

THE PERFECT VOICE



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Tabla loses its beats; Zakir Hussain dies

Mumbai: Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain died at the age of 73 on Sunday after suffering from heart-related problems. Hussain was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of a San Francisco Hospital in the US. Zakir Hussain, the legendary tabla maestro, is celebrated for his talent to blend Indian classical music with global music. His popular works include Shakti, alongside guitarist John McLaughlin, and albums

like Making Music and Saturday Night in Bombay. Zakir Hussain took tabla to the global stage. He earned an impressive five Grammy Awards over the course of his career, including a remarkable three accolades at the 66th Grammy Awards this year. Hussain was honoured with the prestigious Padma Shri in 1988, the Padma Bhushan in 2002, and the Padma Vibhushan in 2023.

It was his groundbreaking 1973 project with English guitarist John McLaughlin, violinist L Shankar, and percussionist TH 'Vikku' Vinayakram that redefined music by blending Indian classical traditions with elements of jazz, creating a fusion style previously unheard of. Zakir Hussain was admitted to the ICU of a San Francisco hospital with heart related problems, his friend and flau-



tist Rakesh Chaurasia said. He had been having blood pressure issues, added Hussain's manager Nirmala Bachani. The eldest son of legendary tabla player Allah Rakha, Hussain has followed in the footsteps of his father, becoming a marquee name in India and across the world. In his career spanning six decades, the musician has worked with several renowned international and Indian

artistes. The Mumbai-born, eldest son of legendary tabla player Allah Rakha, Zakir Hussain followed in his father's footsteps to become a global icon. Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, in a post on X, said: "To learn of the Tabla Maestro Zakir Hussain's demise is utterly devastating." Singer Kavita Krishnamurthy shared her tributes, saying "He has passed away. Multi organ failure."



Members of Bajrang Dal Mumbai hold a Shourya Sanchalan (March) at Raja Bade Chowk, Shivaji Park, Dadar where more than Ten Thousand Cadres participated in Grand March in Mumbai on Sunday.
Pic: Bhushan Koyande

India retain Women's Asia Cup

Muscat: India's goalkeeper Nidhi stole the limelight in the penalty shootout, making three sensational saves to help India overcome three-time champions China 3-2 (1-1) and clinch their second consecutive Women's Junior Asia Cup hockey title here on Sunday. Nidhi's heroics capped off a stellar performance, having already stood tall during regulation time by thwarting multiple attempts from the Chinese forwards as the four quarters ended in a nerve-racking 1-1 stalemate. While skipper Jinzhuang Tan scored for China in the 30th minute, Siwach Kanika's strike early in the second half (41st minute) brought India back into the game in an intense battle for supremacy.

After Ranji, Mumbai win SMT

By G Unnikrishnan

Bengaluru: Mumbai leaned on their collective batting strength to subdue a spirited Madhya Pradesh by five wickets to clinch the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy here on Sunday. Mumbai were stretched on more than one occasion during the chase of 175, a target MP built around skipper Rajat Patidar's fluent unbeaten 81, on a slightly tacky pitch, but eventually they reached 180 for five in 17.5 overs. This was Mumbai's second SMAT title after winning it for the first time in 2022, while MP's wait for a maiden trophy prolonged to another season. After a brief period of lull, Suryakumar Yadav (48, 35b, 4x4, 3x6) reactivated his run-making ways and added 52 runs for the third wicket with Ajinkya Rahane (37, 30b, 4x4). It helped Mumbai to recover from the early dismissals of Prithvi Shaw and skipper Shreyas Iyer, both of them falling to rather causal shots. Just when it seemed that the two veteran batters would carry Mumbai home, Rahane slashed Venkatesh Iyer straight into the hands of Rahul

Batham at deep.

Suryakumar followed soon, top-edging off-spinner Shivam Shukla to Avesh Khan at short fine leg. At 129 for five in 14.4 overs, Mumbai needed 46 runs but any worries were soon eased by the big-hitting Suryansh Shedge (36 not out, 15b, 3x4, 3x6) and Atharva Ankolekar (16 not out, 6b, 2x6) who knocked off the remaining runs without much fuss in a little over three overs. Earlier, Patidar shone brightly while hammering his fifth fifty of this tournament. The right-hander, who was retained by the Royal Challengers Bengaluru, entertained an over 15,000-crowd, who backed him and MP to the hilt, with twinkling shot-making.

In fact, Patidar singlehandedly held the MP innings together as the next highest was a 23 by Shubhanshu Senapati. Madhya Pradesh had made a rather sedate beginning to their innings after losing openers Arpit Gaud (3) and Harsh Gawli (2). They reached 38 for two in the Power Play, which later transpired to 114 for five in 15 overs. However, Patidar found an able ally in Batham (19, 14b) as they added 56 runs for the sixth wicket as MP added 60 runs in the last five overs. Patidar, a clean-striker of the balls, too upped the level of his play, as indicated by a stunning walk-across-the-line six off pacer Shardul Thakur. But individual brilliance was not enough to stop the Mumbai juggernaut on the night.



Adjustment for two-and-half years

FADNAVIS EXPANDS CABINET, HIS DEPUTY AJIT PAWAR SAYS SCENE WILL BE DIFFERENT AFTER HALF TERM

BHUJBAL, MUNGANTIWAR, KESARKAR PROMINENT LEADERS AMONG THE DROPPED MINISTERS

By Correspondent

Nagpur: A total of 39 legislators from Mahayuti allies were sworn in on Sunday in the first cabinet expansion of the 10-day-old Devendra Fadnavis-led government including 16 new faces, while 10 former ministers were excluded. Fadnavis has announced that portfolios for the newly inducted ministers will be allotted within the next two days. Hours before the cabinet expansion ceremony, Deputy CM and NCP leader Ajit Pawar said that some of those who took oath will have a tenure of two-and-a-half-years, underlining constraints in accommodating aspirations of hopefuls. While 33 legislators were sworn in as cabinet ministers, six took oath as ministers of state. The new council of ministers reflects Fadnavis' efforts in balancing caste equations including sections of Marathas, OBCs, SCs, and STs and striking a regional balance. With the new inductees, the strength of the Fadnavis-led ministry has gone up to 42, including the CM and his deputies Eknath Shinde (Shiv Sena) and Ajit Pawar (NCP). One berth was kept vacant.



While the BJP secured 19 ministerial berths by virtue of being the largest among allies, Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party were allotted 11 and 9 berths, respectively. Governor C P Radhakrishnan administered the oath to the new ministers at a ceremony held on the eve of the state legislature's winter session in Nagpur. The BJP, which won the maximum 132 seats in the assembly elections, got the largest chunk of 16

ministers of Cabinet rank and three MoS. Shiv Sena was allotted nine positions as Cabinet ministers and two MoS, while the NCP will have eight ministers of Cabinet rank and a minister of state. Among the new inductees, four are women, including Pankaja Munde, Madhuri Misal, and Meghna Bordikar of BJP and Aditi Tatkare of NCP. Munde and Tatkare took oath as Cabinet ministers, and Bordikar and Misal as MoS. Prominent leaders excluded in

the new Cabinet are Chhagan Bhujbal and Dilip Walse Patil of NCP, and Sudhir Mungantiwar and Vijaykumar Gavit of BJP. From Shiv Sena, former ministers Tanaji Sawant, Deepak Kesarkar, and Abdul Sattar were not re-inducted. Anil Patil, Sanjay Bandsode, and Dharmarao Baba Atram of NCP also missed out on the second chance. The swearing-in ceremony at Raj Bhavan in Nagpur was conducted after 33 years.

India Women win first T20I

Navi Mumbai: India Women extended their unbeaten run against the West Indies to nine consecutive T20I victories with a dominating 49-run win in the series opener here on Sunday. After Jemimah Rodrigues (73) and Smriti Mandhana (54) powered India to their highest-ever total of 195 for four against the Caribbean side and their third highest overall in the format, the West Indies responded with 146 for seven. At the top, young Qiana Joseph dazzled with a 33-ball 49, while veteran Deandra Dottin (52) recorded her first fifty since making a comeback to T20Is earlier this year, but their efforts were not enough. West Indies' hopes were dealt a body blow in the second over when substitute fielder Minnu Mani produced a superb athletic catch to see the back of West Indies' skipper Hayley Matthews (1) off Titas Sadhu (3/37). Joseph cracked five fours and three sixes to keep the scoreboard ticking but West Indies could not produce big partnerships in the middle.

Simran Shaikh costliest player in WPL mini auction

Bengaluru: Mumbai cricketer Simran Shaikh became the costliest player of the Women's Premier League mini-auction 2025, being bought by Gujarat Giants for Rs 1.90 crore even as veteran India player Sneha Rana went unsold. On a day when five teams competed to fill 19 slots from a pool of 120 players to finalise their squads for next year's WPL, the other top money earners were West Indies stalwart Deandra Dottin (Rs 1.70 crore - Gujarat Giants), 16-year-old U19 wicketkeeper-batter G Kamalini (Mumbai Indians - Rs 1.60 crore), Prema Rawat (Royal Challengers Bengaluru - Rs 1.20 crore) and N Charani (Delhi Capitals - Rs 55 lakh). Delhi Capitals and Gujarat Giants were involved in a bidding war for Simran before the latter raised the bar to net her. Simran, 22, a middle-order batter, played a few matches for UP Warriorz during the 2023 WPL season. She has made 176 runs



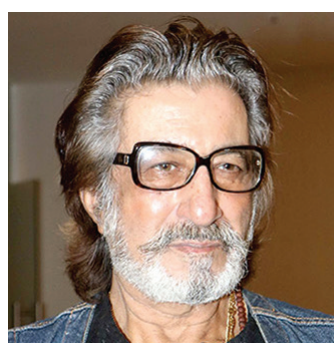
in 11 matches for Mumbai at 22 with a strike rate of 100.57 during the Senior Women's T20 Trophy in October-November. All-rounder Dottin, who is currently in India with the West Indies team for the white-ball series, was the costliest among overseas players and was bought by the Giants for the second time in the auction. Dottin, 33, a veteran of 132 WT20Is, was one of the three players with base price of Rs 50 lakh and saw UP Warriorz too make a wholehearted bid for her before Gujarat Giants upped the amount. Dottin was signed by Gujarat Giants for Rs 60 lakh ahead of WPL 2023, but could not play the tournament.

Khan's kidnappers also planned to abduct Shakti Kapoor

Bijnor/Meerut (UP): Four members of a gang have been arrested for kidnapping actor Mushtaq Mohammad Khan from the Delhi airport, holding him hostage in Bijnor district of Uttar Pradesh and demanding ransom, officials said. According to police, the miscreants were also plotting to abduct veteran actor Shakti Kapoor on the pretext of inviting him to an event. Bijnor Superintendent of Police (SP) Abhishek Jha shared the details on Saturday, saying that Mushtaq Khan's event manager, Shivam Yadav, had filed a complaint on December 9.

Lavi alias Rahul Saini had on October 15 sent an advance payment of Rs 25,000 and an air ticket to invite Khan to an event in Meerut. Upon arriving at the Delhi airport on November 20, Mushtaq was received by a cab driver who took him to a famous 'shikanji' shop between Meerut and Delhi. There, Khan was forced into another vehicle, where more individuals joined him. The actor was then threatened and informed that he had been kidnapped and was being held captive at the home of Lavi, a criminal involved in the case, police said. "During his captivity, the kidnappers took Mushtaq Khan's

bank account details and password. On the night of November 20, the accused consumed alcohol and slept. The following morning, Mushtaq Khan managed to escape and reached a mosque in Mohalla Chahshiri, where locals contacted his family and helped him return home. "On November 21, the kidnappers withdrew Rs 2.2 lakh from Mushtaq Khan's bank account while shopping in Meerut and Muzaffarnagar," the officer said. The arrested gang members have been identified as Sarthak Chaudhary, Sabiuddin, Azim, and Shashank. Police have also recovered Rs 1.04 lakh from their possession.



Police revealed that the gang was involved in abducting film stars by sending advance payments and air tickets under the guise of event invitations. The investigation has also revealed that actor Shakti Kapoor was offered Rs 5 lakh to attend

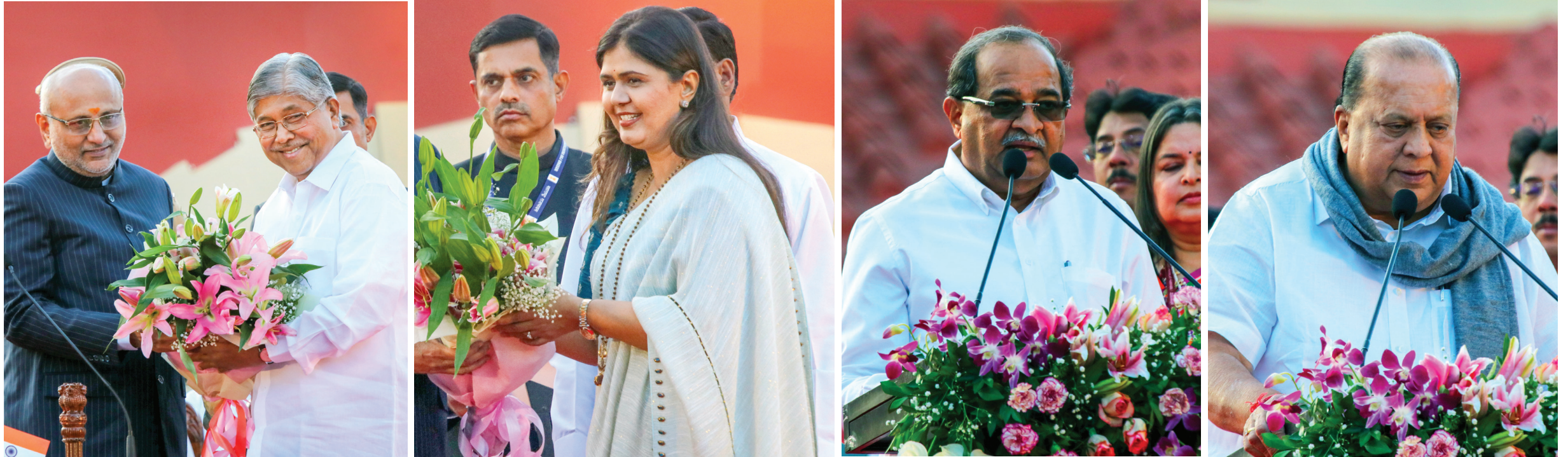


a similar event, but the deal fell through due to a high advance request. Police are now investigating whether the gang was involved in the kidnapping of other film stars. Efforts are on to track down

the remaining members of the gang, including Lavi. Meanwhile, in a related development, Arjun, one of the kidnappers involved in comedian Sunil Pal's abduction, was shot and injured during an encounter with police in Meerut on Sunday. Arjun, who was arrested on Saturday, attempted to escape while being escorted for a medical checkup at Lalkurti police station by snatching the pistol of a sub-inspector, the Meerut police said. Arjun, while trying to flee, opened fire indiscriminately at the police team. The police team retaliated, and Arjun was shot and injured in the exchange of

fire. Meerut Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Vipin Tada said that police had recovered from Arjun an SUV, a Scorpio, used in Sunil Pal's kidnapping last month, along with Rs 2.25 lakh cash and a mobile phone used in the crime. "Arjun was immediately taken to the hospital in an injured condition. Police are now searching for his associates, as they believe the gang involved in the kidnapping is based in Bijnor. Authorities have also contacted the victim for further statements and are continuing their investigation into the case," the SSP said.

Pankaja, Rathod return in the cabinet



Nagpur: The Cabinet expansion saw the re-entry of state BJP chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule, Jaykumar Raval, Pankaja Munde, and Ashok Uike who had served as ministers during Fadnavis' first term from 2014 to 19.

Region-wise, a maximum of nine ministers are from the western Maharashtra region including Madhuri Misal, Makrand Patil, Shivendrasinh Bhosale, Hasan Mushrif, Chandrakant Patil, Shambhuraj Desai, Prakash Abitkar, Jaykumar Gore, and Datta Bharne.

With eight ministers, including Girish Mahajan, Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil, Sanjay Savkare, Gulabrao Patil, Dadaji Bhuse, Jaykumar Rawal, Manikrao Kokate, and Narhari Zirwal, the north Maharashtra comes second.

Seven ministers- Chandrashekhar Bawankule, Sanjay Rathod, Akash Fundkar, Ashok Uike, Indranil Naik, Ashish Jaiswal, and Pankaj Bhoiyar are from the Vidarbha region in east Maharashtra.

The Marathwada region will be represented by six ministers namely Pankaja Munde (BJP) and her cousin Dhananjay Munde (NCP), Atul Save, Sanjay Shirsat, Meghana Bordikar, and Babasaheb Patil.

Ganesh Naik, Ashish Shelar, Pratap

Sarnaik, and Mangal Prabhat Lodha have been inducted from the Mumbai/Thane region.

