tensions of the Bhima-Koregaon riots that erupted in late December 2017 and January 2018 – a period marked by violent clashes and the deepening divide between communities.

At the time, too, Fadnavis was CM. The Bhima-Koregaon riots, which started as a skirmish between Dalit and Maratha groups, quickly escalated into a statewide crisis, exacerbating long-standing tensions between the communities and drawing in national attention. The rioting led to massive damage to property and a hardening of identities in the state, while the state's handling of the aftermath, including the alleged targeting of activists and intellectuals, raised uncomfortable questions about the state's response to caste-based unrest.

Now, as he returns to the helm, the lesson for the CM from Bhima-Koregaon is clear: the authorities must be proactive in managing the tensions that frequently flare up around caste-based violence and protests. It is crucial that Chief Minister Fadnavis, who has returned to power in Maharashtra, takes swift action to prevent a repeat of the events of Bhima-Koregaon and ensure that the Parbhani tragedy does not spiral into widespread statewide unrest and spillover to other districts.

Suryawanshi's death has already sparked protests and outrage, particularly from the Dalit community, who view his demise as another example of systemic police brutality. While the political situation in Maharashtra is far more fluid than in 2018, underlying fault lines remain. The Parbhani violence risks further inflaming tensions between Dalit and upper-caste communities, particularly as caste-based politics continues to shape the discourse in the state.

The Chief Minister must act decisively to ensure that neither the state's institutions nor political rabble-rousers aggravate the violence. This begins with a full, thorough and transparent inquiry into Suryawanshi's death.

A takeaway of Bhima-Koregaon is that violence can quickly spread if it is allowed to fester without intervention. A repeat of the 2018 riots must be avoided at all costs. Fadnavis must rise to the occasion, showing that Maharashtra is capable of managing its deep-seated social divisions without allowing them to boil over into violent confrontations.

NATIONALISM FIRST

The Unsung Hero of 1971: General Jacob and India's Martial Supremacy



By
Rajeev Puri

December 16, 1971, is a day that forever altered the course of South Asian history, marking the culmination of India's triumph in the 1971 India-Pakistani war and the creation of Bangladesh. On this day, India achieved a victory that restored its martial confidence on the world stage as a formidable military power. At the heart of this victory was a moment of unparalleled significance: the surrender of 93,000 Pakistani soldiers in Dhaka, immortalized by the iconic photograph of Pakistani General A. A. K. Niazi handing his pistol to Indian Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora.

While the spotlight has often shone on the charismatic leadership of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw and the figure of General Aurora, one crucial individual remains largely overlooked — General J.F.R. Jacob. The role played by Jacob, a man whose actions were instrumental in

Gen. Jacob's unwavering resolve and strategic brilliance were the linchpin of India's historic victory in the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, securing not just a military triumph but the birth of a nation.

turning a strategic stalemate into a resounding victory, deserves greater recognition. Without his decisive actions and iron resolve, the humiliating defeat of Pakistan may never have come to pass, and the war could have concluded in an UN-brokered ceasefire, allowing Pakistan to avoid the full consequences of its defeat.

The irony is palpable. Just six years earlier, in the 1965 war, India found itself at the gates of Lahore, poised for a historic victory, only to be halted by international intervention. Pakistan, with its propaganda machine in overdrive, proclaimed a victory despite the fact that Indian forces were on the cusp of success. The celebrations in Pakistan on September 6 as their 'Liberation Day' only serve to underscore the false narrative of triumph.

But December 16 was different. That day, the surrender at the Ramna Race Course in Dhaka confirmed India's unequivocal victory. In stark contrast to Pakistan's manufactured claims of victory, the image of Niazi's surrender to Aurora sent shockwaves through Pakistan, triggering riots as the population grappled with the reality of their humiliation. No amount of propaganda could rewrite the narrative captured in that photograph, which spoke volumes about India's martial prowess. Today, India stands proudly at number four on the Global Firepower Index, a testament to its formidable military capabilities, an ascent that owes much to the confidence instilled in the armed forces by leaders like General Jacob.

In his memoirs, General Jacob recalls the dire situation in the Eastern Sector: with only 3,000 men 30 miles from Dhaka and Niazi commanding 26,400 inside, a UN-sponsored ceasefire threatened India's gains. At this crucial moment, Manekshaw called, directing Jacob to go to Dhaka and secure the surrender.