The coastal Konkan region is represented by five ministers, including Nitesh Rane, Uday Samant, Yogesh Kadam, Bharat Gogawale, and Aditi Tatkar.

The first-timers from three Mahayuti allies include Yogesh Kadam, Meghna Bordikar, Madhuri Misal, Pankaj Bhoiyar, Shivendrasinh Bhosale, Manikrao Kokate, Jaykumar Gore, Narhari Zirwal, Pratap Sarnaik, Bharat Gogawale, Makrand Patil, Nitesh Rane, Akash Fundkar, Babasaheb Patil, Prakash Abitkar, and Sanjay Savkare.

With the induction of NCP's Babasaheb Patil, the Ahmadpur constituency in Latur district has got representation in the state ministry after 20 years.

Babasaheb Patil, who defeated NCP (SP) leader and former minister Vinayakrao Patil in the November 20 state polls, has become a state cabinet minister for the first time.

In 2009, Babasaheb Patil was elected for the first time from Ahmadpur on the Rashtriya Samaj Paksha ticket. In 2014, he unsuccessfully contested the election on the ticket of the undivided NCP. He won the 2019 elections.

The two-and-half month formula

The long-running suspense in Maharashtra politics ended in Nagpur on Sunday, when Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis managed to expand his cabinet. Significantly, this time around the ministers have been sworn in not for the full term, but only for two and a half years. With this new experiment, unusual politics has started in Maharashtra, which will be full of many changes and challenges in days to come. The Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has committed to offering opportunities to legislators

who haven't yet made it into the state's ministry. This assurance was given by him on Sunday in Nagpur, just before the cabinet expansion. During the swearing-in, the new ministers have been told to submit an affidavit, in which it is made clear that their tenure will be only two and a half years. Discussions are rife in the state regarding this new formula. However, it is not yet clear whether this rule will apply to BJP ministers as well or only for Shiv Sena and NCP leaders. While addressing party MLAs Ajit Pawar emphasised that while everyone

aspires to be a minister, the available positions are limited. Nevertheless, the government promises to offer these chances by rotating positions during their five-year term, ensuring broader representation across regions. With this the new plan aims to provide opportunities over a two-and-a-half year period, with current limitations due to a capped number of ministerial positions.

This cabinet expansion in the state is not just an administrative move, but an indication of new equations in politics.

This two and a half years agreement between the constituent parties of the grand alliance is a unique experiment of sharing power. But it will be interesting to see in which direction the disputes and resentments related to it will take the politics of Maharashtra in the coming days. Shiv Sena ministers had to promise to leave the post after a tenure of two and a half years. This affidavit limits their future and tries to ensure discipline inside the party. Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde clarified this decision in the party meeting.

Cabinet Ministers

Chandrashekhar Bawankule (BJP)	Mangal Prabhat Lodha (BJP)	Shivendrasinh Raje Bhosale (BJP)	Akash Fundkar (BJP)
Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil (BJP)	Uday Samant (Shiv Sena)	Manikrao Kokate (NCP)	Babasaheb Patil (NCP)
Hasan Mushrif (NCP)	Jaykumar Rawal (BJP)	Jaykumar Gore (BJP)	Prakash Abitkar (Shiv Sena)
Chandrakant Patil (BJP)	Pankaja Munde (BJP)	Narhari Zirwal (NCP)	MINISTERS OF STATE:
Girish Mahajan (BJP)	Atul Save (BJP)	Sanjay Savkare (BJP)	Madhuri Misal (BJP)
Gulabrao Patil (Shiv Sena)	Ashok Uike (BJP)	Sanjay Shirsat (Shiv Sena)	Ashish Jaiswal (Shiv Sena)
Ganesh Naik (BJP)	Shambhuraj Desai (Shiv Sena)	Pratap Sarnaik (Shiv Sena)	Pankaj Bhoiyar (BJP)
Dada Bhuse (Shiv Sena)	Ashish Shelar (BJP)	Bharat Gogawale (Shiv Sena)	Meghna Bordikar (BJP)
Sanjay Rathod (Shiv Sena)	Dattatray Bharne (NCP)	Makrand Jadhav Patil (NCP)	Indranil Naik (NCP)
Dhananjay Munde (NCP)	Aditi Tatkar (NCP)	Nitesh Rane (BJP)	Yogesh Kadam (Shiv Sena)

Shelar becomes minister, BCCI treasurer's post set to be vacant

Mumbai: The post of the treasurer in the BCCI is set to be left vacant after BJP leader Ashish Shelar took oath as a cabinet minister in the Devendra Fadnavis-led Maharashtra state government on Sunday.

Shelar, who became the BCCI treasurer in October 2022, took oath as one of the cabinet ministers in Nagpur after winning the Vandre West seat in Maharashtra assembly elections last month.

The Supreme Court had ruled that no minister and public servant can become a member in the BCCI while implementing Lodha Committee recommendations in 2016.

The apex court, however, had allowed the BCCI to amend its constitution in September 2022 which paved the way for MLAs to become office-bearers in the board. Following this, Shelar had become the BCCI treasurer in October that year.

Shelar is the second offi-



cial from the incumbent committee to move on from his post after Jay Shah, who moved on from his post as the BCCI secretary to the chairman of the International Cricket Council.

Shah began his tenure at the ICC on December 1 as the BCCI president Roger Binny appointed joint secre-

tary Devajit Saikia as the interim secretary of the Indian cricket board on December 9.

PTI had earlier reported that Saikia is believed to continue in his new role as the interim secretary of the BCCI till September 2025 before the post is permanently filled up.

MVA slams govt over farmers' woes

Nagpur: The opposition MVA on Sunday targeted the Maharashtra government over farmers' plight, price rise, jobs and a sarch's murder and boycotted the customary tea party on the eve of the state legislature's winter session here.

Hours before the cabinet expansion of the government in the evening, leaders of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA), comprising the Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (SP) and Congress, held a press conference at Ravi Bhavan in the city to slam the BJP-led dispensation.

Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council Amadas Danve said the government was doing a "drama" by keeping the session open for six days. Earlier, the Nagpur session used to be held for anywhere between three weeks and one month, he said.

Danve claimed that there would be no questions and answers and calling attention motions during the winter session, which will be held from December 16 to December 21.

Mix of old and new, heavyweights and debutantes

Nagpur: Following is the brief profile of some of the ministers who were inducted into the Devendra Fadnavis government in Maharashtra on Sunday.

Chandrashekhar Bawankule: The Maharashtra BJP president won from Kamthi seat in Nagpur in the 2024 assembly polls after being denied a ticket in 2019. He was, however, rehabilitated as MLC and was later made the party's state unit chief in August 2022. Bawankule has been associated with the BJP for the past 30 years. He was power minister in the Devendra Fadnavis-led BJP-Shiv Sena government between 2014 and 2019.

Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil is an 8-term MLA from Shirdi in Ahilyanagar district who also served as minister in the first Shiv Sena-BJP government in the state in 1995 as well as the Congress-NCP dispensations from 1999 to 2014. He joined the BJP in 2014.

Chandrakant Patil is a two-time MLA from Ko-

thrud in Pune and was earlier an MLC. Patil, who hails from Kolhapur, is close to Union minister Amit Shah and was a minister in the Devendra Fadnavis government between 2014 to 2019.

Seventy-year-old Hasan Mushrif of the NCP is six-time MLA from Kagal assembly seat in the state's Kolhapur district. He allied with Ajit Pawar when the NCP split in July last year. Mushrif was booked in a money-laundering case and was raided by Enforcement Directorate and Central Bureau of Investigation before he joined the ruling alliance. Despite opposition stalwart Sharad Pawar's concerted efforts to defeat him, he managed to retain his seat in 2024.

Debutante minister Madhuri Misal is a 4-time MLA from Parvati assembly constituency in Pune.

Meghana Bordikar is a two-time BJP MLA from Jintur in Parbhani district.

Pankaja Munde is an MLC who lost the 2024 Lok Sabha polls from Beed.

Sanjay Savkare, who was sworn in as cabinet minister on Sunday, represents Bhusawal. He joined BJP in 2014 from the NCP. Savkare was assistant to former MLA Santosh Chaudhari before entering politics.

Yogesh Kadam (38) is a two-time MLA from Dapoli assembly seat in the state's Konkan region and is son of senior Shiv Sena leader and former state minister Ramdas Kadam.

NCP MLA Narhari Zirwal from Dindori, who took oath as cabinet minister, is a confidante of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. Zirwal was deputy speaker in the assembly whose term ended on November 26. Nitesh Rane is son of former CM and Union minister Narayan Rane and is 3-time MLA from Kankavli. He contested polls as a Congress candidate for the first time in 2014 and joined the BJP in 2019. Akash Fundkar is a 3-time MLA from Khambgaon and is son of former state BJP chief late Pandurang Fundkar.

First time in Nagpur since 1991

Nagpur: The swearing-in of 39 ministers at Raj Bhavan in Nagpur on Sunday was the first held in Maharashtra's second capital in 33 years, the last such event being the cabinet expansion of the Sudhakarrao Naik dispensation in 1991.

Naik had expanded his council of ministers by inducting Shiv Sena rebels Chhagan Bhujbal and Rajendra Gole, who had switched over to the ruling Congress. The Congress' Beed legislator Jaidutt Kshirsagar was also inducted into the Naik government at the time.

They were administered the oath of office by Governor C Subramaniam.

Incidentally, Bhujbal was the biggest name to be dropped from the Eknath Shinde government when 39 ministers were inducted into the Devendra Fadnavis cabinet on Sunday.

Naik was CM from June 25, 1991 to February 22, 1993.

Fadnavis receives grand welcome on home turf

Nagpur: Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday led a rally organised in his hometown Nagpur by BJP workers to celebrate the Mahayuti's victory in recent assembly polls.

The chief minister, who represents the Nagpur South West assembly constituency, underlined the Mahayuti government's commitment to serve the people 24 hours.

Fadnavis landed in Nagpur to a grand welcome from party workers and people. The rally started from Nagpur airport and culminated at Fadnavis' residence in Dharampath.

Talking to reporters at the airport, Fadnavis said, "It is a joyous moment that after becoming the chief minister, I have come to my janmabhoomi and karmabhoomi

(birthplace and workplace). Nagpur is my family, and it is welcome by my family."

He slammed the opposition parties, accusing them of not believing in the Constitution.

Fadnavis, accompanied by his wife Amruta Fadnavis, state BJP chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule and others boarded a decorated open-top vehicle at Nagpur airport. The route of the rally was dotted with banners welcoming the son-of-the-soil.

Fadnavis raised 'Ek hain toh safe hain' and 'Modi hain toh mumkin hain' slogans while addressing his supporters.

"The Mahayuti (coalition) under the leadership of PM Modi received huge blessings from the poor, tribals, farmers, Dalits, and OBC and others (in assembly



elections). This electoral victory became possible due to the trust put in Mahayuti by Ladki Bahins (the name of a popular scheme for women), ladka (beloved) shetkari (farmers), ladke yuva (youths), Dhangars, Marathas and other sections," he said.

I thank 14 crore people of Maharashtra for blessing the Mahayuti and making me chief minister, Fadnavis added.

Fadnavis said the people chose Mahayuti to serve them and change their lives and Maharashtra.

"I, Eknath Shinde, and Ajit Pawar with others will work 24 hours to fulfil the dream of people. This government will work 24/7 for the people," he said.

Fadnavis landed in Nagpur for the oath-taking ceremony of

the Mahayuti government as part of the first expansion of Cabinet. The winter session of the state legislature will commence in the second capital of Maharashtra on December 16.

Fadnavis took oath as the chief minister for the third time on December 5 after the Mahayuti combine swept the November 20 Maharashtra elections, winning 230 out of 288 seats.

The Opposition Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi, which managed just 46 seats, has been alleging irregularities in electronic voting machines (EVMs).

Asked about the Opposition aggressively taking up the issue of EVMs, Fadnavis said, "These people are disappointed. They don't have faith in democracy and the Election Commission."

PUBLIC NOTICE
NOTICE is hereby given that my client MR. SANJAY MADHUKAR RANE & MR. AJAY MADHUKAR RANE, the legal heirs of Late. SHUBHANGI MADHUKAR RANE, have made an application in connection of Flat No. 2005, Avisha CHS Ltd., Thakurdwar Road, Mughbhat Cross Lane, Giraon Mumbai, Pin - 400004, with society for delete the membership of Late. SHUBHANGI MADHUKAR RANE and replace the name of MR. SANJAY MADHUKAR RANE & MR. AJAY MADHUKAR RANE. Any person having any objection to sale or claiming any right, title or interest in said Flat by way of sale, exchange, gift, mortgage, charge, trust, possession, inheritance, lease, lien, attachment or any other right whatsoever. The same may be made known in writing to me at Shop No.23, Shree Vrindavan CHS Ltd., B/H Woodland Cinema, Virar (W), Tal-Vasai, Dist-Palghar, Pin 401 303 within 15 days from the date of issue of this notice, failing which society shall proceed to change the name as per rules & regulation
(DHANASHRI YERUNKAR)
(ADVOCATE)
Place: Virar
Date: 16.12.2024

After poll drubbing, Uddhav drops 'return to Hindutva' hints

Mumbai: The Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) has dropped broad hints over the past few days of going back to its core Hindutva agenda after the drubbing the party received in the November 20 Maharashtra polls.

The party has mounted a strident attack on the Centre for atrocities on Hindus in Bangladesh after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government in the neighbouring country in August and has now come forward to "protect" an "80-year-old" Hanuman Temple outside Mumbai's Dadar station that was been served a demolition notice by the railways.

Signalling its intent on the issue, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray performed 'maha aarti' at the temple amid efforts by the party to corner the ruling BJP on the Hindutva plank.

Earlier, on December 6, the party raised hackles of some allies when Uddhav Thackeray's close aide and MLC Milind Narvekar posted a photo of the Babri Masjid demolition on social media site X along with the combative "I am proud of those who did it" quote of Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray. The mosque in Ayodhya was brought down on December 6, 1992.

On Friday, Uddhav Thackeray had attacked the Union government over the atrocities on Hindus in



Bangladesh and sought to know the steps taken by India to protect the community in the neighbouring nation.

Observers said these moves mark another change in the policy of Shiv Sena (UBT), which severed ties in 2019 with its long-time ally BJP and joined hands with the Congress and NCP but stuck to its 'Marathi manoo' (sons of the soil) plank.

These observers said the move comes amid the drubbing the Thackeray-led party received in the assembly polls and ahead of the civic polls, which have been due in most cities in Maharashtra, including Mumbai, since early 2022. It got just 20 seats in the 288-member Maharashtra assembly despite contesting 95 as part of the MVA.

The cash-rich Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) was controlled by the undivided Shiv Sena for 25 years from 1997 to 2022. In 2017, the Shiv Sena and the BJP were

involved a close fight and won 84 and 82 seats, respectively.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the party won four of the six seats in Mumbai, though a closer look revealed it did not do well in seats with its traditional voter base. In assembly segments like Worli, held by Aaditya Thackeray, it had leads of less than 7,000.

The ruling BJP accused the Shiv Sena (UBT) of winning with the help of minority votes.

The Uddhav Thackeray-led party's ambiguous stand on Uniform Civil Code and Waqf Board Amendment Bill gave the BJP further ammunition to attack its former ally.

In the assembly polls, results of which were declared on November 23, victories in just 10 of the 24 constituencies it contested in Mumbai was another sign of its waning voter base, especially among core supporters.

Moreover, the victory margin in three constituen-

cies (Jogeshwari East, Versova and Mahim) was lower than 2000 votes, while it was less than 10000 in Worli, Shivadi, Kalina and Dindoshi. Only victories in Vikhroli, Byculla and Vandre East were with margins of more than 10,000.

Ambadas Danve, the leader of opposition in state legislative council, said Shiv Sena (UBT) never abandoned Hindutva and this was made clear even by the then chief minister Uddhav Thackeray.

"(I challenge the opposition) to show one instance where we have abandoned Hindutva. Our Hindutva is different. It does not mean hating minorities," Danve told PTI.

A Sena UBT leader, however, admitted the party fell short of countering the "BJP's narrative" that the Thackeray-led outfit had abandoned Hindutva, especially when the ruling party gave calls like "ek hain to safe hain" (we are safe when united) and "batenge toh katenge" (divided we

perish) in the assembly poll campaign.

Political analyst Abhay Deshpande said the Shiv Sena (UBT) changing its political line in 2019 did prove advantageous to the party in 2024 Lok Sabha polls as it got a new voter base.

However, the November assembly polls showed the party had lost a significant part of its core voter base to Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and the BJP, Deshpande pointed out.

Deshpande said the Sena (UBT) has realized that the party's "secular" stand may not work in the BMC, so it has moved back to its core Hindutva agenda. The party's secular stand may help in wards where the Congress has a weak candidate and the minority votes will gravitate to the Shiv Sena UBT, he added.

Prakash Akolkar, the author of 'Jai Maharashtra -- Ha Shiv Sena Navacha Itihas Aahe' (Jai Maharashtra -- This is the History of Shiv Sena) said the party moving back to Hindutva stems from its "frustration" from electoral setbacks.

"In the first session after he took over as the chief minister in 2019, Uddhav Thackeray had said his party made a mistake of mixing religion with politics. Now the party is going back to its main Hindutva plank. This shows that the party has no real ideology," Akolkar said. -PTI

Newbies in the House Part-7

The dreamer fetches historic win

By Ruddhi Phadke

It was a long-cherished dream for Rajan Naik to represent Nalasopara in the Assembly. He tried his luck twice earlier but failed. This time, however, he created a history by becoming the first BJP MLA from the seat, known as a citadel of the Thakur family.

The sober and humble Naik defeated Kshitij Thakur, an MLA who had become synonymous with Nalasopara. Naik's victory is also considered as the beginning of the end of the influence of the Thakur family. Interestingly, this is for the first time that no one from the Thakur family is in the Assembly since 1991.

"I won't use the word 'gundaraj', but I must say 'Ramrajya' has been established finally in Nalasopara and Vasai," said MLA Rajan Naik. After wiping out Thakurs from Vasai, BJP gave another blow to BVA by defeating the party in Nalasopara. After Sneha Dubey, another historic victory that's worth taking cognizance of is that of Naik. Again, a debutant contestant challenged the mighty and emerged victorious.

Rajan Naik's journey from now is not going to be easy as he has dared to challenge the Thakurs who are obviously upset due to the unexpected defeat. Kshitij Thakur was defeated by a margin of 36,875 votes.

Speaking to 'The Perfect Voice', Naik said, "The credit goes to Devendra ji (Fadnavis), Chandrashekhar Bawankule and Ravindra Chavan and of course the collective efforts of the party workers. Ladki Bahin scheme was a masterstroke that finally pushed us closest to success." Naik said.

It was not a difficult decision to contest elections as he has been working with RSS for 37 years, he has also worked under ABVP for five years. "Everyone knew me. From voters to party seniors, I was well connected with all. Above all, I was extremely approachable to voters."

He pointed out that people of Nalasopara were fed up of the long standing problems of illegal structures, land disputes and traffic woes and the word



"parivartan" set the base of the party's campaign in Nalasopara. Naik believed that anti-incumbency factor cannot be ruled out while analyzing what led to the success. "After 2019, over 2 lakh new voters were enrolled. Youth wants change," added Naik.

According to Naik another factor that drove the victory was relentless efforts on campaign and voter awareness. He said he himself walked nearly 193 kilo meters and personally visited voters, distributing slips and convincing people to vote.

Having won the election, Naik is all set to embrace the challenges Nalasopara constituency brings with it as people now have set huge expectations from the first time MLA. The constituency for years has been battling several issues like lack of infrastructure, including roads, public transportation, and amenities like hospitals and schools, unemployed youth, rising crime, environmental concerns like pollution, deforestation, and waste management. Besides, the constituency has also experienced social and communal tensions in the past.

Naik likes to be called as people's man. He is often seen travelling in Mumbai's local trains in second class compartments and singing Marathi bhajans with the co-passengers. His simplicity and loyalty to the BJP have yielded results. However, this nature could change his mettle too in front of the mighty Thakurs. They are down but yet out.

Bail to mentally ill man convicted for murder

Mumbai: The Bombay High Court has granted bail to a 35-year-old man, convicted for killing his father, noting he is mentally unsound and suffering from schizophrenia.

A division bench of Justices Bharati Dangle and Manjusha Deshpande, in its December 12 order, suspended the life sentence imposed on the man and granted him bail pending hearing of his appeal against conviction.

The convict, who was well educated, had been diagnosed with schizophrenia and was on psychotropic medication, the court noted.

"The mental status examination clearly reflects that he continues to mutter to himself and suffers from mood swings and there is specific reference to his speech, sometimes being coherent and sometimes irrelevant and his judgment being impaired," the HC said.

The bench said mental health is a state of well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, to learn well and work well.

"It affects how we think,



feel, react and act as we cope with life and encompasses psychological and social well-being," the court said.

"In a country like India, when people still shy away from openly discussing the mental illness and are not open about disclosing it, as it carries a significant social stigma, leading to an apprehension of social exclusion or discrimination, it can be too much to assume that a person, who has killed his father and categorically admitted that he is responsible for the act, to be identified suffering from any sort of mental illness," the HC said.

The bench had earlier directed that the convict, lodged at the Yerwada prison in Pune, be evaluated by a psychologist.

The psychologist's report stated the convict was suffering from schizophrenia. The court noted the convict was a highly educated

person and started getting medical treatment for his mental illness in 2010.

It appears his treatment was either discontinued or it was again resumed only when he suffered from the attacks and this ultimately resulted into the incident, when he killed his own father, the court said.

The HC bench said prima facie it was convinced that the trial court had failed to consider the accused's mental illness.

The bench, while granting him bail, sought an affidavit from his sister assuring the court that he would continue to take treatment for his mental illness so that he does not pose danger to anyone else and shall be admitted to a mental health care institution if required. The man was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment by a sessions court in Pune in 2015 for killing his father.

Motorecyclist run over by BEST bus

Mumbai: Days after a BEST bus mowed down seven persons in Kurla, a motorcyclist got run over by an electric bus of the transport body in the Govandi area here, police said on Sunday.

The accident occurred at the Shivaji Nager junction in Govandi late on Saturday night, an official said.

The bus was heading towards the Kurla bus depot from Shivaji Nagar when the victim's two-wheeler came in contact with one of the rear tyres of the bus, and he got run over, the official said.

The victim, Dikshit Vinod Rajput, sustained a severe head injury and was rushed to the Rajawadi Hospital, where the doctors declared him dead before admission, he said.

The police have arrested the bus driver, Vinod Aabaji Rankhambe (39), under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS) Act, and further investigation is underway, the official said.

Earlier this week, an electric bus of the BEST mowed down seven persons and injured 42 others on the S G Barve Marg in Kurla (West).



A fire erupted on the second floor of the seven-story Poonam Chambers commercial building in Worli. Mumbai Fire Brigade, police, and other emergency personnel responded swiftly and no injuries were reported. Thick black smoke was seen billowing from the building as firefighters worked to extinguish the flames on Sunday. (Pic: Bhusan Koyande)

Prison officer booked for bribe

Thane: A case has been registered against a policeman and a senior prison officer for allegedly demanding and accepting a bribe to stop harassment of a prisoner's family member in Navi Mumbai, police said on Sunday.

Based on a complaint, the police have registered a case under the Prevention of Corruption Act against Nivrutti Maneji Kannewad, a senior officer of Talaja Jail, and constable Rahul Parmeshwar Garad, an official said.

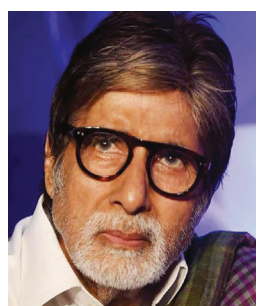
The duo allegedly demanded a bribe of Rs 10,000 from the complainant, whose brother is an inmate at Talaja Jail, he said.

The complainant alleged that his brother had been harassed by the two accused in Talaja Jail. The harassment reportedly escalated when the inmate was brought to court for proceedings.

During a meeting, the inmate informed his brother that the two officials had demanded Rs 10,000 to stop the harassment, the official said. The Anti-Corruption Bureau probed into the complaint and found that the duo had accepted the bribe amount on Saturday.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Even today 'Awaraz' is a film that is etched in my mind. Talking about Raji's incredible showmanship, the way he envisioned the dream sequence in the film had never been seen before."



Amitabh Bachchan, Actor

Will conduct performance audit: Fadnavis

Nagpur: Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Sunday that portfolios will be allocated to new ministers in the next two to three days.

Addressing a press conference after 39 legislators of Mahayuti took oath as ministers as part of the expansion of the cabinet on the eve of the winter session of the legislature, Fadnavis said Mahayuti allies have agreed to conduct a "performance audit" of ministers during their tenure.

While Fadnavis didn't

mention any timeline, Deputy CM and Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde said the ministers of his party will get two-and-a-half years and those who perform will progress.

Deputy Chief Minister and NCP leader Ajit Pawar said "non-performers" can be replaced in two-and-a-half-months also.

Fadnavis said the Mahayuti government will start working towards developing Maharashtra.

"We have decided on the portfolio allocation and it will be announced in two to

three days. Our administration will focus on swift development," he said.

He slammed the opposition MVA for terming the Mahayuti government as a "government of EVM".

"Our government came to power because every vote has gone for Maharashtra. My government works by the Constitution and respecting the dignity of the Constitution is our priority," the chief minister said.

Fadnavis announced a probe by SIT into the murder of Massajog village sar-

panch Santosh Deshmukh in Beed district.

"The case has been given to CID and a special SIT will be set up to investigate. Culprits will be punished," the chief minister said.

He said the violence in Parbhani was orchestrated and pointed out that the stone replica of the Constitution was desecrated by a mentally unstable person who has been arrested.

"I have directed the police to take action against those protesters involved in stone pelting in Parbhani," he added.

Fadnavis said he and his deputies- Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar- have told new ministers that they would be subjected to a performance audit.

"Performance audit of ministers will be done and all three of us have agreed to this," he said.

The CM said those leaders of the BJP who couldn't find a place in the Cabinet may be assigned an organisational role.

Shinde said he had decided at the Shiv Sena party level to give two-and-a-half years to new ministers.

"Those who work good will progress," he added.

Earlier in the day, the opposition MVA targeted the Maharashtra government over farmers' plight, price rise, jobs and a sarpanch's murder.

Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council Ambadas Danve said the government was doing a "drama" by keeping the session only for six days. Earlier, the Nagpur session used to be held for anywhere between three weeks and one month, said the Sena (UBT) leader.

Call for extending POSH Act to political parties

By Uzmi Athar

New Delhi: Legal experts and activists have voiced the urgent need to bring political parties under the ambit of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, known as the POSH Act, citing the need for gender equality and accountability.

The reaction comes after the Supreme Court on Monday disposed of a plea seeking direction to political parties to follow the procedure for the protection of women in the workplace under the 2013 POSH Act.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Manmohan asked the petitioner to approach the Election Commission of India (ECI) with a representation for the application of the POSH Act.

Sonal Mattoo, a lawyer and director of NGO Helping Hands, called for a shift in perspective, urging political parties to focus on the spirit of the law rather than its technical definition.

"The problem is they're looking at the letter of the law as opposed to the spirit of the law. If you look at the letter of the law, yes, you will struggle with who is the employer... but if you look at the spirit of the law, it's very easy to implement as every political party has a disciplinary committee," she told PTI.

Similarly, she said, this is



a group of people who are entrusted with ensuring that decorum is followed and no member does anything that brings disrepute to the party.

"Similarly, they can set up a committee that also looks at the behaviour related to inappropriate conduct of party workers and people within the party. So, if you look at the letter of the law and you look at who is the employer, you will struggle.

"But if you look at other bodies within political parties that look at discipline and other conduct or misconduct, it's very easy to create a similar pattern in terms of ensuring appropriate conduct with women colleagues that work with them. I think the whole idea is to look at the spirit, rather than the letter of the law," Mattoo said.

However, prominent lawyer Shilpi Jain expressed concerns over the internal committees' independence, given the immense power wielded by politicians.

"An internal committee funded by a political party will lack teeth. For such bodies to function effectively, independence and cour-

age are essential. Unfortunately, given the misuse of power by many politicians, achieving this remains a challenge," she told PTI.

Jain added that courts are better positioned to handle cases of sexual harassment involving politicians, given the inherent biases internal mechanisms might face.

Activists argue that addressing harassment within political parties will set a precedent for improving gender equality across society.

Shabnam Hashmi, founder of NGO Anhad, called it a "progressive" move.

"Politicians are expected to lead by example. If they continue to ignore gender equality, it sends the wrong message to society. Establishing such mechanisms in political parties will bring gradual but important changes, just as we saw with women asserting themselves after the implementation of 33 per cent reservation in panchayats," she told PTI.

Yogita Bhayana, anti-rap activist and founder of People Against Rape in India (PARI) criticised the "irony" of Parliament exempting itself from a law it enacted.

"If an institution with more than 10 members is required to implement POSH, why are political parties excluded? Parliament itself brought in this law. Their inability to enforce it internally reflects

their reluctance to confront harassment within their ranks," she told PTI.

Bhayana also pointed out the larger issue of poor implementation of the POSH Act across various sectors, stating, "We need a framework that is not only expansive but also effective in its enforcement."

The legal definition of "workplace" under the POSH Act complicates its application to political parties.

A 2022 Kerala High Court ruling stated that political parties do not have a conventional employer-employee relationship and cannot be mandated to set up Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs).

This ambiguity, combined with the decentralised and informal nature of political party structures, has often been cited as a reason for non-compliance.

Still, many experts believe this should not prevent political parties from taking proactive steps.

"The lack of a traditional workplace structure cannot be an excuse. Political parties must adapt and lead by example," Hashmi emphasised.

She added that even minimal initial progress would pave the way for systemic change in the long run.

Lawyers and activists have also highlighted how extending the POSH Act to political parties could improve the participation of women in politics.



India Women's Minnu Mani takes the catch of West Indies Women's captain Hayley Matthews during the first T20 International cricket match of a series between India Women and West Indies Women in Navi Mumbai on Sunday.

Pic: PTI

'Nasbandi' mandatory if cadres want to marry: Surrendered Maoists

Jagdalpur (Chhattisgarh): "Nasbandi (vasectomy)" is a very common word in Maoist lexicon. Cadres who wish to get married are forced to undergo the procedure on the directive of senior CPI (Maoist) leaders.

A former Maoist insurgent from Telangana was instructed to undergo the procedure before he got married. Years later, after he laid down his arms and surrendered, he underwent a second surgery to reverse the procedure, eventually becoming a father to a boy.

He was not the only one. Many who lay down their arms and enter the mainstream similarly choose to reverse the procedure to start a family.

The practice of 'nasbandi' is so widespread that its impact was conveyed to Union Home Minister Amit Shah during an interaction with surrendered Maoist cadres here on Sunday.

"When I was a member of the CPI (Maoist), I had to go for 'nasbandi'. But after I gave up arms and joined the mainstream, I underwent another operation so that I could become a father. After the second operation, I became the father of a baby boy," the

former Maoist from Telangana said while interacting with Shah.

The perception among members of the proscribed outfit is that childcare will prove a distraction and their movement suffer. There is also apprehension that cadres who get married might turn their backs on the movement.

As a result, vasectomy is compulsory for any cadre that gets married.

Vasectomy is a surgical procedure that cuts the supply of sperm to the semen, providing permanent birth control (contraception).

Markam Dula, a surrendered Naxal from Chhattisgarh's Sukma district, said, "It is mandatory for Naxal cadres to go for 'nasbandi' if they want to get married. The leaders don't want any member being involved emotionally with his offspring. So the way forward is 'nasbandi'."

Another former Maoist insurgent from Malkangiri in neighbouring Odisha shared a similar account.

"Before I married my fellow cadre, he had to undergo a 'nasbandi'," said Sukanti Mari.

Her husband was eventually killed in a police encounter and she subsequently surrendered before the authorities.

Shah, during his interaction with the group of surrendered Naxals, said he was immensely satisfied that the country's youngsters realised the futility of violence and laid down arms.

He appealed to the remaining Naxals to give up arms and join the mainstream, saying their rehabilitation was the government's responsibility.

"I appeal to Naxals, please come forward. Give up arms, surrender and join the mainstream. Your rehabilitation is our responsibility," he said.

The Centre has formulated a rehabilitation policy for surrendered militants and Naxals, including those injured in violence, he said.

While interacting with Shah, the surrendered Naxals conveyed to him how they were benefiting from various government schemes, including jobs in the police, the private sector and bank loans for starting their own ventures.

-PTI

Assad's racy photos discovered after his fall, spark ridicule



Beirut: Bizarre and personal photos of ousted Syrian President Bashar Assad have surfaced from his abandoned residences, sparking ridicule among Syrians who only until recently were persecuted for criticising his leadership.

The images, reportedly discovered in photo albums from Assad's mansions in the hills of Damascus and Aleppo, painted an unflattering portrait of Bashar and his father, Hafez Assad, who had ruled Syria with an iron grip for decades. They stripped away the carefully constructed image that the Assad family had cultivated for decades.

One photo featured Hafez Assad in his underwear, striking a bodybuilder-like pose. Other images showed Bashar Assad in a Speedo flexing his biceps; astride a yellow motorcycle

in his briefs; perched on a handcycle, also in his briefs; and staring blankly in a kitchen, wearing only white underwear and a sleeveless undershirt.