Jacob's resolve was unshaken, despite knowing that the glory of the surrender would likely go to his superior, General



Aurora. He was determined to see this victory through, not just for the military but for the country's pride and the international reputation of India. Jacob's professionalism and selflessness stand as a shining example of Indian military leadership. While Manekshaw could have easily taken the surrender himself, he chose to let General Aurora, as the commander of the Eastern Command, claim that honour. Jacob, though aware that history would remember someone else, played a pivotal role in laying the groundwork for the surrender.

Upon reaching Dhaka, Jacob was met with resistance. Niazi and his commanders were prepared for a ceasefire, not a surrender. Jacob, alone and surrounded by hostile officers, remained calm under pressure. He demanded that Niazi read and sign the Instrument of Surrender, giving him 30 minutes to decide. Jacob's words were blunt: if Niazi refused, he would have no choice but to hand over the Pakistani prisoners to the Mukti Bahini, a feared Bengali liberation force that had already reached Dhaka. Jacob knew that this was a gamble; despite his small force, he had to secure the surrender or risk losing everything.

Even after 30 minutes of tense silence, Jacob's confidence never wavered. He entered Niazi's office and, when he received no response to his request for a decision, he took the silence as an accept-

ance. His next move was decisive. "You will surrender in the open at the Ramna Race Course," he told Niazi, further demanding that the Pakistani troops provide a guard of honour.

The surrender, when it finally took place at 4:30 PM was more than just a military victory—it was a moment of national pride for India. As 500,000 Bengalis cheered the arrival of a new nation, the humiliation of Pakistan was complete. The events of that day marked not just a military triumph but the birth of Bangladesh and a reaffirmation of India's place as a rising power in the world.

General J.F.R. Jacob, though not widely remembered in the same breath as Manekshaw or Aurora, was the key to this victory. His strategic foresight, unwavering confidence, and deft handling of the surrender secured a victory that has echoed through the annals of history. The events of that momentous day remind us that military triumphs are not just about the battlefield but about leadership, timing and the courage to seize the moment. Today, as we commemorate Vijay Divas, let us remember General Jacob, the unsung hero whose actions ensured that India's victory was not just military, but absolute.

(The author is a political commentator and a global affairs observer. Views personal.)

The Arab Spring: Democracy's Dream and its Unfinished Business

THIRTEEN YEARS AFTER THE ARAB SPRING, THE PRICE OF FREEDOM ACROSS WEST ASIA AND THE ARAB WORLD HAS BEEN MORE CHAOS AND INSTABILITY



By
Ruddhi Phadke

More than a decade since the seismic tremors of the Arab Spring first rippled across the Middle East and North Africa, the outcomes remain as diverse and complex as the region itself. From the chaotic stalemate of Syria to the fragile transformations of Morocco and the simmering discontent in Bahrain, these movements have etched a lasting imprint on the political, social, and economic fabric of their nations. Yet nowhere are the consequences more tragic and intractable than in Yemen, where optimism collapsed into war, and Syria, where a revolution turned into one of the world's most prolonged humanitarian disasters.

The Arab Spring, triggered by a young Tunisian fruit vendor's self-immolation in December 2010, inspired millions across the Arab world to demand accountability, reform, and dignity from deeply entrenched regimes. What began as hopeful protests in squares from Sanaa to Manama quickly morphed into bloody crackdowns, civil wars, and even broader geopolitical proxy struggles. While Tunisia has emerged—albeit shakily—as a democratic success story, countries such as Yemen, Syria, and Libya remain case studies in how revolutions can collapse into dysfunction and despair.

Yemen was swept into the revolutionary fervour soon after the uprising in Syria gained momentum in early 2011. Protests against President Ali

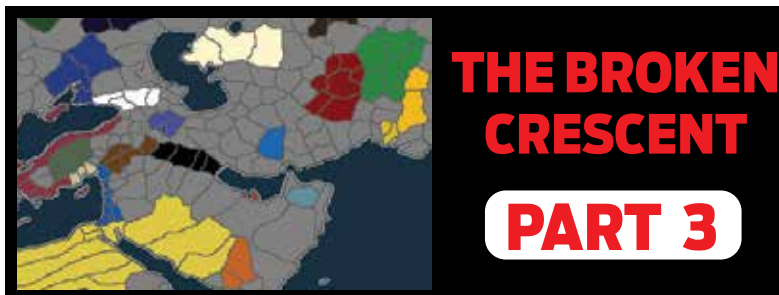
Abdullah Saleh's 30-year rule were marked, at first, by optimism. Demonstrators called for Saleh's resignation and demanded political and economic reforms. Saleh's decades-long grip on power had been characterized by patronage, corruption, and growing inequality, which catalysed the anger of Yemen's youth and civil society.