Social media footage showed Syrians touring the Assads' opulent estates, revealing extravagant decor, jacuzzis and other lavish possessions out of reach of ordinary people living amid civil war since 2011. Fuelled by decades of persecution and a desire for vengeance, people stripped the mansions of valuables and exposed Assad's private world, including some of his photo collections.

The unbecoming images of Assad in various states of undress and odd scenarios quickly went viral, turning into an object of mockery. For many Syrians, who had endured forced imprisonment, dis-

placement and oppression under the Assad dynasty, these photos served as both a spectacle and a moment of catharsis.

"What is it with the Assad family and being photographed in their underwear? Highly interested in knowing the fantasy behind," journalist Hussam Hammoud wrote on X.

One particularly peculiar shot showed Bashar in a Speedo aboard a boat, surrounded by other people. Another depicted him on a balcony overlooking the sea, teasing a girl sitting on his shoulders.

In one photo, Bashar Assad is pictured with a group of people, including his reportedly maternal cousin, Ihab Makhlof, who is wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with an image of Hitler. One video on social media showed a man flipping through hundreds of photos in an album, featuring images from family occasions. One showed a young Bashar in a suit and his wife Asmaa in white dress, reportedly from their engagement ceremony, as he places a ring on her finger. Another image captured a topless Bashar posing with a camera.

-AP



Bajrang Dal activists during a 'Shaurya Yatra' organised by Bajrang Dal and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) in Moradabad on Sunday.

Pic: PTI

Procession amidst tight security

Mandya (Karnataka): The Sankeertana Yatre, a procession organised by Hindu Jagarana Vedike as part of the Hanuman Jayanti celebrations, was held amid tight security in Srirangapatna here on Sunday.

The procession concluded "quite smoothly and peacefully", a senior police officer said.

Saffron-clad devotees gathered from various places took out a procession from the Anjaneya Swamy Temple - located in front of the Nimishamba Temple - to the Sri Ranganatha Swamy Temple in the town, singing bhajans and raising slogans, cover-

ing a distance of about 4.3 km.

Heavy police security was in place, and barricades were erected around Jamia Masjid, which is on the route of the march, police said.

There was no major tension or untoward incidents, other than minor arguments between a section of participants of the procession and police near the mosque; A section of participants slowed down near the mosque and indulged in sloganeering and security forces made them move ahead towards the destination, a senior official said, adding "things ended quite smoothly."

Masjid was closed for visitors both Saturday and Sunday as a precautionary measure, officials said. Police held rounds of peace meetings with organizers to ensure that no untoward incidents occurred.

Officials and personnel drawn from Mandya and neighbouring districts were deployed in Srirangapatna along with home guards, Karnataka State Reserve Police (KSRP), and District Armed Reserve (DAR) personnel, a senior official said. CCTV cameras were installed at 110 sensitive spots identified, and video and drone cameras were deployed to monitor things, they added.

-PTI

Railways to elevate tracks for Kumbh

Mahakumbh Nagar (UP): Indian Railways, in collaboration with the Uttar Pradesh State Bridge Corporation, has undertaken a project to elevate railway tracks to remove level crossings before next year's Maha Kumbh, officials said.

The initiative is set to ease traffic congestion, save travel time, and provide significant relief to city residents, they added.

Celebrated in a cycle of 12 years, the Maha Kumbh will be held in Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26.

Rail under bridges (RUBs) and rail over bridges (ROBs) are ready on almost all the level crossings in Prayagraj where movement will start fully before the mega event, officials said.

Alongside the spiritual festivities, the Maha Kumbh has accelerated industrial growth and commercial development across the region. A major highlight of this transformation is the removal of level crossings, made possible through the collaborative efforts of Indian Railways and the State Bridge Corporation.

Amit Malviya, senior public relations officer, Prayagraj division, said the RUBs and ROBs are being

constructed at almost all level crossings, not only within Prayagraj, but also in the surrounding areas.

Several of these crossings were completed during the last Kumbh in 2019 as part of earlier infrastructure upgrades, he said, adding that the remaining projects are now being fast-tracked for completion ahead of Maha Kumbh 2025, with joint efforts from the Centre and state government.

These developments are expected to be fully ready before the commencement of the grand event.

Seven ROBs have been constructed here at a cost of about Rs 375 crore, while the construction work for three RUBs is in the final stages, the officials said.

Cementing operations will begin soon on all the newly-constructed ROBs and RUBs, which will not only ease the movement of crores of devotees attending the Maha Kumbh, but also benefit the city residents with reduced traffic congestion even after the event, Malviya said.

The end of level crossings will ensure uninterrupted and safe operation of trains. Approximately 10,000 trains are expected to operate.

India seeks strong subsidy for high seas fishing

New Delhi: India has pitched at the WTO for stricter regulations on subsidies granted by countries that are engaged in high seas fishing activities, an official said.

Highlighting the stark disparity, an Indian document submitted at the World Trade Organization (WTO) has noted that it provides a modest USD 35 per fisher annually, compared to subsidies as high as USD 76,000 per fisher per year in some European nations.

India also suggested that historical subsidisers should seek permission of the Committee on Fisheries Subsidies for grant of subsidies in future.

The country has made these

remarks in the meetings of the Negotiating Group on Rules (Fisheries subsidies), which are going on in Geneva.

"India has pitched for strong disciplines for historical fisheries subsidisers which are engaged in distant water fishing (200 nautical miles from sea shore) and has asked for a moratorium on subsidies at the present level for 25 years," the official said.

On these demands, India was supported by countries like Indonesia and other developing countries, the official added.

"Blaming India for stalling the decision at the GC is merely an excuse and a tactic to push for

weak disciplines, allowing business as usual to continue," the official said adding WTO members engaged in distant water fishing should stop providing any kind of subsidies for 25 years as they provide significantly higher support measures and are indiscriminately exploiting fisheries resources.

The General Council is the WTO's highest-level decision-making body in Geneva, meeting regularly to carry out the functions of the WTO. It has representatives (usually ambassadors or equivalent) from all member governments and has the authority to act on behalf of the Ministerial Conference.

India has also called for adopting a 'per capita distribution of subsidies' criteria to address concerns over overfishing and capacity under the WTO framework, according to the document.

The document - Designing Disciplines For the Overcapacity and Overfishing Pillar: A case for intensity-based subsidies approach - was submitted by India and it would come up for discussion in the General Council meeting of the WTO at Geneva on December 16-17.

The issue is being negotiated at the WTO as the member countries are discussing reaching an agreement on disciplining subsi-

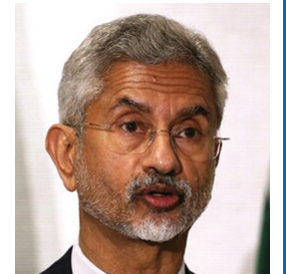
dies that lead to overfishing and overcapacity.

In 2022, the countries finalised a pact on stopping subsidies for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities.

It has added that the annual aggregate level of fisheries subsidies cannot be the correct measure as these support measures include beneficial as well as subsistence subsidies that are linked to livelihood which in no way contribute to overcapacity and overfishing. Countries like Norway, China, Japan and the US undertake distant water fishing and provide huge subsidies to their fishing community.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"If the domestic model has changed, if the landscape has changed, if the behavioural patterns of states have changed, and if the tools of foreign policies have changed, how can foreign policy remain the same?"



S Jaishankar, Minister, External Affairs

Never called Modi a 'chaiwala': Aiyar

THE CONGRESSMAN'S BOOK THROWS LIGHT ON THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN THE CONGRESS

New Delhi: Veteran Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar has said he never called Narendra Modi a 'chaiwala' and that his strong belief that the BJP leader was unsuited for the PM's post was not based on his tea-selling past.



Aiyar addresses the controversy surrounding his comments in the lead up to the 2014 general elections in his forthcoming book 'A Maverick in Politics' published by Juggernaut.

In the book, the 83-year-old Aiyar talks about his early days in politics, navigating through the P V Narasimha Rao years, his time as a minister in UPA I, his RS term and then his "decline...fade out...fall".

Aiyar narrates in the book that for him, personally, the 2014 elections began on a wrong note when the AICC convened in a pre-election plenary session on 17 January, 2014 in New Delhi and he was interviewed in the convention hall of the Talkatora Stadium.

Modi was being bruited about as the obvious winner of the coming general elections, he says in book.

"I was utterly horrified that a man stained, I thought irretrievably, by the 2002 carnage of Muslims in Gujarat, could aspire to lead the India of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru," he says in the book.

So, in the interview, Aiyar said he stressed that it was outrageous for a man who did not know that Alexander had never come to Pataliputra or that Taxila (Takshashila) was in present day Pakistan to seek to step into Jawaharlal Nehru's shoes.

"The people of India would never accept this, I

On being neglected by Gandhi family

"I had the favour of (former) prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. I then had the favour of Sonia Gandhi. But that's a very, very uncertain basis on which to be in politics. So, when Sonia Gandhi got angry with me in 2010, that patronage got withdrawn. And yet not completely withdrawn. "So it was a very slow decline. But it was a decline that took place over a period of about 15 years... And then, once Rahul Gandhi came in, I thought it was going to go up. Because he said to me that where he used to agree with me 75 per cent, he said 'now I agree with you 100 per cent!'" "And then proved that he agreed with me 100 per cent by asking his mother to remove me from the only position I had in the Congress, which was as the national convenor of the party's Panchayati Raj Sangathan, named after Rajiv Gandhi. And then refused to meet me, or most of the time refused to meet me. With the result that today, I am completely isolated."

said, adding, 'Never! Never! Never!' in thundering tones. I then quipped that if, after he lost the election, Modi still wanted to serve tea, we could make some arrangements for him here," he says.

"This was touted then -- and ever since -- as my having said that Modi could not become PM because he was a 'chaiwallah'. I never called Modi a 'chaiwallah' and never advanced his having been a 'chaiwallah' as the reason for my believing he would never make it to the post of PM," Aiyar states in the book.

Indeed, the person who said he was a 'chaiwala' was Modi himself -- to stress his somewhat doubtful claim to humble beginnings.

"The video of my remarks is still available on YouTube for anyone who cares to look. I have often

invited my media critics, and even my party colleagues, to check this out but they just do not want to because they are committed to their totally false premise that I had indeed described Modi as a 'chaiwallah' who, therefore, could not be the PM," the Congress leader says.

The irony of Modi himself having claimed to be a 'chaiwala' is lost on them.

"Not knowing that this would become the main media story a few hours later, poor Rahul Gandhi singled me out from my obscure corner in the audience to publicly affirm that my championing of Panchayati Raj made me the kind of role model of what the party aimed at ensuring," Aiyar recounts.

Gandhi also added Sam Pitroda to make us twin role models for party work-

ers, Aiyar recalled.

"The media and Modi played out my alleged (but wholly untrue) remark about Modi being unfit to rule as PM because (as he claimed) he had begun life as a 'chaiwallah'. This was no more than a hollow election gimmick that the election pundit, Prashant Kishor, who was given much of the credit for Modi's stunning electoral victory, told me he had exploited to the full through the 'chai pe charcha' events that he stage managed with a hologram (then unknown and unprecedented) of Modi joining the tea drinkers," Aiyar says.

"It gave the handle to elements in the Congress party to divert attention from the real causes of the party's humiliating collapse at the hustings to shift the blame on this one remark put out in sarcasm, if sneering, jest," Aiyar says in the book.

In the book, Aiyar also deals with other controversies involving him, including the 'neech' remark row.

He claims Modi twisted his comments to claim that he had described him as a 'low-caste' man which was "completely untrue".

"The Congress campaign in Gujarat was running on the wholly misconceived notion that Rahul Gandhi was going to win the state in his very first election outing after being elected party president. So, the party and the leadership persuaded themselves that I had upset the applecart."



Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher addresses a press conference at Shambhu border in Patiala district, Punjab on Sunday.

Pic: PTI

Techie's wife, her family arrested in suicide case

Bengaluru/Lucknow: The Bengaluru Police has arrested three people, including the estranged wife of tech executive Atul Subhash, who died by suicide recently, an official said on Sunday.

Nikita Singhania was arrested from Gurugram, Haryana, while her mother Nisha Singhania and brother Anurag Singhania were picked up from Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj for abetting Subhash's suicide, the Bengaluru Police official said.

They were arrested on Saturday morning, brought to Bengaluru and sent to 14-days judicial custody after being produced before a local court, he said.

A senior official from Prayagraj police on Sunday claimed that the Bengaluru Police did not inform them about the arrest of Nisha Singhania and Anurag Singhania.

Subhash, 34, was found hanging from his house in Munnekolalu in southeast Bengaluru on December 9. He left behind lengthy videos and notes, blaming his wife and in-laws for driving

him to commit suicide through "false" cases and "persistent torture".

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said Subhash's wife, mother-in-law and brother-in-law have been apprehended and are in judicial custody.

Addressing reporters in Bengaluru, Parameshwara said, "He (Subhash) had left about a 40-page death note and he has raised several issues, most importantly about the misuse of provisions in the law that were meant for protection of women. He has said that he was pressured for Rs 3 crore and other things including cases against him."

Noting that Subhash has raised questions about the "rights of men", the minister said this has become a topic of discussion across the country, whether the law should be amended, citing women's rights are being misused.

"Questions are being raised, discussions are happening in the country. Probably discussions will have to happen in the days ahead about bringing changes in the laws at both state and the Centre," he added.

Earlier, Nikita Singhania, her mother, brother and uncle Sushil Singhania had filed anticipatory bail pleas in Allahabad HC.

Will not immerse ashes till we get justice

Samastipur (Bihar): The father of Bengaluru techie Atul Subhash on Sunday called for strict punishment for those who "harassed" his son, asserting that his ashes will not be immersed till justice is served.

"I thank the Karnataka Police for arresting them (Subhash's estranged wife and in-laws). All those who harassed my son should be punished so that he gets justice, and his soul rests in peace. I will not immerse the ashes of my son till we get justice," Pawan Kumar told reporters here.

Committed to end Naxalism by March 2026: Amit Shah

Raipur: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the Centre and the Chhattisgarh government were committed to end the menace of Naxalism from the state before March 31, 2026.

When Chhattisgarh becomes free of Naxalism, the entire country will get rid of the menace, Shah said addressing the President's Police Colour Award function at the police parade ground here.

He said the Chhattisgarh police have made a significant achievement in the fight against Naxalism in the last one year.

Shah also hailed the Chhattisgarh government's rehabilitation policy for Naxalites and appealed to them to quit violence and join the mainstream.

The President's Colour is not just an award, it is a symbol of service, dedication and sacrifice and it reminds of the countless challenges that police have to deal with, he said.

Shah expressed confidence that the Chhattisgarh police will discharge their responsibilities and will never step back from

their duty.

"I am confident that from tomorrow the jaws of Chhattisgarh will come out with the President's insignia on their uniforms and their morale will increase manifold," Shah said.

"The state leadership, the chief minister, the home minister of the state have taken a pledge and the Government of India is also committed to your pledge. Together, we will completely eradicate Naxalism from Chhattisgarh before March 31, 2026," he said.

When Chhattisgarh becomes Naxal free, the entire country will get rid of the menace, the Union minister said.

"The Chhattisgarh police have secured a significant achievement in the fight against Naxalism in the last one year... 287 Naxalites were neutralised, 1,000 arrested and 837 surrendered in the last one year in the state. The Chhattisgarh police along with various security forces of the country have done the work of putting the last nail in the coffin of Naxalism in the last one year," he said.



Amit Shah in Raipur.

Pic: PTI

'Modi invokes Nehru to distract'

New Delhi: The Congress on Sunday hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, charging that defamation of Jawaharlal Nehru and minimum democratic governance was his model.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said Prime Minister Modi has an "obsession" with Nehru as he invokes him to distract the nation's attention from his own failures and current challenges on which he maintains a complete silence.

The Congress attack on the prime minister came a day after he attacked the party during the debate on

the 'Glorious 75 year journey of India's Constitution'.

"It was the famous French philosopher Voltaire who had first said that if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him. For our self-anointed divinity - if Nehru had not existed, it would have been necessary to invent him," Ramesh said.

The Congress leader asked what would the prime minister do without Nehru, for whom he has a pathological obsession?

"Nehru is necessary to distract the nation's attention from His own failures. Nehru is necessary to di-

vert the nation's attention from current challenges on which He maintains a complete silence," the Congress leader said.

He also said that Nehru is necessary to deny the nation's many achievements before May 2014.

Prime Minister Modi on Saturday accused the Congress of repeatedly mutilating the Constitution, having "tasted blood" in its "greed" for power, as he asserted that his government's policies and decisions since 2014 have been aimed at boosting India's strength and unity in line with the vision of the Constitution.

Justice Yadav likely to appear before SC Collegium

New Delhi: Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, who reportedly made controversial statements at a VHP function, is likely to appear before the Supreme Court Collegium soon to explain his stand on controversy.