Initially, Saleh offered minor concessions, including promises that he would not transfer power to his son. Yet the violence escalated. Clashes between government loyalists and protesters turned deadly, forcing the international community—primarily the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—to intervene. In late 2011, Saleh agreed to step down in exchange for immunity from prosecution, transferring power to his deputy, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, in 2012.

However, Yemen's fragile transition collapsed within two years. The Houthis rebels—an Iran-aligned Shia insurgent group—exploited the political vacuum and seized the capital, Sanaa, in 2014. What began as an internal conflict quickly turned into a devastating proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, with devastating consequences for civilians. Over 377,000 deaths have been recorded, millions have been displaced, and Yemen now stands as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

Efforts to broker peace, including UN-sponsored negotiations and ceasefires, have been repeatedly sabotaged by shifting alliances and entrenched distrust. While other countries that experienced Arab Spring uprisings have begun to rebuild, Yemen remains trapped in a cycle of violence and humanitarian despair.

Bahrain's uprising, which began in February 2011, carried echoes of its neighbours' struggles but was uniquely shaped by the island nation's sectarian divide. The Shia majority, long marginalized by the ruling Sunni



THE BROKEN CRESCENT
PART 3

elite, took to the streets to demand democratic reforms, an end to corruption, and greater representation. The protests, centered in Manama's Pearl Roundabout, were met with a heavy-handed police crackdown that killed demonstrators and injured hundreds.

The ruling Al Khalifa family's response illustrated a blend of coercion and superficial reform. King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa promised investigations into police violence and reforms to address grievances. Yet when these measures failed to appease the protesters, a more forceful intervention followed. In March 2011, Saudi Arabia, backed by a GCC military coalition, sent troops into Bahrain to

quash the uprising. A state of emergency was declared, and opposition groups were suppressed with sweeping military and judicial powers.

Today, Bahrain remains a cautionary tale of unresolved grievances. Although the state projects an image of calm, the underlying tensions persist. Protests continue sporadically, but they are quickly quelled through surveillance, arrests, and intimidation. Bahrain's small size and geopolitical alignment with Saudi Arabia ensure it remains a key player in the Gulf, yet the sectarian cleavages that drove the uprising remain unresolved.

In contrast to Yemen and Bahrain, Morocco managed to chart a more

peaceful trajectory through the Arab Spring. Demonstrations began in Rabat and other major cities, as citizens demanded democratic reforms, an end to corruption, and greater social justice. However, King Mohammed VI, who enjoys significant legitimacy, responded with a series of measured reforms that defused much of the unrest.

In March 2011, the king promised constitutional reforms and established a commission to draft a new framework that would address some of the protesters' demands. By July, a new constitution was approved in a nationwide referendum, winning support from 98% of voters. The reforms curtailed some of the king's powers while enhancing the role of the elected parliament. Subsequent parliamentary elections saw the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) emerge as the dominant political force.

Although Morocco avoided the violent upheavals that consumed its neighbours, it is not without its challenges. Critics argue that many of the constitutional reforms were superficial and that the monarchy retains overwhelming control over policy and governance. Nevertheless, Morocco's experience stands out as a rare example where the Arab Spring fostered incremental progress rather than chaos.

Nowhere has the Arab Spring's tragic aftermath been more visible than in Syria, where it seems like open season after Assad's recent collapse.

The Arab Spring began as an awakening of hope—a collective call for dignity, justice, and reform. Yet its outcomes reflect the stark disparities within the region. Tunisia, the birthplace of the uprisings, remains the lone democratic success story, albeit with growing economic woes. Egypt's revolution led to a brief experiment

with democracy before the military reclaimed control. Libya, like Yemen and Syria, descended into warlordism and chaos.

The unrest had also opened the door for extremist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda to exploit power vacuums, exacerbating instability across the region. Syria's war spilled across borders, reshaping geopolitics in ways that continue to reverberate after Assad's fall. Yemen, once on the cusp of reform, now symbolizes the collapse of state institutions under the weight of external interference and internal divisions.

Bahrain and Morocco offer contrasting lessons. The former reveals the durability of Gulf monarchies, underpinned by external support and heavy-handed repression. Morocco, by contrast, demonstrates that carefully managed reforms—however limited—can prevent violent upheaval.

More than a decade on, the Arab Spring remains unfinished. Its legacy is visible in the bombed-out buildings of Sanaa, the enduring repression in Bahrain, and the hesitant reforms in Morocco. Syria stands as the most enduring and tragic reminder of what happens when peaceful demands for change are met with unchecked brutality.

The region's youth, who once filled squares with chants of hope, are now left to navigate the wreckage of failed revolutions, deepening economic crises, and entrenched authoritarianism. While the international community has provided humanitarian aid and facilitated peace talks, the broader aspirations of the Arab Spring like accountability, dignity and democracy remain elusive.

In the end, the Arab Spring was less a single event than a protracted reckoning. For Yemen, Bahrain, Morocco, and perennially strife-torn Syria, that reckoning continues, each on its own jagged and unfinished path.



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KALEIDOSCOPE

1. Indian Coast Guard personnel during a rehearsal for the Republic Day parade at Kartavya Path amid dense fog in New Delhi.
2. Katy Perry performs at Q102's iHeartRadio Jingle Ball on Monday in Philadelphia.
3. Military personnel perform during 'Military Tattoo' on the occasion of 'Vijay Diwas 2024'.
4. People perform yoga during the Rishikesh Yoga Festival at Parmarth Niketan 'ashram' in Rishikesh of Uttarakhand.
5. Tourists take a boat ride on Ganga river in Varanasi on Monday.

All Pictures PTI, AP



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FILMS & ME

Centenary Tribute to Raj Kapoor: An Ode to Awaara (1924 – 1988)



By
Shoma A. Chatterji



The centenary of Raj Kapoor is celebrated with great pomp and glory through the collaboration of several organizations like R.K. Films, Film Heritage Foundation, NFDC-National Film Archive of India in association with PVR-Inox and Cinapolis that have organized the public screenings across many theatres in India on the 13th, 14th and 15th of December through tickets sold at a flat rate of Rs.100.00. The films screened were – Aag, Sangam, Barsaat, Awara, Mera Naam Joker, Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai, Jagte Raho, and Bobby. The films were screened in every corner of the country from Kerala to Assam, Odisha to Punjab.

The grand launch of the festival took place on December 13, 2024 in Mumbai in the presence of the entire RK family. Though Raj Kapoor turned producer at a very young age with Aag in 1948 when he was just 24, he tasted the obsessive drink called cinema and was obsessed with this creative form of art right till he passed away nearly four decades later soon after he had been bestowed the Dadasaheb Phalke Award for his rich contribution to cinema in May, 1980.

He was so critically ill at that time that he had to step into the award venue wearing an oxygen mask and the President of India walked down from the dias and presented him with the award, the certificate and the cheque personally which was unique in the history of the National Awards till then. Though he is now dubbed as

the “King of Entertainment” in Indian cinema, it would be right to remember that in his earlier films, he espoused the cause of the marginal, downtrodden man in the street exploited, neglected, misguided by the capitalists in power. One may recall that Awaara was released in 1951 soon after Independence when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was the Prime Minister of India focused on a socialist, democratic republic announced on 26th January the same year. This ideology is said to have inspired Raj Kapoor to create the tramp Raju who is inducted into a life of crime by the criminal (K.N. Singh) who brought him up to become a thief.

The process through which Raju evolved from a life of crime to a life minus crime with the help of his lady love Rita (Nargis) a modern, sophisticated and practicing lawyer brought up by a judge (Prithviraj Kapoor) yet falls helplessly in love with this hopeless tramp. Raju is actually the legitimate son of the judge who had thrown out his pregnant wife accusing her of being “used” by the criminal who abducted her and held her prisoner for some days. The script was by the noted K.A. Abbas whose story formed the very foundation of many RK films in the beginning of his career. The publicity brochure brought out by the sponsors and organizers of the centenary tribute, write, “Awaara, garnered unprecedented

success in the former Soviet Union. To commemorate 100 years of world cinema in 1990, the then Soviet Union honoured Raj Kapoor alongside eminent global film personalities like Ingrid Bergman, Jean Gabin, Charlie Chaplin and Marilyn Monroe.