The top court on December 10 took note of news reports over the statements and sought a report from the Allahabad High Court on the entire issue.

"The Supreme Court has taken note of newspaper reports of a speech given by Mr Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, a sitting judge of the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad. The details and particulars have been called from the high court and the matter is under consideration," an official statement had said.

As per the established practices, the judge, against whom a report is sought by the apex court Collegium on any controversial issue from the high court concerned, is given an opportunity to put forth his or her version before the top court Collegium headed by the Chief Justice of India (CJI).

Apex court sources said the Allahabad High Court judge is likely to be asked to

appear and put forth his version as per established practices.

At a Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) function on December 8, Justice Yadav said the main aim of the uniform civil code was to promote social harmony, gender equality and secularism.

He was addressing a provincial convention of the legal cell and high court unit of the VHP in Allahabad High Court.

A day later, videos of the judge speaking on provocative issues, including the law working according to the majority, were circulated widely on social media, prompting strong reactions from several quarters, including opposition leaders who questioned his reported statements, labelling it as "hate speech".

Lawyer and convenor of Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reforms, an NGO, Prashant Bhusan on Tuesday wrote to CJI Sanjiv Khanna seeking an "in-house enquiry" into the conduct of the Allahabad HC judge.

Bhusan claimed the judge breached judicial ethics and violated the consti-

tutional principles of impartiality and secularism.

According to Bhusan, the remarks undermined the judiciary's role as a neutral arbiter and eroded public trust in its independence.

"A strong institutional response is needed to restore public faith in the judiciary," the letter said, adding, "We call upon your office sir (the CJI) to restore the faith of the people in the institution of judiciary by immediately setting up an in-house committee to enquire into acts of judicial impropriety by Justice Yadav and by withdrawing all judicial work from Justice Yadav," Bhusan wrote.

On December 8, CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat also wrote to the CJI calling the judge's speech a violation of his oath, saying "no place for such persons in a court of justice".

Karat sought action from the apex court on the issue.

Similarly, the Bar Association of India passed a resolution condemning the statements of the high court judge.

-PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Whoever speaks the truth, these people will pressurise him with impeachment (motions), and still they talk about the Constitution. Look at their double standards. An Allahabad High Court judge said there should be a Uniform Civil Code."



Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister, UP

Dynasty politics not 'lifelong ticket' to success

New Delhi: Pooh-poohing the BJP's criticism of dynasty politics, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has said that political lineage is not a "lifelong ticket" to success and questioned why the ruling party doesn't raise the issue with its allied parties which can also be accused of perpetuating dynasties.

Abdullah was responding to a question during an exclusive interview on Friday with PTI whether his family's fourth generation

will go into politics, and if that would expose him to fresh criticism of perpetuating dynastic politics the way the Congress party and other opposition parties have been.

Abdullah's two lawyer sons have recently made forceful political commentaries, especially on the issue of the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution that took away Kashmir's special status, an emotive issue among Kashmiris. They also campaigned extensively with



their father during the September Assembly elections.

"Whatever space they choose to carve out, they will have to make for them-

selves. Nobody is going to give them anything on a plate," said Abdullah, whose grandfather Sheikh Abdullah is considered the founding father of the post-independence state of Jammu and Kashmir.

His father Farooq Abdullah was also a chief minister for decades, and Omar Abdullah returned as chief minister for a second time in October.

"Belonging to a political family is not a lifelong ticket for success. And I don't need to point towards any-

body else. I'll just talk about myself. I lost an election this year," he said, referring to his failed bid in the Parliamentary elections earlier this year.

However, he contested in the Assembly elections in September and won handsomely. "I'm the same person, same family, same political party," he said.

He said the BJP's criticism of dynasty politics is simply political hypocrisy. "The BJP only seems to oppose political dynasties when it's convenient. They

have no issues with dynastic politics among their allies," he said.

"I don't need to point out the number of dynastic allies that the BJP has or has had in the past or will have in the future. So, I have always maintained that the BJP doesn't have a problem with political families. They have a problem with political families that are opposed to the BJP." From the BJP's vantage, he said, politicians are neither dynasts nor corrupt once "you are an ally of BJP." -PTI

India's import of Russian oil drops in Nov

New Delhi: India's import of Russian crude oil dropped in November to its lowest level since June 2022 but the Kremlin continues to be the biggest source of oil for India, according to a monthly tracker report of a European think tank.

India became the second biggest buyer of Russian crude oil since Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022, with purchases rising from less than one per cent of the total oil imported to almost 40 per cent of the country's total oil purchases.

The rise was primarily because the Russian crude oil was available at a discount to other internationally traded oil due to the price cap and the European nations shunning purchases from Moscow.

"India's imports of Russian crude oil dropped by a massive 55 per cent in November - the lowest figure since June 2022," the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) said in its latest report.

Russia remained India's top oil supplier, followed by Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

"China has bought 47 per cent of Russia's crude exports, followed by India (37 per cent), the EU (6 per cent), and Turkey (6 per cent)," CREA said without giving absolute numbers.

In November, there was a 17 per cent month-on-month increase in the discount on Russia's Urals grade crude oil to an average of USD 6.01 per barrel compared to Brent crude oil. The discount on the ESPO grade narrowed by a massive 15 per cent and was traded at an average discount of USD 3.88 per barrel while that on the



Sokol blend narrowed by 2 per cent to USD 6.65 per barrel, it said.

Russia predominantly sells ESPO and Sokol grades of crude oil to India.

Besides crude oil, India bought smaller quantities of coal from Russia.

"From December 5, 2022 until the end of November 2024, China purchased 46 per cent of all Russia's coal exports - India (17 per cent), Turkey (11 per cent), South Korea (10 per cent), and Taiwan (5 per cent) round off the top five buyers list," according to CREA.

All fossil fuels taken together, "India dropped to third in the list of largest buyers of Russian fossil fuels in November, contributing 17 per cent (EUR 2.1 billion) to Russia's monthly export earnings from its top five importers. There was a significant 22 per cent drop in Russian revenues from crude oil exports to India in November," it said.

While there was an 11 per cent month-on-month decline in the total volume of India's imports of crude oil in November, Russian volumes suffered

the most, dropping by a massive 55 per cent.

India imports more than 85 per cent of its crude oil, which is refined into fuels like petrol and diesel refineries.

In an attempt to restrict funds for Russia's war machine, The Group of Seven (G7) rich nations, the European Union and Australia put an embargo on Russian crude and introduced a USD 60 per barrel price cap in December 2022. Over the next 12 months, the price cap and embargo had a significant impact on revenues, and forced Russia to find new markets and ways to transport its oil.

Russia did this by offering deep discounts on its Urals grade crude.

"It has been two years since the imposition of the price cap. CREA estimates that in this period, the sanctions have forced Russia to drop the price of Urals by an estimated 15 per cent. Since the sanctions, Russia has lost an estimated EUR 14.6 billion in revenues from Urals grade crude exports," the report said.

-PTI

Five firms add Rs 1.13 lakh cr

New Delhi: Five of the 10 most valued firms added Rs 1,13,117.17 crore to their total market valuation last week with Bharti Airtel stealing the show.

While Tata Consultancy Services, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank and Infosys were the gainers, Reliance Industries, State Bank of India, Life Insurance Corporation of India, ITC and Hindustan Unilever took a hit in their valuations.

Last week, the BSE benchmark gained 623.07 points or 0.76 per cent and the Nifty advanced 90.5 points or 0.36 per cent. The market valuation of Bharti Airtel surged by Rs 47,836.6 crore to Rs 9,57,842.40 crore.

Infosys added Rs 31,826.97 crore to its valuation at Rs 8,30,387.10 crore.

HDFC Bank's valuation rose by Rs 11,887.78 crore to Rs 14,31,158.06 crore and that of ICICI Bank increased by Rs 11,760.8 crore to Rs 9,61,423.08 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of TCS climbed Rs 9,805.02 crore to Rs 16,18,587.63 crore.

However, the mcap of Reliance Industries declined by Rs 52,031.98 crore to Rs 17,23,144.70 crore.

The valuation of LIC tumbled Rs 32,067.73 crore to Rs 5,89,869.29 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever slumped Rs 22,250.63 crore to Rs 5,61,423.08 crore.

The mcap of State Bank of India dropped Rs 2,052.66 crore to Rs 7,69,034.51 crore and that of ITC by Rs 1,376.19 crore to Rs 5,88,195.82 crore. Reliance Industries remained the most valued firm followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Infosys, SBI, LIC, ITC and Hindustan Unilever.

-PTI

BY INVITATION

India needs a plan to decarbonise its buildings and the construction industry



By
Viswajit Srinivasan

Given the contribution of embodied carbon to the overall emissions by India's building construction industry, the country needs to develop a plan to decarbonise building and have targets for GHG emission reduction.

While there are limited standards and reporting frameworks for addressing embodied carbon even in developed markets because the emphasis is on operational emissions, there is an urgent need to innovate and transition to low carbon emitting technologies and construction methods to be able to tackle embodied carbon as there is to develop standards and reporting methods. India has a very rudimentary framework for management of operational carbon metrics and needs to urgently develop and implement building performance management and measurement tools, to achieve its coveted objective of net-zero by 2070.

To overcome this while traditional asset backed lending models may of course be explored where the borrowers are credit worthy and where asset valuations support, India could also explore an off-balance sheet model that helps shift energy efficiency projects from being an expensed asset that must be procured and maintained (and

will depreciate) to one that is an operating expense. The extent of Government support by way of grants and subsidised funding to support decarbonisation of select asset classes such as housing, is to be further assessed. There may also be innovative models such as the one used by the National Wealth Fund, UK where sovereign guarantees are used to de-risk exposure to private borrowers and can help attract private capital into areas seen as risky.

This has a twofold benefit: it helps crowd in private capital and take on risks at a pricing which otherwise would not be possible and it helps develop and test the market so with time, borrowers would be able to borrow at attractive pricing without the need for a sovereign guarantee.

Though India has low per capita annual emissions at 1.8 tons of CO2e compared to the USA at 14.7 and China at 7.6 in part thanks to being among the most populous countries, in absolute terms, it is the third-largest emitter country globally and hence has a central role to play in any global strategy to mitigate GHG emissions.

In India, the real estate and construction sectors account for 32 per cent of total national GHG emissions, covering both operational and embodied carbon with buildings projected to emit upto 7x more carbon by 2050 (against to 2005 levels).

Moreover, the situation with respect to the building construction in India is different from the UK where 80 per cent of buildings that will exist in 2050 have already been built and hence the emphasis is on improving energy efficiency of existing stock to decarbonise the sector.

In India it is estimated that operational emissions (emissions by virtue of using/operating a building) contribute to 60 per cent of overall emissions from the built environment with 40 per cent contribution from embodied emissions.

As per a study, 50-70 per cent of embodied carbon emissions is before completion. Of this, 85-90 per cent of embodied emissions are from manufacturing, 7-10% from transportation and 3-5 per cent during construction.

While India has taken steps towards reducing operational emissions by establishing the Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), this entity has already completed energy efficiency projects in over 10K+ buildings across India and has effected savings in the 30-50 per cent range.

There is however clearly much more to be done both in terms of improving the manufacturing processes to use low carbon emitting technology and materials and in driving nation-wide efforts to deliver decarbonisation. For any decarbonising drive to succeed in India, domestic properties / homes would need to be the focus as these constitute 75% of buildings; commercial buildings account for roughly 1.2bn. sq.ft.. Further research effort may be needed to determine the spend on improving energy efficiency of buildings, the nature of interventions and a financing structure which can ensure that retrofits are viable and property owners are incentivised to invest in these measures.

(The author is a senior banker and sustainable finance expert of Indian origin based out of UK. Views personal.)

FPIs infuse Rs 22,766 cr into Indian equities

New Delhi: Foreign investors have made a strong comeback to Indian equities with a net investment of Rs 22,766 crore in the first two weeks of December driven by expectations of rate cut by the US Federal Reserve.

This revival follows significant outflows in the preceding months, with Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) pulling out a net Rs 21,612 crore in November and a massive Rs 94,017 crore in October -- the worst monthly outflow on record.

Interestingly, September had marked a nine-month high for FPI inflows, with a net investment of Rs 57,724 crore, highlighting the volatility in foreign investment trends.

With the latest inflow, FPI investment has reached at Rs 7,747 crore in 2024 so far, data with the depositories showed.

Looking ahead, the flow of foreign investments into Indian equity markets will hinge on several key factors. These include the policies implemented under Donald Trump's presidency, the prevailing inflation and interest rate environment, and the evolving geopolitical landscape,

Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

Additionally, the third-quarter earnings performance of Indian companies and the country's progress on the economic growth front will play a crucial role in shaping investor sentiment and influencing foreign inflows, he added.

According to the data with the depositories, FPIs have made a net investment of Rs 22,766 crore in this month (till December 13). This was driven by expectations of a US Federal Reserve rate cut.

A shift toward monetary easing has improved global liquidity, drawing capital into emerging markets like India. These inflows reflect sustained interest in India as a growth market, Karthick Jonagadla, smallcase Manager and Founder of Quantace Research, said.

Also, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) enhanced liquidity by lowering the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) that boosted investors' sentiment, Vipul Bhowar, Senior Director - Listed Investments at Waterfield Advisors, said.



Cargo vessels during their flagging off ceremony in Kolkata on Sunday. Pic: PTI

ASEAN gained from US-China trade war

New Delhi, Dec 15 (PTI) Mexico, Canada, and 10-nation Southeast Asian bloc ASEAN benefited more from the US-China trade war than India, economic think tank GTRI said in a report.

It said that India has to strengthen its local supply chains and produce critical intermediates to reduce reliance on China, while improving cost efficiency and ease of doing business to enhance competitiveness of domestic industries and increase exports to the US.

With Donald Trump again becoming the US

President, the evolving trade landscape offers huge opportunities for the Indian industry as he is now planning new tariffs targeting Mexico, Canada, China, and others.

The US-China trade war, initiated in 2018 under President Trump with tariffs targeting key sectors, has significantly reshaped global trade flows but failed to achieve its primary goals.

"Key beneficiaries of the trade war included Mexico, Canada, and ASEAN nations, which collectively accounted for 57 per cent of the growth in US imports.

India also emerged as a significant gainer, with exports to the US rising by USD 36.8 billion, driven by sectors like electronics, pharmaceuticals, and engineering goods," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

Mexico emerged as the biggest winner, with an increase in exports by USD 164.3 billion to the US between 2017 and 2023. It was followed by Canada (USD 124 billion), Vietnam (USD 70.5 billion), South Korea (USD 46.3 billion) and Germany (USD 43 billion).

-PTI

FIS campus in Guwahati

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Finland International School (FIS) has announced to launch its highly anticipated campus in Guwahati. This expansion marks another step after the school's success of its campuses in Thane and Mumbai.

The announcement was unveiled at a glittering event in Mumbai attended by the Ambassador of Finland to India Kimmo Lahdevirta and the Consul General of Finland Erik af Hallstrom.

FIS has introduced a unique and highly effective approach that merges Finland's globally renowned pedagogical methods with India's National Education Policy (NEP) and ICSE-aligned curriculum.

FIS is the brainchild of Shashank Goenka, Managing Director of Goenka Inc. "At FIS, our mission is to nurture creativity, empower children with confidence, and equip them to excel in a rapidly changing world. The launch of FIS Guwahati signifies a bold leap in our journey to set new benchmarks for education across India," said Goenka.

Chip plant begins without incentive

By Praseon Srivastava

Surat: Gujarat-based Suchi Semicon has started production of semiconductors without the Centre's incentive and plans to invest USD 100 million in three years, a top official of the company said on Sunday.

Suchi Group Chairman and Suchi Semicon founder Ashok Mehta said though the company has applied for the Centre's incentive under SPECS (Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors) and India Semiconductor Mission, it does not want to hold on to production for the sake of incentives.

"We have a full proof business plan. Our business plan is not primarily for incentives. We have set up a plant to do business. The Centre's approval will come when we meet their requirements. We have made USD 100 million (about Rs 840 crore) investment plan over three years," Mehta said.

He said that the state government has approved 20 per cent incentives for the plant.

"At the time of Covid when there was shortage of

semiconductors, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had asked to turn crisis into opportunity. We made our mind at that time to make a foray into the semiconductor business. We decided to start a factory after a lot of research with industry experts," Mehta said.

He is also the founder of textile company Suchi Industries.

"We already have clients who have placed their requirements. Majority of our production will be for overseas clients. We have started trial production some time back and our components are getting tested by clients," Mehta said.

He said that the company has used some funds from the textile business and raised a funding round from friends and families.

"We have also tied up with Punjab National Bank for credit facility. Our investment plan also includes incentives that we are confident of getting from the Centre based on our performance," Mehta said.

Suchi Semicon co-founder Shetal Mehta said the commercial shipment of the semiconductors will start in the first quarter of next year.