In post-World War II, post-Partition India, when the entire socio-political system was under strain and thousands of migrants were pouring into the cities, millions identified with Raj Kapoor’s dispossessed heroes. The tramp of ‘Awaara’ reappeared in ‘Shree 420’, but with a difference and was rediscovered as a circus clown in ‘Mera Naam Joker’. The vision that Kapoor staged and sang was recognizably Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s India, featuring an urbanizing, modernizing milieu and the rural-urban and the class divide, the challenges of the common man and the moral ambivalence of a changing society.” The exploitation of the marginal man by a capitalist society defined the hero in early Raj Kapoor films and the best example is Awaara. If one were to define it as a film with a Leftist slant, the credit perhaps goes to K.A. Abbas who began his working life as a political journalist and earned great fame for his weekly column, The Last Page in Blitz, a weekly tabloid newspaper which became popular mainly

for his column. Abbas has reportedly gone on to say, “Raj Kapoor evolved into the cultural

ambassador and global messenger of post-colonial Indian cinema.” According to Abbas, Raj Kapoor through his films, had inspired the war-torn victims of war to learn to dream and also to believe in those dreams. Actually, there were two Raj Kapoors. One was the private person devoted to his mother and ever desirous of beautiful women and the other is the pillar of Hindi cinema he shaped up to become and ruled the film industry for four long decades. Yet, he is the most outstanding entertainer born within the more than 100 years of Indian cinema. Awaara was filled with beautiful song sequences, a very long dream scene where one song telescopes into another imaginatively choreographed and cinematographed with chorus dancers as if stepping down from heaven along with a beautiful princess who is actually Rita in a surrealist image.

It is one of the most imaginative and aesthetic song-and-dance sequences in the annals of Hindi cinema and perhaps set the trend of dream sequences in films. The film is so immortal in the annals of history of Indian cinema that its music keeps playing endlessly on music videos and reels across the screen monitors beginning with the wonderful title song Awaara Hoon through Dam Bhar Jo Dam Bhar Jo Udhar Moon Phere, to Ghar Aaya Mera Pardeesi, all set to tune by his favourite duo Shankar-Jaikishen. The lyrics were by Shailendra and all songs lip-synced by Raj Kapoor were sung by Mukesh. He would say that he wanted his epitaph to read: “Here is a man who only wished to love.” He would also keep repeating that when he died, his dead body be brought to the RK Studios before being carted away to the crematorium. We have no idea if this really took shape.

(The author is a film scholar. Views personal)

EXPLAINER

Will AI Save the Planet?

Optimistic advocates for AI say this environmentally costly technology will become more sustainable with time. We can use AI more efficiently, and explore less energy-intensive designs inspired by the human brain. We can build data centres more sustainably, using wood or low-carbon concrete and steel. The heat from the data centres can warm homes in the local area. Of course, if we start using AI systems too widely (including where we don’t really need them), the growth might outweigh any of these potential gains in efficiency.

But recently, I’ve been hearing another argument: that AI itself is tackling climate change. AI can help to model wildfires, optimise energy consumption to stabilise the grid, accelerate the development of low-carbon materials, and much more. My research team recently published a report that digs into these claims – and found some cause for concern.

As it turns out, it’s difficult to compare the environmental impacts of asking AI to carry out a task versus asking people. Take writing and making art. One study says that it is much more environmentally friendly for AI to do these creative tasks than humans. But one of its methods for investigating this is to allocate a slice of the carbon footprint from all human activities to the creative activity. By this logic, there would be the same carbon emissions from an hour’s work by an artist, a dairy farmer, a billionaire CEO, or an ecologist restoring a wetland.

A related paper acknowledges the simplification and instead allocates carbon just for the electricity a human consumes. The authors say this is a practical approach to carbon accounting. Establishing a fair comparison between human and AI work is hard because the tasks may look alike, but their underlying processes are fundamentally different. What about the current total carbon impact of AI? Another paper, partly funded by Microsoft, mentioned that AI is today responsible for just 0.01 per cent of global carbon emissions.

When we looked closer, we found this figure was based on the emissions of one year’s AI server sales by Nvidia – the biggest manufacturer of such hardware – as estimated in one analysis. This prediction hasn’t been verified, and if it is accurate, it wouldn’t include AI being run on servers installed in previous years. When contacted for comment, some of the authors said that this estimate wasn’t the article’s main focus. Assessing the climate impacts of AI is complicated be-



cause we don’t know how future AI models will be built, operated and used.

Another study reviewing AI’s sustainability benefits cited several other articles that, in our view, appeared to feature mistakes – like referring to studies to back up their claims which did not contain relevant information. AI systems sometimes make mistakes – known as “hallucinations” – like when Microsoft Copilot accused a journalist of committing the crimes he had reported on. So we asked the authors if they had used an AI to write the article. They dismissed this idea and stood by the integrity of their review. They agreed that not all of the AI sustainability solutions their review referred to can be supported by existing studies. But they said that they had also included predictions about what AI might one day be capable of, based on their own expert judgement, which they said was standard practice.