-PTI

Indian tourism sector to double in 10 years: WTTC

Mumbai: The Indian tourism sector is expected to double in size to USD 523 billion in the next 10 years, according to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) President and CEO Julia Simpson.

WTTC works with governments on issues of the travel and tourism industry, and is the global authority on the economic and social contribution of the sector.

"The travel and tourism sector employs 45 million people in India, and is going

to double in its value. In 10 years, the sector is going to be worth USD 523 billion in India, more than double the present size of USD 256 billion," Simpson told PTI.

"In 10 years, the tourism sector in India will be providing jobs to 63 million people," she said.

India is one of the most beautiful and amazing countries in the world, Simpson said. Tourists and visitors across the centuries have been attracted to its shores and wonderful cities. India continues to



welcome the world with open arms and the Indian hospitality is incredible, she added.

"Tourism represents about seven per cent of the Indian economy and in 2019 it was about USD 211 bil-

lion. Now it is about USD 256 billion and gives jobs to 45 million people in India."

"If you look at the impact of tourism in terms of the greenhouse gas emissions on India, it represents about five per cent of all In-

dia's greenhouse gas emissions and that's probably about 250 billion kilos of carbon (dioxide) every year. That is actually the biggest greenhouse gas emission in the tourism sector after the US and China," she said.

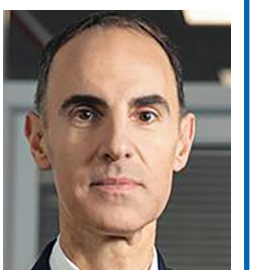
The good news is that while the tourism sector has been growing, the greenhouse gas emissions haven't been growing as fast, she said. That means India is becoming more and more efficient for travel and tourism, she added.

"We are also keen to talk to the Indian government to ensure that it is reaching out to the aviation sector to help produce more sustainable aviation fuel because we can't really do tourism without aviation."

"We need aviation sector. We will have more people travelling by air and we need to do that more sustainably. And the only real opportunity right now is through sustainable aviation fuel. We really encourage the government to incentivize its production."

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Nissan is betting big on India... and the plans (for India) remain intact. Contrary to the perception, in India, we are strengthening our members, growing our production, and we just included almost 600 new employments."



Frank Torres, President, Operations, Nissan India

Rebels try to bring normalcy while Syrians vow to speak up

Damascus: The new head of security arrived at Damascus' international airport with his men, a bearded fighter who marched with other rebels across Syria to the capital. The few maintenance staff who showed up for work huddled around Maj Hamza al-Ahmed, eager for answers about what happens next.

They unloaded all their complaints, pent up for years during the rule of President Bashar Assad, which now, inconceivably, is over.

They told him they were denied promotions and perks funneled to pro-Assad favorites, that bosses threatened them with prison for working too slowly. They warned him of hardcore Assad supporters among the airport staff, ready to return whenever the facility reopens.

As al-Ahmed tried to reassure them, Osama Najm, an engineer, confessed: "This is the first time we talk."

This was the first week of Syria's transformation after Assad's unexpected fall.

Rebels, suddenly in charge, met a population bursting with emotions: excitement at new freedoms; grief over years of repression; and hopes, expectations and worries about the future. Some were overwhelmed to the point of tears.

The transition has been surprisingly smooth. Reports of reprisals, revenge killings and sectarian violence have been minimal. Looting and destruction

have been quickly contained, insurgent fighters disciplined. On Saturday, people went about their lives as usual in the capital, Damascus. Only a single van of fighters was seen.

There are a million ways it could go wrong.

The country is broken and isolated after five decades of Assad family rule. Families have been torn apart by war, former prisoners are traumatized by the brutalities they suffered, tens of thousands of detainees remain missing. The economy is wrecked, poverty is widespread, inflation and unemployment are high. Corruption seeps through daily life.

But in this moment of flux, many are ready to feel out the way ahead.

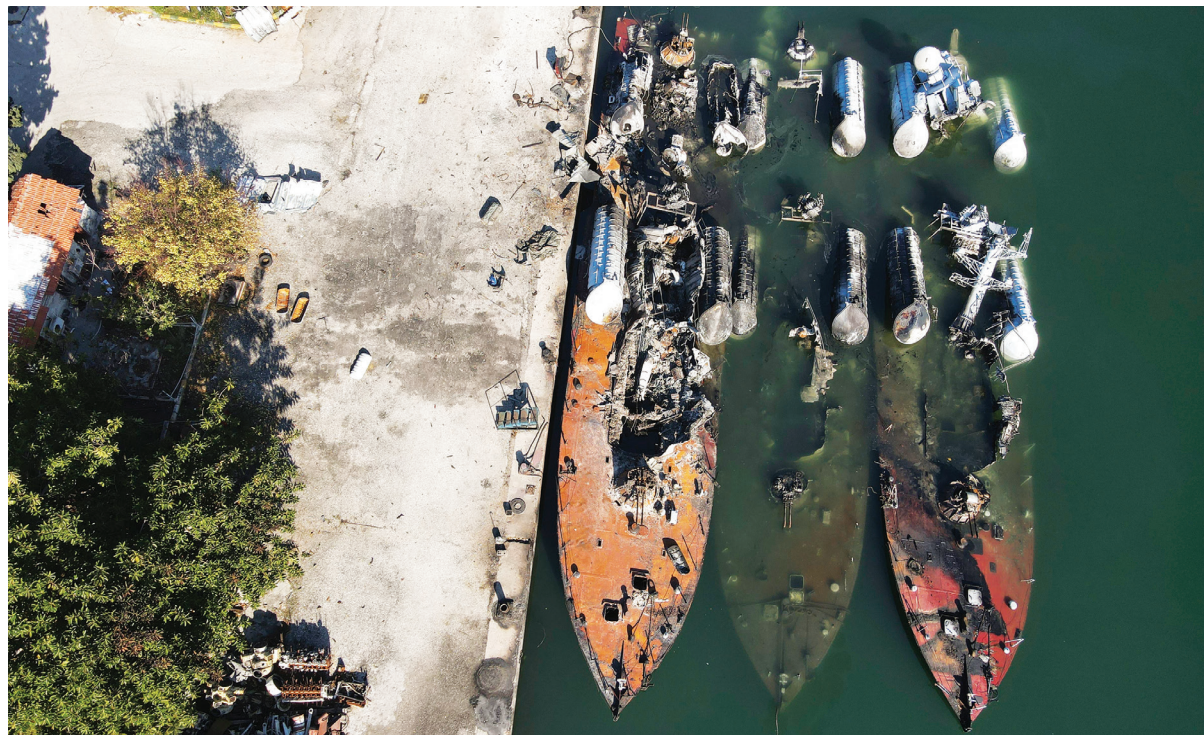
At the airport, al-Ahmed told the staffers: "The new path will have challenges, but that is why we have said Syria is for all and we all have to cooperate."

The rebels have so far said all the right things, Najm said. "But we will not be silent about anything wrong again."

Idlib comes to Damascus

At a torched police station, pictures of Assad were torn down and files destroyed after insurgents entered the city Dec. 8. All Assad-era police and security personnel have vanished.

On Saturday, the building was staffed by 10 men serving in the police force of the rebels' de facto "salvation government," which for years governed the re-



Syrian naval vessels are seen destroyed by an Israeli airstrike last week in the port of Latakia, Syria on Saturday. Pic: AP/PTI

bel enclave of Idlib in Syria's northwest.

The rebel policemen watch over the station, dealing with reports of petty thefts and street scuffles. One woman complains that her neighbors sabotaged her power supply. A policeman tells her to wait for courts to start operating again.

"It will take a year to solve problems," he mumbled.

The rebels sought to bring order in Damascus by replicating the structure of its governance in Idlib. But there is a problem of scale. One of the policemen estimates the number of rebel police at only around 4,000;

half are based in Idlib and the rest are tasked with maintaining security in Damascus and elsewhere. Some experts estimate the insurgents' total fighting force at around 20,000.

Most of the bearded fighters hail from conservative, provincial areas. Many are hardline Islamists.

The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has renounced its al-Qaida past, and its leaders are working to reassure Syria's religious and ethnic communities that the future will be pluralist and tolerant.

Syrians remain suspicious.

"The people we see on

the streets, they don't represent us," said Hani Zia, a Damascus resident. He was concerned by the few reports of attacks on minorities and revenge killings. "We should be fearful."

Some restaurants have resumed openly serving alcohol, others more discreetly to test the mood.

At a sidewalk café in the historic Old City's Christian quarter, men were drinking beer when a fighter patrol passed by. The men turned to each other, uncertain, but the fighters did nothing. When a man waving a gun harassed a liquor store elsewhere in the Old City, the rebel police arrested him, one po-

liceman said.

Salem Hajjo, a theater teacher who participated in the 2011 protests, said he doesn't agree with the rebels' Islamist views, but is impressed at their experience in running their own affairs. And he expects to have a voice in the new Syria.

"We have never been this at ease," he said. "The fear is gone. The rest is up to us."

The fighters make a concerted effort to reassure

On the night after Assad's fall, gunmen roamed the streets, celebrating vic-

tory with deafening gunfire. Some security agency buildings were torched. The public stayed indoors.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham moved to impose order. It ordered a nighttime curfew for three days. It banned celebratory gunfire and moved fighters to protect properties.

After a day, people began to emerge.

Tens of thousands went to Assad's prisons to search for loved ones, mingling with rebels, some of whom were also searching.

Amid celebrations, gunmen invited children to hop up on their armored vehicles, and posed for photos with women, some with their hair uncovered. Pro-revolution songs blared from cars.

The transitional government urged people to return to work. The insurgents deployed men to act as traffic police. Volunteers picked up trash, since municipal workers haven't returned to their jobs.

Officials say they want to reopen the airport as soon as possible and this week maintenance crews inspected a handful of planes on the tarmac. Cleaners removed trash, wrecked furniture and merchandise.

One cleaner, who identified himself only as Murad, said he earns the equivalent of \$15 a month and has six children to feed, including one with a disability. He dreams of getting a mobile phone.

"We need a long time to clean this up," he said.

-AP

Chinese spy got close to British royal

By Aditi Khanna

London: The scandal surrounding an alleged Chinese spy who managed to gain access to Buckingham Palace as a "close confidant" of Prince Andrew, the younger brother of King Charles III, intensified on Sunday as it emerged that he also met former prime ministers David Cameron and Theresa May.

While Cameron and May distanced themselves from any knowledge of his espionage links, the row involving the businessman, known only as "H6" for legal reasons, continues to dominate the headlines after a tribunal judge noted that he had an "unusual" degree of trust from the senior royal.

Earlier, Andrew, the Duke of York, said in a statement that he had "ceased all contact" with the alleged spy.

"David Cameron was leader of the Conservative Party for over a decade and PM for six years. He met thousands of people during that time at hundreds of functions and events. We don't have any further information about this individual," a source close to Cameron, now Lord Cameron, was quoted as saying by 'Sky News'.

A spokesperson for Theresa May said "as such, she doesn't remember when or where this particular photograph was taken or the man in question". A Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) went on to hear in July that the man was invited to Prince Andrew's birthday party in 2020 and was told by a royal aide that he could act on the Duke's behalf when dealing with potential investors in China.

ABC to settle defamation lawsuit with Trump

New York: ABC News has agreed to pay USD 15 million toward Donald Trump's presidential library to settle a lawsuit over anchor George Stephanopoulos' inaccurate on-air assertion that the president-elect had been found civilly liable for raping writer E. Jean Carroll.

According to settlement documents made public Saturday, ABC will also post a note on its website expressing regret over the claim in a March 10 segment on Stephanopoulos' "This Week" program and pay USD 1 million in legal fees to Trump's lawyer.

In a statement, ABC News said: "We are pleased that the parties have reached an agreement to dismiss the lawsuit on the terms in the court filing."

Trump sued Stephanopoulos and ABC for defamation days after the anchor claimed during an interview with Rep. Nancy Mace, R-S.C., that Trump had been "found liable for rape," which misstated the verdicts in Carroll's two lawsuits against him.

Last year, Trump was found liable for sexually as-

saulting and defaming Carroll and was ordered to pay her USD 5 million. In January, he was found liable on additional defamation claims and ordered to pay Carroll \$83.3 million. Trump is appealing both verdicts.

Neither verdict involved a finding of rape as defined under New York law.

The judge in both cases, Lewis Kaplan, has said that the jury's conclusion was that Carroll had failed to prove that Trump raped her "within the narrow, technical meaning of a particular section of the New York Penal Law."

Kaplan noted that the definition of rape was "far narrower" than how rape is defined in common modern parlance, in some dictionaries, in some federal and state criminal statutes and elsewhere.

The judge said the verdict did not mean that Carroll "failed to prove that Mr. Trump raped her as many people commonly understand the word rape." Indeed... the jury found that Mr. Trump in fact did exactly that."

-AP



A dead child is carried into the Al-Aqsa Martyrs hospital in Deir al-Balah after an Israeli army strike in the Bureij refugee camp, central Gaza Strip on Saturday. Pic: AP/PTI

Five migrants dead, several missing

Athens: At least five migrants died, an unknown number were missing and more than 200 others rescued in Greece in multiple operations south of the island of Crete, the coast guard said Saturday.

The four operations began late Friday and one was still under way, according to the coast guard.

Three operations, including the ongoing one, involved separate incidents off the island of Gavdos, south of Crete, and the fourth took place off the southern Peloponnese region on the south-

ern mainland.

In the ongoing operation, 39 people were rescued and taken to Crete, the coast guard said. Five bodies were retrieved from the water. Survivors have said that dozens of others were in the same boat.

A total of nine vessels, including coast guard ships, an Italian navy frigate and four merchant ships, were still involved in the rescue Saturday, as well as two helicopters, the coast guard said.

In the other two operations off Gavdos, 47 and 89 people, respectively, were

rescued. These operations were complete.

Another 28 migrants were rescued off the Peloponnese, with no one reported missing.

The coast guard conducted extensive overnight search and rescue missions assisted by navy helicopters and commercial vessels as well as vessels from the European border protection agency Frontex.

Greek government officials say the spike in migrant arrivals is being driven by conflicts in the Middle East.

-AP

Hasina involved in enforced disappearance: Commission

Dhaka: An inquiry commission set up by the interim government in Bangladesh has said that it found evidence implicating deposed PM Sheikh Hasina and top-ranking military and police officials from her regime in alleged incidents of enforced disappearance.

The five-member Commission of Inquiry submitted an interim report titled "Unfolding The Truth" to Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus on Saturday.

The commission estimated that there would be more than 3,500 enforced disappearances.

"The commission has found evidence of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's involvement as the instructor in the incidents of enforced disappearance," the press wing of the office of Chief Adviser said in a statement.

It said the deposed premier's defence adviser Major General (ret'd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, former director general of the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre and sacked Major General Ziaul Ahsanand senior police officers Monirul Islam and Mohammad Harun-Or-



Rashid and several other senior officials were found to be involved in those incidents.

The ex-military and police officers are on the run, mostly believed to be abroad since the ouster of Hasina's Awami League regime on August 5 following a student-led uprising.

According to the statement, retired Supreme Court judge Mainul Islam Chowdhury, the chairman of the commission, told Yunus that during investigations they found a "systematic design" that allowed enforced disappearances to go undetected.

"Individuals carrying out enforced disappearance or extrajudicial killing (even) lacked knowledge about victims," Chowdhury said.

The report said the police's elite anti-crime Rapid Action Battalion (RAB),

which draws men from the Army, Navy, Air Force, regular police and other law enforcement agencies had collaborated with each other to pick up, torture and keep victims in detention and deliberately segmented the operations.

The commission simultaneously proposed the abolition of the RAB alongside scrapping or thoroughly amending the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009.

Rights activist and commission member Sajjad Hossain said they recorded 1,676 complaints of enforced disappearances and, so far, have examined 758 of them. Of these, 200 people or 27 per cent of the victims never returned while those who returned were mostly shown as arrested.

Besides the chairman, the commission comprises Justice Farid Ahmed Shibli, rights activist Nur Khan, private BRAC University teacher Nabila Idris and rights activist Sajjad Hossain.

Commission members also told the government to repeal laws under the Armed Police Battalions Ordinance that grants law enforcers indemnity for acts done in "good faith".

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The Mediterranean is the backdrop of this trip, surrounded by situations of crisis and conflict which is expected to be echoed in the pope's address."



Matteo Bruni, Spokesman, Vatican

Raj Kapoor's birth anniversary at his House

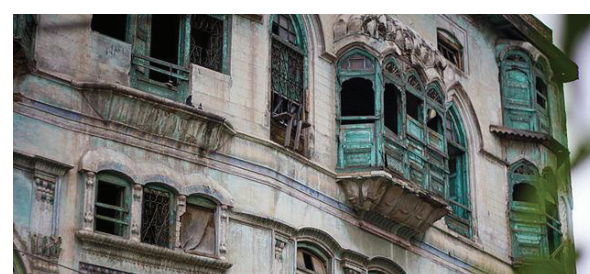
Peshawar: Pakistani cultural enthusiasts and film lovers gathered at the iconic Kapoor House in Peshawar on Saturday to celebrate the 100th birth anniversary of legendary Bollywood filmmaker and actor Raj Kapoor.