Questions to ask about AI

Meanwhile, we should avoid lumping all kinds of AI together. There are in fact diverse forms of AI: big, small, discriminative, generative, machine learning, symbolic and more. I can be excited about an AI that excels at counting carrots, and helps farmers to plant them more effectively, without offering a blanket endorsement of all AI systems.

There are different types of climate action too. Climate mitigation is about getting carbon emissions down to net zero to stop global warming. Climate adaptation is about learning to live and thrive in a warmer world. We need both.

AI for climate adaptation is very welcome indeed (say, helping us to increase carrot yields, despite more volatile weather). But it doesn’t simply offset the carbon cost of AI. It would be like comparing apples with oranges (or carrots). It’s a tricky calculation to make, one with political and ethical dimensions.

-The Conversation

MUMBAI'S NEXT WONDER KID WHO TOOK SMAT BY STORM

By G Unnikrishnan

Bengaluru: Thirty six is an important number in Suryansh Shedje's fledgling career. The two unbeaten 36s in the span of five days during the just concluded Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy showcased the bubbling talent and maturity inside this 21-year-old from Mumbai.

The first 36 (12 balls) came on Sunday in the SMAT final against Madhya Pradesh. Shedje walked in when Mumbai needed 46 from 34 balls — not tough in T20s but the pressure of the final could make a difference.

However, Shedje coolly clobbered Venkatesh Iyer for two sixes before smashing Tripathi Singh for 4, 6, 6 to put a lid on the match. Being a finisher in T20s can be a nerve-jangling job even for the seasoned names, and this young man has pulled it off twice under pressure situations.

"I was told beforehand that this would be my role. I would be batting at 5 or 6.



So coming into this tournament, I tweaked my practice sessions a bit. I was playing 6-ball sets, trying to score a certain amount of runs in those 6 balls. That kind of helps," Shedje said after the SMAT final here.

"I was taking breaks after every 6 balls because when you go into bat, you will only get 10-15 balls to face. So, I was trying to simulate that in the practice session," he added.

However, the simulation routine does not programme his brain to play premeditated shots.

"Before the bowler is on his run-up, I don't think of any shots. When he starts running, then my brain starts working. Then I commit (to a shot). There are no double thoughts in my head.

"That's an important point. If you're in a dilemma whether to play the shot or not, then 5 out of 10 times you won't connect it.

through his performances elsewhere.

"I really love his work ethic. He is someone who puts in hard yards. Even after the game, he goes, he trains and you could see it in his athletic ability," said Shreyas.

He's a phenomenal talent. He's that kind of a player who is always there for the team.

"He goes full throttle, he's hell bent towards achieving success and that's what fascinates me about him," he added.

This self-awareness is possibly coming out of the tough year Shedje had to go through in 2023.

"A huge blow that I got was last year when I got a stress fracture in the L4 region. I was just going to enter the Syed Mushtaq Ali season. Lucknow Super Giants was going to retain me, but then they had to release me because of injury.

"I couldn't attend an NCA camp also because of the injury. So, the first two months were hard for me. But my parents, my coaches, Abhishek Nair sir, Monty Desai sir and Manish Bangera sir, they helped me a lot when I was going through the motions."

Beyond all these, Shedje is a cricket nerd who is glued to YouTube footage of matches when he is not on field.

-PTI



Akash Deep ducks plays a shot during play on day four of the third cricket test between India and Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane on Tuesday.
Pic: AP/PTI

Eyes on Gambhir as Rohit, Virat fail

By Kushan Sarkar

New Delhi: Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are copping maximum criticism for being walking wickets during the ongoing Test series against Australia but even Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant haven't shown the patience needed to survive Down Under, indicating a larger problem.

Patience is a virtue that one develops over time and Kohli had once showed how it's done during his golden phase between 2014 and 2019. KL Rahul, blessed with sound technique, has displayed that during the current series with scores of 77 and 84 in Perth and Brisbane.

In case of Jaiswal, save his second innings knock of 161 at Perth, a shuffle across the crease is making him a candidate for leg-before.

Gill loves to play on the rise outside the off-stump and away from his body and could be impatient when

one bowls the stump and even for Pant, a compulsive stroke player, the ball that leaves him from five metre length with adequate bounce, is creating issues.

So, will head coach Gautam Gambhir and his deputy Abhishek Nayar, who is highly regarded in Mumbai cricket circuit for being a "Mind Coach and Life Coach rolled into one", do anything about it?

A former India great, who didn't wish to be named, offered his perspective.

"Not all great players or players of repute happen to be great coaches. They might have done some incredible things as players and knew what to do and how to react during a particular situation," the veteran of 100-plus Tests said.

"But coaching is science and not many can tell why certain things need to be done. Even Gautam used to play with hard hands and dab towards slips in Australia and England.

"You can still work with younger guys but difficult to mould the older ones who don't get enough time to work on their game in a packed calendar," he added.

Watching the dismissals of especially Kohli in Australia, which seemed like a replay of previous ones, has led to growing concerns.

Rohit, barring the England tour in 2021, he does not really have a track record in SENA countries in Tests. But with Kohli, the problem of reaching for deliveries on and outside the off-stump has resurfaced once again and has been a persistent issue for quite some time.

Devang Gandhi, who was a touring selector between 2016-17 to 2020-21, had a more nuanced take compared to the veteran India star.

"It would be very easy to target Nayar as a low hanging fruit or for that matter Gautam," Gandhi, who has coached the Delhi Ranji

team and Bengal U-19, told PTI during a conversation.

"But they have just come into system. To discuss or nudge a player, first you need to be around for some time and once there is some kind of mutual trust between the two, you can offer him solutions. But at this level, it is more about the experienced player's own mental make-up."

So what is Kohli's problem? Gandhi, a former Test opener and an NCA Level-2 coach, believes it's all about his mental approach.

Sachin Tendulkar's epic 241 in the 2004 New Year's Test in Sydney is often cited as a prime example of patience. He didn't hit a single cover drive until he scored his double hundred.

"It's about controlling the mind. You can be a sound-boarding board for players like Tendulkar and Kohli but at this stage, you can't coach them. Coaching happens at junior level," Gandhi added.

-PTI



'Fit India Cycling Drive' launched

New Delhi: Sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya flagged off the 'Fit India Cycling Drive' at the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium here on Tuesday.

Close to 500 cycling enthusiasts joined the three kilometre ride from the stadium to Raisina Hills and back, the initiative aimed at promoting cycling as a healthy mode of transportation.

The event was flagged off by Mandaviya in the presence of Raksha Khadse, the minister of state (Sports), MP Tejasvi Surya, as well as elite athletes, including Paris Paralympics bronze medallist Simran Sharma, Commonwealth Games gold medallist Nitu Ghanghas and Asian Games bronze winner Preeti Pawar.

Mandaviya said, "We

have launched this event as 'Fit India Cycling Tuesdays' but for the convenience of cycling enthusiasts, this will now be conducted on Sundays and be called 'Sundays on Cycle'.

"Doctors, journalists, teachers, corporate professionals and youth will join for an hour-long cycling ride on Sundays, not only in New Delhi but also all parts of the country. Cycling gives a big boost to the environment; it is the solution to pollution and also contributes to sustainability."

The event, held simultaneously in over 1,000 locations across India, was organised by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports' Fit India movement, in collaboration with the Cycling Federation of India (CFI), MY Bharat, and various sports authorities.

Shaw dropped from Mumbai's Vijay Hazare squad

New Delhi: Troubles keep mounting for Prithvi Shaw, who on Tuesday expressed his frustration after being dropped from Mumbai's squad for the Vijay Hazare Trophy beginning on December 21.

The 25-year-old, who was once hailed as a generational talent and scored a hundred on Test debut, has had a season to forget.

He was dropped in the middle of Ranji Trophy league stage on fitness and disciplinary grounds, before returning for the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT) that Mumbai won. He also went unsold at the IPL auction in November.

His performance in the premier domestic event was not eye-catching but he did make a couple of 40s and as many 30s over the course of the event.

"Tell me God, what more do I have to see? If 65 innings, 3399 runs at an average of 55.7 with a strike rate of 126 (in Vijay Hazare), I'm not good enough. But I will keep my faith in you and, hopefully, people still believe in me, because I will come back for sure. Om Sai Ram," Shaw wrote in his Instagram story.



Shreyas Iyer will captain the 17-man squad picked for the first three games. Following the SMAT, Iyer had said sky was the limit for Shaw if he worked on his work ethics.

Ajinkya Rahane, who was the star batter for Mumbai in SMAT, had captained the 50-over side last season. Veteran spinner Shams Mullanee also doesn't feature in the squad alongside Shaw.

India T20 skipper Suryakumar Yadav is also part of the side.