A highlight of the event, reinforcing the significance of Peshawar's ties to cinematic history, was the cutting of a cake to mark the birth centenary of Kapoor -- one of the most influential figures of Indian cinema.

Participants also wel-

comed the World Bank's announcement to allocate Rs 100 million each for the restoration of the ancestral homes of Raj Kapoor and fellow Bollywood legend Dilip Kumar. Both homes, located near the famous Qissa Khawani Bazaar, are celebrated as symbols of Peshawar's deep ties to Indian cinema.

The gathering, jointly organised by the Cultural Heritage Council (CHC) and the Directorate of Archaeology Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, called for larger-scale events to



commemorate the legacy of Kapoor. The attendees emphasised Kapoor's connection to Pakistan, where he was born in Peshawar's Dhaki Nalbandi, and praised his enduring influence on cinema.

Muhammad Hussain Haidery, Secretary of the Pak-Iran Trade and Investment Council, was the chief guest of the event.

Born on December 14, 1924, Kapoor was the son of stalwart actor Prithviraj

Kapoor. He made classics like "Awaraz", "Barsaat", "Shree 420", "Sangam" and "Mera Naam Joker" during his illustrious 40-year career. He died in 1988.

Ibrahim Zia, a renowned writer and researcher on the Indian film industry who has extensively studied film legends with roots in Peshawar and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, presented rare photographs of Raj Kapoor from his childhood and early adolescence years in Peshawar.

He also shared insights into the actor's illustrious

career, starting in the 1940s. Zia highlighted Kapoor's versatility across genres, which solidified his status as the "Greatest Showman of Indian Cinema".

The Kapoor House stands near the ancestral homes of Dilip Kumar and Shah Rukh Khan, connecting two generations of Indian film legends to Peshawar. Dilip Kumar and Shah Rukh Khan, a modern-day Bollywood superstar, further underscore the city's historical contribution to Indian cinema.

-PTI

EDITORIAL

Demonising Savarkar

Rahul Gandhi's recent diatribe against freedom fighter and Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in the Lok Sabha, where he accused the BJP of mocking the Constitution by aligning with Savarkar's alleged preference for Manusmriti, has once again spotlighted a paradox: the uneasy alliance between Congress and Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) in the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) and the broader INDIA bloc.

Why does Thackeray's party, long a champion of Savarkar, tolerate such vitriol? And why hasn't Shiv Sena (UBT) exited the alliance despite the persistent ideological dissonance?

Gandhi's persisting attacks against Savarkar are yet another instance of his historically shallow and politically motivated understanding of India's past. The Congress scion's facile criticisms of Savarkar betray not just a lack of depth but also a tendency to selectively engage with history to suit his political narrative. His range of accusations, ranging from dismissing Savarkar as an 'apologist' to painting him as a symbol of the country's oppression, are based on a superficial understanding of his contributions to India's freedom struggle. They are removed from the complexities of Savarkar's life and ideas, which transcend the binary labels that Gandhi and his party insist on assigning.

The Congress's disdain for Savarkar is not new. From opposing his inclusion in the pantheon of national heroes to boycotting his portrait's unveiling in Parliament's Central Hall in 2003, the Congress has consistently sought to undermine his legacy. Even when Atal Bihari Vajpayee presided over the unveiling ceremony, Sonia Gandhi joined hands with the Left to criticize the move.

The point here is that for the Shiv Sena, Savarkar has been more than a historical figure; he is a symbol of Maharashtra pride and nationalism. Since its inception in 1966, the Sena has demanded that Savarkar be posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna. Yet, despite their vocal support for Savarkar, the Sena (UBT) has refrained from taking a strong stand against Rahul Gandhi's repeated attacks.

The Sena (UBT), weakened after its split with the BJP, relies on the MVA and the INDIA bloc for relevance. Does Uddhav fear that exiting the alliance would isolate his party in Maharashtra's volatile political landscape?

For the Congress led by Rahul Gandhi, Savarkar will always remain a convenient punching bag. But for Uddhav Thackeray, the Savarkar question is more than a historical debate—it is a test of his party's identity. His decision to remain conspicuously silent, prioritizing political expediency over ideological commitment, puts the Sena (UBT) in a precarious position, especially after its drubbing in the recent Assembly polls.

Secondly, Gandhi and the Congress leaders, along with the Dalit outfits and other so-called 'progressive' parties who keep assiduously demonizing the Manusmriti as a symbol of patriarchy and caste oppression, present a reductive, oversimplified view. As one of the oldest texts in Hindu law, it deserves a more nuanced reading, but alas, for Gandhi and the Congress, opportunism and identity politics take precedence over everything else.

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

The K-Drama That Shook South Korea's Democracy

By
Sumant Vidwans

Countries like Taiwan and South Korea are often called beacons of democracy, standing up against their dictatorial neighbours. However, this impression was tarnished on December 3 by a dramatic event in South Korea, rivalling the twists and turns of a K-Drama.

This political drama began when South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol declared martial law and ordered the military to take over the National Assembly (i.e., the parliament).

Yoon alleged that the opposition Democratic Party (DP), which holds a majority in the parliament, had been infiltrated by pro-North Korean elements who were plotting sedition and working against South Korea. He vowed to eliminate these anti-state forces and claimed that martial law was an inevitable measure to safeguard the country and its freedom.

Soon after this announcement, DP leader Lee Jae-myung hosted a livestream, urging his party members and citizens to gather at the National Assem-

South Korea's six-hour martial law is a stark reminder of democracy's fragility and the need to protect it.

ibly building for a protest. But the police had already closed the gates. Still, hundreds of people gathered there to oppose the decision.

Within an hour of the martial law declaration, the Army Chief of Staff declared that all political activities were suspended under martial law, including any strikes, rallies, and protest marches. All forms of media would also fall under the control of the martial law command. Any violators could be arrested, detained, or searched, and any material could be seized, all without a warrant.

The military special force was deployed at the National Assembly building soon after that. Some of the members of Parliament had to crawl through the legs of security guards; others shoved and screamed at armed soldiers, and some even had to climb over fences and walls to reach inside.

Of 300 parliament members, 190 managed to enter the building. To block the soldiers, MPs hastily barricaded the doors with benches, tables, sofas, and other available items. At 1 AM local time, National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-sik presented a resolution demanding the immediate lifting of martial law, which all 190 MPs, including some from the President's People Power Party (PPP), unanimously opposed. PPP leader Han Dong-hoon also issued a statement condemning Yoon's martial law declaration and pledging to oppose it with the citizens.

The opposition leader, Lee, had already warned in September that the president might be planning to announce martial law. At that time, the president had called it a baseless political attack that lacked common sense.

According to the constitution, the president should lift martial law if a majority of MPs pass a resolution against it. Given that Yoon had accused the DP lawmakers of being anti-state, it was uncertain whether he would honour



this resolution. However, at around 4:30 AM local time, Yoon announced that he would accept the National Assembly's demand and lift the martial law, and apologising, he promised that this wouldn't be repeated.

Martial law ended within hours, but the political drama continued. On December 5, DP spokesperson Cho Seung-rae accused the president of ordering the military to arrest several political leaders, including DP leader Lee Jae-myung, National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-sik, and PPP leader Han Dong-hoon. Han's inclusion, as the sole PPP member on the list, highlighted his conflict with President Yoon.

At a PPP meeting on December 6, Han suggested suspending Yoon's presidential authority to safeguard the country, hinting some PPP MPs might back impeachment. An impeachment motion requires two-thirds of the 300 National Assembly members, including at least 8 PPP MPs. However, after the president invited Han to a meeting, Han's stance shifted.

On December 7, when the DP brought the motion to impeach the president, all PPP MPs, except one, walked out of the Assembly, and the impeachment motion failed due to lack of quorum. Another bill demanding a special prosecutor to

investigate the corruption allegations against the President's wife, Kim Keon-hee, also failed by just two votes. However, Han maintained that the president would have to step down soon.

Although South Korea is widely considered a vibrant democracy, this was not the first time martial law was imposed. Since its formation in 1948, South Korea has faced martial law 17 times. The country has also been through decades of military rule.

While reassuring that the latest attempt at martial law lasted less than six hours, it also underscores the fragility of democratic institutions, which people often take for granted. Irrespective of the country where one lives, it's everyone's responsibility to be aware of the political situation of that country and participate actively in the democratic process when the time comes. After all, democracy is the form of government 'of the people, by the people, and for the people', so it's also the people's responsibility to protect and uphold it.

On a hopeful note, let us wish for democracy to survive, thrive, and flourish from South Korea to Canada and everywhere in between.

(The author is a foreign affairs expert. Views personal.)

From Jasmine to Ruin

By
Ruddhi Phadke

Bashar al-Assad's regime has finally collapsed in Syria, marking the last chapter of the Arab Spring's tumultuous legacy. Over a decade after a street vendor's desperate act of self-immolation in Tunisia sparked a wave of uprisings across the Arab world, Syria's protracted struggle has culminated in a fragile and uncertain new era. The Arab Spring, which began in December 2010 with calls for democracy and dignity, has undoubtedly reshaped West Asia's political landscape, leaving behind a patchwork of progress and ruin. The so-called 'Spring' began as a flicker of hope and quickly transformed into a region-wide conflagration. From 2010 to 2012, a cascade of protests, uprisings, and revolutions swept across the Middle East and North Africa, shaking authoritarian regimes that had ruled for decades. Ordinary citizens sought democratic reforms, economic justice, and an end to the tyranny of dictators.

But the consequences of this political upheaval were as varied as the na-

The collapse of Assad's regime marks the Arab Spring's final act, revealing a legacy of shattered states and unfinished revolutions.

tions involved. While some countries experienced fleeting moments of democratic triumph, others descended into chaos, providing fertile ground for extremists. Nowhere has this turbulence been more profound and protracted than in Syria, whose civil war simmered for over a decade culminating in Assad's fall.

The fuse was lit in Tunisia on December 17, 2010, when Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor, set himself ablaze protesting against police harassment and economic despair. His act of self-immolation ignited a wave of outrage across the country, highlighting decades of economic stagnation, unemployment, and political corruption under President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Demonstrations spread rapidly, and attempts to quell them with force only fueled the flames. By January 14, 2011, Ben Ali had fled the country, marking the first major victory of the Arab Spring.

Tunisia's transition to democracy, heralded by a new constitution and free elections, became a model for the region. Yet, the road was not without hurdles. Economic instability persisted, as did security threats from extremist groups. Even today, Tunisia's democratic experiment remains fragile, yet it stands as one of the Arab Spring's few relative successes.

Inspired by Tunisia,

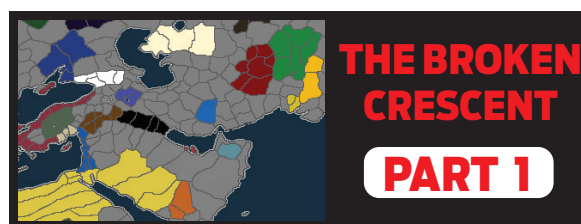
HOW THE ARAB SPRING SOWED SYRIA'S TURMOIL



Egyptians took to Cairo's Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011, demanding the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak, who had ruled with an iron grip for nearly three decades. The protests culminated in Mubarak's resignation on February 11, 2011, after weeks of mass demonstrations and violent clashes. For a moment, Egypt seemed poised for a democratic rebirth.

But the euphoria was short-lived. The military, which assumed control after Mubarak's fall, struggled to balance competing political forces. By 2013, the democratic experiment faltered when the military ousted the elected president, Mohamed Morsi, following widespread protests. Today, Egypt remains under authoritarian rule, with the hopes of the revolution dashed and economic and social grievances as pressing as ever.

In Libya, the Arab Spring evolved into a bloody civil war. The revolution against

THE BROKEN CRESCENT
PART I

Muammar Gaddafi, who had ruled for over four decades, began in February 2011. Inspired by Tunisia and Egypt, Libyans rose against a regime marked by repression, corruption, and grotesque human rights abuses. As protests intensified, Gaddafi vowed to crush dissent with brute force. This prompted international intervention; the United Nations authorized a no-fly zone, and NATO launched airstrikes to support the rebels.

The conflict culminated in Gaddafi's capture and death in October 2011, bringing an end to his autocratic reign. But Libya's victory was Pyrrhic. The country plunged into chaos, with rival militias vying

for power. The state fragmented, its oil wealth squandered in a protracted struggle for dominance. Over a decade later, Libya remains mired in instability, a stark reminder of how revolutions can shatter nations more thoroughly than they transform them.

While Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya grappled with the immediate aftermath of their revolutions, Syria's descent into conflict was far more catastrophic and enduring. The Syrian uprising began in March 2011, when protests erupted in the southern city of Daraa after the arrest and torture of teenagers accused of writing anti-government graffiti. The re-

gime of President Bashar al-Assad responded with brutal force, transforming what began as peaceful demonstrations into a full-blown civil war.

Syria's conflict became a proxy battleground for regional and global powers. Iran and Russia supported Assad, while Western nations and Gulf states backed various rebel factions. Amid the chaos, extremist groups like ISIS exploited the power vacuum, spreading terror across the region. By 2014, ISIS had declared a caliphate, controlling swathes of Syria and Iraq and perpetrating atrocities that shocked the world. The war's toll was staggering. Over 500,000 people were killed, and millions were displaced, creating one of the worst refugee crises in modern history. Entire cities, including Aleppo and Raqqa, were reduced to rubble. Assad's regime, however, clung to power with Russian air support

and Iranian militias, gradually regaining territory.

By 2024, after years of grinding conflict, a tenuous resolution emerged. A peace agreement brokered by Russia, Turkey, and Iran offered a semblance of stability, albeit on Assad's terms. The regime remains in power, its survival a testament to the brutality it wielded to crush opposition. Yet, Syria's recovery is far from assured. Reconstruction costs are estimated in the hundreds of billions, and trust between the regime and its people is non-existent.

The Arab Spring revealed the depth of frustration simmering across the Middle East and North Africa. In many countries, decades of autocratic rule had bred corruption, economic stagnation, and social despair. Youth unemployment was rampant, public services were inadequate, and civil liberties were scarce. The uprisings were a cry for dignity and justice in societies where both had long been denied.

Yet, the outcomes of these revolutions varied widely. Tunisia remains a fragile democracy, while Egypt reverted to authoritarianism. Libya and Syria exemplify the dangers of power vacuums, where the fall of dictators unleashed violence and extremism. In Yemen, another Arab Spring battleground, a civil war continues to devastate the country, with no resolution in sight.

The Arab Spring also had unintended consequences. It created opportunities for extremist groups like ISIS to flourish, exploiting chaos to establish a foothold. The refugee crisis it generated placed enormous strain on neighboring countries and Europe, reshaping global

politics and fueling the rise of populist movements in the West.

Syria's civil war underscores the complexities of revolutionary change. Unlike Tunisia or Egypt, where protests quickly toppled leaders, Syria's uprising morphed into a protracted war, exacerbated by sectarian divisions and foreign interventions. Despite years of negotiations and ceasefires, the conflict dragged on, with no consensus among foreign powers on how to resolve it. The eventual peace deal, brokered without Western involvement, reflects a shift in the region's balance of power toward Russia and Iran.

As the dust settles on the Arab Spring, its legacy remains a cautionary tale. It exposed the fragility of authoritarian regimes but also the perils of revolution without a clear roadmap for governance. For the region's youth, who remain hungry for change, the lessons of the Arab Spring are sobering. Democratic transitions are rare, and the costs of upheaval can be staggering.

Syria stands as a stark reminder of what can happen when protests are met with unrelenting violence and when foreign powers pursue competing agendas in a fractured state. The country's fragile peace may mark the end of its civil war, but it is far from achieving the dignity and justice that first drove its people to rise in 2011.

(Tomorrow: Revisiting the Arab Spring will delve into Syria's protracted struggle for revolution and explore the mass movements that unfolded in Yemen, Bahrain, and Morocco)



KALEIDOSCOPE

1. An artist paints a wall at Lodhi Road area in New Delhi on Sunday.
2. Members of the LGBTQ+ community during 'Kolkata Rainbow Pride Walk 2024' in Kolkata on Sunday.
3. The city of Brisbane illuminated with colourful lights ahead of Christmas in Australia.
4. Union Minister Kiren Rijiju bowls during a cricket match between Lok Sabha Speaker XI and Rajya Sabha Chairman XI teams in New Delhi on Sunday.
5. Indian Army jawans perform during 'Military Tattoo' practice event ahead of the Vijay Diwas celebrations in Kolkata on Saturday.