-PTI

Vaibhav, Om, Saraswati, Vidyarthi in semis

Mumbai: In the Under-14 Mumbai District Sub Junior Kho-kho championships, teams Vaibhav Sports Club, Om Saishwar Seva Mandal, Saraswati Sports Club and Vidyarthi Krida Kendra reached the semi-finals. Om Saishwar Seva Mandal will face Vaibhav Sports Club whereas Saraswati Sports Club will lock horns with Vidyarthi Krida Kendra in the semi-finals.

In the first match, Vaibhav Sports Club defeated Saraswati Mandir High School by 9-5.

In the second match, Om Saishwar Seva Mandal defeated Students Sports Club 8-1 by 1 innings and 7 runs. For Om Saishwar, Shrathik Gami played an unbeaten 7 minutes and took two opponents out in the attack. Saraswati Sports Club defeated Om Samarth Bharat Vyayam Mandir 10-8 by 1 innings and 2 points. For Saraswati, Mahek Advade took four opponents in the attack after defending for 3:30 minutes.

Vidyarthi Krida Kendra defeated Shri Samarth Vyayam Mandir (21-1-4) 21-5 by 1 innings and 16 points.

India to host World Boxing Cup Final in 2025

New Delhi: India is set to host the World Boxing Cup Final in November next year, reaffirming its support for the breakaway World Boxing body.

The Boxing Federation of India will also simultaneously host the third World Boxing Congress, which will include elections for the Presidency and Executive Board.

The tournament will be the first international event hosted by the BFI after opting to join the new governing body earlier this year.

Last time BFI hosted the International Women's Boxing Championship in 2023. "It is a proud moment for India to be recognised by World Boxing for hosting such prestigious events. This opportunity not only highlights India's organisational excellence but also underscores our unwavering commitment to ensuring boxing remains an integral part of the Olympic movement," BFI President Ajay Singh said.

"We are honoured to contribute to the sport's legacy and look forward to welcoming the global boxing community to India in 2025," Singh added. The date of the tournament will be confirmed in January. The first World Boxing Cup of the year will be held in Brazil in March, followed by competitions in Germany, Kazakhstan and India. "After the huge success of our first World Boxing Cup series in 2024, it is fantastic that we have four such strong bids to host the competition in 2025. I would like to thank the National Federations of Brazil, Germany, Kazakhstan and India for their ongoing support and commitment," World Boxing President Boris van der Vorst said. "I am also very grateful to the Boxing Federation of India for its ongoing support in bidding to host both a World Boxing Cup and our next Congress in 2025 in New Delhi," he added. WB is a breakaway international federation aiming to secure recognition from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and ensure that boxing remains on the Olympic roster.

How Maharashtra produces so many Kho-Kho players?



By Correspondent

Mumbai: The Kho-Kho World Cup 2025 which is scheduled to take place in Delhi between January 13-19, is less than a month away now and preparations for the global event are going in full flow. In build up to the multi-nation tournament, Kho-Kho Federation of India (KKFI) in collaboration with the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports (MYAS) is conducting an intensive training camp at the Jawa-

harlal Nehru Stadium which comprises of 60 male and as many female players taking part in it.

The final squad for the World Cup will be picked on the basis of players' performance in the camp. A total of 15 men and 15 women players will be selected to represent India in the competition.

Coach Ashwani Kumar Sharma talked about the importance of this camp and how difficult it would be for him and the other coaching members to pick and choose players for the

World Cup.

"The camp is an opportunity for the players to showcase their talent and skill set and be a part of the squad that will represent India in the World Cup. We have picked players who have performed exceptionally well in the Nationals for this camp. There are 60 players in each category and we will be choosing 15 out of them for the final squads," Ashwani said.

The coach also explained how club culture in Maharashtra has been helpful in boosting more

talent in the state.

"A lot of talent comes from states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Odisha, Delhi, Kerala, Punjab and Haryana. We have some brilliant players from Maharashtra purely because Kho-Kho is very popular as a sport there. No matter what, each and every kid plays the sport in that region. Also, there is club culture in Maharashtra which creates some good rivalry among the players to do well that eventually helps Kho-Kho on the whole."

"Moreover, the Kho-Kho players get good job options which creates a sense of security among the players. Each player of the team that wins the national gets INR 7 lakh in the prize money. Also, the Shiv Chhatrapati Award is a prestigious annual sports award given by the Government of Maharashtra to recognize the achievements of athletes and sports contributors in the state. So, this all adds up and we get to see so many good players from Maharashtra," he added.