All Pictures PTI, AP

EXPLAINERS

Why Children Watch Same Show or Play Same Game Repeatedly?

It's a familiar feeling for many parents. No matter what you suggest, your pre-schooler just wants to watch that episode of Bluey again, never mind that it's just finished playing. And at bedtime, it has to be a book you've read frequently enough to have developed a repertoire of specific voices for every character.

These deep and repetitive interests in a TV episode, game or topic may be frustrating to parents who just want to watch something different. But this repetition actually has great benefits for children's learning and wellbeing.

One reason for this is what we can call the "input effect". This isn't a new concept in cognitive science.

Searching for patterns

Think of the brain as an organ doing its best to figure out what is normal in our lives - what's part of a regular pattern and what isn't. Researchers have discovered a phenomenon known as "statistical learning". According to this idea, children are very sensitive to the occurrence of regularities and patterns in their lives.

Interestingly, babies are particularly adept at understanding certain types of material, such as the likelihood of certain sounds in the speech we address to them. But they need to be exposed to many examples of this in order to detect regularities.

For instance, in all languages, and English is no exception, the sounds included in words tends to follow certain patterns. In English, for instance, some of the most common combinations of three letters are "the", "and" or "ing". It makes sense that children's brains search for repetition - in this example, it will help them learn language.

So, when young children return to watch the same show, what they are doing, whether they know it or not, is driven by a desire to detect and consolidate the patterns in what they are watching, hearing or reading.

Familiar comfort

As well as supporting learning, repetition also has benefits for chil-



children's emotions, in what we are calling here the "wellbeing effect".

The main job of childhood is learning, and that means actively seeking out new experiences and stimuli. However, having to process and adapt to new things can be exhausting - even for a toddler with boundless energy.

The world can also be a stranger and more stressful place for children than it is for adults. As an adult, you will have learnt what to expect and how to behave within particular contexts, but children are constantly encountering new situations for the first time.

Well-known stimuli, such as that TV episode they've already watched umpteen times, can provide a source of comfort and security that buffers against this stress and uncertainty.

Deep interests in a particular activity can also provide wellbeing benefits through a sense of control and mastery. Children are constantly being challenged and stretched in what they know and understand at nursery, school and elsewhere. This is crucial for learning, but it also presents a threat to their feelings of competence.

Being able to relax into an activity that they feel good at, such as a favoured game, fulfils these competence needs. In addition, being able

to opt into an activity that they enjoy lets them have a sense of autonomy and control over their lives, which is otherwise often spent being whisked here and there by parents.

Of course, not all children are equally likely to develop these kinds of repetitive interests. For example, autistic children often show particularly focused interests.

There is huge value to be gained from repetition in terms of learning and wellbeing. So, while you shouldn't be forcing them to rewatch shows, you also don't need to be concerned if this is something they're pursuing themselves.

However, it can become problematic if it affects the child's ability to engage with other important aspects of their life, such as getting out of the house on time, interacting with others, or doing physical exercise.

Of course, there is no rule of thumb that can be applied to all children in all contexts. As parents, we can only be attentive to the situation and make a decision. But as you queue up Frozen yet again, think about the input and wellbeing effects, and perhaps give yourself a break from worrying that your child should be doing something - anything! - else.

-The Conversation

How Ex-Soccer Player Kavelashvili Became Georgia's President?

Former soccer player Mikheil Kavelashvili became president of Georgia on Saturday, as the ruling party tightened its grip in what the opposition calls a blow to the country's EU aspirations and a victory for former imperial ruler Russia.

Kavelashvili, 53, easily won the vote given the Georgian Dream party's control of a 300-seat electoral college that replaced direct presidential elections in 2017.

Georgian Dream retained control of parliament in the South Caucasus nation in an October 26 election that the opposition alleges was rigged with Moscow's help. Georgia's outgoing president and main pro-Western parties have since boycotted parliamentary sessions and demanded a rerun of the ballot.

Georgian Dream has vowed to continue pushing toward EU accession but also wants to "reset" ties with Russia.

In 2008, Russia fought a brief war with Georgia, which led to Moscow's recognition of two breakaway regions as independent, and an increase in the Russian military presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Critics have accused Georgian Dream - established by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a shadowy billionaire who made his fortune in Russia - of becoming increasingly authoritarian and tilted toward Moscow, accusations the ruling party has denied. The party recently pushed through laws similar to those used by the Kremlin to crack down on freedom of speech and LGBTQ+ rights.

Pro-Western Salome Zourabichvili has been president since 2018 and has vowed to stay on after her six-year term ends Monday, describing herself as the only legitimate leader until a new election is held.

Georgian Dream's decision last month to suspend talks on their country's bid to join the European Union added to the opposition's outrage and galvanized protests.

The outgoing president?

Zourabichvili, 72, was born in France to parents with Georgian roots and had a successful career



with the French Foreign Ministry before President Mikheil Saakashvili named her Georgia's top diplomat in 2004.

Constitutional changes made the president's job largely ceremonial before Zourabichvili was elected by popular vote with Georgian Dream's support in 2018. She became sharply critical of the ruling party, accusing it of pro-Russia policies, and Georgian Dream unsuccessfully tried to impeach her.

"I remain your president - there is no legitimate Parliament and thus no legitimate election or inauguration," she has declared on the social network X. "My mandate continues."

Speaking to The Associated Press, Zourabichvili rejected government claims that the opposition was fomenting violence.

"We are not demanding a revolution," Zourabichvili said. "We are asking for new elections, but in conditions that will ensure that the will of the people will not be misrepresented or stolen again."

"Georgia has been always resisting Russian influence and will not accept having its vote stolen and its destiny stolen," she said.

Who is Kavelashvili?

Georgian Dream nominated Kavelashvili - mocked by the opposition for lacking higher education. He was a striker in the Premier League for Manchester City and in several clubs in the Swiss Super League. He was elected to parliament in 2016 on the Georgian Dream ticket, and in 2022 co-founded the People's Power

political movement, which was allied with Georgian Dream and became known for its strong anti-Western rhetoric.

Kavelashvili was one of the authors of a controversial law requiring organisations that receive more than 20 per cent of their funding from abroad to register as "pursuing the interest of a foreign power," similar to a Russian law used to discredit organisations critical of the government.

The EU, which granted Georgia candidate status in December 2023 on condition that the country meets the bloc's recommendations, put its accession on hold and cut financial support in June following approval of the "foreign influence" law.

How did protests unfold?

Thousands of demonstrators converged on the parliament building every night after the government announced the suspension of EU accession talks on November 28.

Riot police used water cannons and tear gas almost daily to disperse and beat scores of protesters, some of whom threw fireworks at police officers and built barricades on the capital's central boulevard.

Hundreds were detained and over 100 treated for injuries.

Several journalists were beaten by police and media workers accused authorities of using thugs to deter people from attending anti-government rallies, which Georgian Dream denies.

The crackdown has drawn strong condemnation from the United States and EU officials. -AP

Stellar hundreds from Head, Smith put Australia in pole position

Brisbane: Travis Head put an insipid Indian bowling attack to sword for his second successive hundred while veteran Steve Smith wore the opposition down with a statement century to put Australia in a favourable position on day two of the third Test here on Sunday.

Australia reached a commanding 405 for 7 at stumps courtesy, a 241-run stand between Head (152 off 160) and Smith (101 off 190) for the fourth wicket after the visitors put them in a spot of bother at 75 for three in the morning.

The Indian bowlers, who impressed in the first session, lost their way to allow Head and Co to dominate the proceedings.

Jasprit Bumrah (5/72), who came up with welcome wickets both in the morning and towards the end of play, was once again the stand out bowler for the visitors. It was his second five-wicket haul of the series and the overall tally stands at 17.

Leaving Bumrah's brilliance aside, India's on-field tactics left a lot to be desired as Head played yet another game changing knock.

Head's hundred came after a match-winning 140 in Adelaide while it was a classical Test match knock for Smith, who reached three figures for the first time in 25 innings, silencing his detractors.

While reaching their personal milestones, Smith now is the international batter with joint most Test hundreds (10) against India alongside Joe Root followed

by Sir Vivian Richards and Sir Garfield Sobers (8 each).

Head, since his century in WTC final at the Oval in 2023 has been India's nemesis with another classic ton in ODI World Cup final and two more in the current series. No player in last one year has scored more runs against India across formats.

Poor tactical calls
The field placements in early part of Head's innings were questionable with India having a deep point and deep square leg, allowing the explosive batter to pace his innings with singles and doubles earned through cuts and whips off legs.

The short balls were finally attempted when Head was well set and he duly put them away with disdain but Rohit Sharma not playing a third man for his ramp shot looked a bit odd. It was more of reactive captaincy from Rohit rather than being pro-active.

His special effort included 18 boundaries. Even after tea, too many runs were conceded with Ravindra Jadeja (0/76 in 16 overs) and Nitish Reddy (1/65 in 13 overs) opening the bowling as Rohit Sharma chose to preserve his frontline pacers for the new ball.

Smith's hundred too was of high quality. He preferred to grind it out in the first half of his innings before gaining the confidence to go for his strokes. He changed his stance for the third time in as many Tests by reverting to his exaggerated shuffle

across the stumps and that ended up paying rich dividends. The hands were moving well, which has always been integral to his game. One bowler, who should consider himself unlucky is Akash Deep who repeatedly beat Smith's outside edge without much success.

In the morning, Bumrah extended his dominance over the Australian openers before Reddy got into the act to leave the visitors at 104 for three at lunch.

Despite the pressure exerted by the Indian pacer, Australia were able to muster 76 runs in the session.

With the majority of day one lost due to rain, play started half an hour earlier than scheduled time and it did not take long for Bumrah what he has done thus far in the series.

Resuming at 28 for no loss, Australia lost Usman Khawaja (21 off 54) in the fourth over of the day when Bumrah had him caught behind with a ball that straightened slightly to take a faint outside edge. It was the third time Bumrah had got rid of the left-handed opener in the series.

In the following over, Bumrah sent back Nathan McSweeney (9 off 49) for the fourth time in three Tests, drawing a thick outside edge from an angle that travelled fast to Virat Kohli at second slip.

India were able to maintain pressure after the early breakthroughs with under pressure Smith and Mar-

nus Labuschagne (12 off 55) looking to occupy the crease.

Akash and Siraj did a pose a few questions to both Smith and Labuschagne but could not get the desired results.

Reddy, who got the ball to swing, ended Labuschagne's vigil in the 34th over of the innings. The India all-rounder drew the Australian number three to drive off a full ball and Labuschagne took the bait only to be caught by Kohli at second slip, leaving Australia at 75 for three.

Two overs later, there was a major scare in the Indian camp as Siraj walked off the field after feeling discomfort in his left leg in the middle of his over. He was seen holding his left knee but returned to the field much to India's relief.



Siraj is getting stick from "saints" of Australian cricket: Gavaskar

Indian legend Sunil Gavaskar has called out the double standards of the Australian cricket pundits for their criticism of Mohammed Siraj's aggressive send-off to Travis Head in the Day/Night Test in Adelaide. While Head said that Siraj's reaction was uncalled for, the Indian pacer on his part countered that the southpaw never said "well bowled" which he claimed to have told the media.

ICC warned Head and Siraj was fined 20 percent of his match fee but what has irked Gavaskar is the holier than thou attitude of some former Australian players. "Siraj is getting the stick from all the 'saints' in Australian cricket who, of course, were known for their impeccable behaviour on the field. It may have incensed Australian fans that Siraj's fiery send-off was directed at Head, who scored a magnificent century and was also the local boy," Gavaskar wrote in his column for Sydney Morning Herald.

SCOREBOARD	
Australia 1st Innings (28 for no loss overnight)	
Usman Khawaja c Pant b Bumrah	21
Nathan McSweeney c Kohli b Bumrah	9
Marnus Labuschagne c Kohli b Nitish Reddy	12
Steven Smith c Rohit b Bumrah	101
Travis Head c Pant b Bumrah	152
Mitchell Marsh c Kohli b Bumrah	5
Alex Carey batting	45
Pat Cummins c Pant b Siraj	20
Mitchell Starc batting	7
Extras: (lb-17, w-11, nb-5)	33
Total: 405/7 in 101 overs	

AUD 1 million revenue loss for Cricket Australia

Cricket Australia is set to lose AUD 1 million (approx Rs 5.4 crore) in gate receipts after being forced to hand out complete refund on tickets sold for the rain-hit day one of the Gabba Test between India and Australia. Only 13.2 overs were possible due to heavy downpour on Saturday when tickets were sold out. As per CA rules, if a minimum of 15 overs is bowled during the day fans are not eligible for a full refund. CA is set to lose a million dollars after being 10 balls short of the requisite number.

Sanjivani Jadhav tops among Indians

KEBEDE SHINES, KISSA UPSETS EBENYO IN MARATHON

Kolkata: Ethiopian Sutume Kebede retained the women's crown in the ninth edition of Tata Steel World 25K, the first World Athletics Gold Label Road Race at this distance, while Ugandan Stephen Kissa triumphed over the defending champion, Daniel Ebenyo from Kenya, in men's race on Sunday.

The Indian elite runners also returned with splendid performances, with Gulveer Singh setting a new event record and Sanjeevani taking the title in the women's category.

Confirming her entry just two weeks before the race, Kebede recovered from a stomach ailment just in time to defend her title here in a modest 1:19:17.

Having set a stand-alone World Best for 25K here while winning last year's race with a time of 1:18:47, the Ethiopian runner started her campaign in 2024 with fantastic personal best in half-marathon (1:04:37) and marathon (2:15:55) to take the top spots in Houston and Tokyo respectively.

Incidentally, her timing in Tokyo made her the eighth fastest among women marathoners to date.

Coming to Kolkata with confidence and the desire to excel, Kebede started the race with some ini-



tial challenges from Bahrain's Desi Jisa, the winner here in 2022, and Kenyan Viola Chpengeno, a third-place finisher in last year's Delhi half-marathon.

The Kenyan started fading in the waning stages of the race, thus allowing Kebede to become a clear leader after 23K.

The Ethiopian runner's winning time would have been better had Chpengeno continued with her for some more time. However, Kebede signed off 2024 with another winning note.

Chpengeno finished second in 1:19:44, while Jisa finished a distant third at 1:21:29.

Redemption for Kissa
Kissa salvaged some pride after logging his first win in an interna-

tional competition in five years.

He suffered two back-to-back debacles as a non-finisher at the Olympic Games in Tokyo (10,000m) and Paris (Marathon) and took only second spots in a couple of races in between.

Hence, making a podium finish on his debut at 25K brought a happy moment for the Ugandan to cherish for a long time.

The race kicked off with a fair bit of nippiness in the air as the top bunch of Ebenyo, Benson Kipruto, Kissa, and Haymanot Alew made past the 10K mark at 28:42 but upped the ante as they were still a few seconds behind their expectation.

Gulveer, Sanjeevani excel
Gulveer Singh (26) habitually

breaks the national record in every distance event. He has improved the national marks in 5000 and 10,000m twice this year.

The Guangzhou Asian Games bronze medallist, who just eight weeks ago became the Asian cross-country champion, is now turning his focus towards road running.

Sawan Barwal, the 2023 Asian half-marathon bronze medallist, led Gulveer in a significant portion of the race. As in the international category, Gulveer broke away from Sawan and sprinted to finish first and also registered another Indian Best at this distance by clocking 1:14:10.

Sawan clocked a close 1:14:11 to cross the finish line fractionally behind the leader. Gaurav Mathur completes the Indian podium in third place.

Sanjivani Jadhav, popular among women runners in the country, returned to Kolkata after 2022, where she was a top finisher among Indians. Kavita Yadav aided her by initially challenging Sanjivani before allowing her to run a solo race. The 28-year-old runner improved her best by over 5 minutes, winning in 1:29:08. Lili Das (1:30:58) and Kavita Yadav (1:32:19) took the next two spots among Indian women.



Zheng Si Wei and Huang Ya Qiong of China is congratulated by Chen Tang Jie and Toh Ee Wei of Malaysia after winning in the mixed doubles badminton match finals at the World Tour Finals in China on Sunday. Pic: PTI

India beat Pakistan in Women's Cup

Kuala Lumpur: Riding on a brilliant four-wicket haul by 17-year-old spinner Sonam Yadav and an entertaining batting by G Kamilini, India thrashed Pakistan by nine wickets in a Group A match of the U19 Women's T20 Asia Cup here on Sunday.

Left-arm spinner Sonam delivered her best international bowling figures of 4 for 6, helping India restrict the arch-rivals to just 67/7 in 20 overs. The total was then overhauled in 7.5 overs, with Kamilini play-

ing a stroke-filled, unbeaten knock of 44 runs off just 29 deliveries.

Electing to bat after winning the toss, only two Pakistan players, opener Komal Khan (24) and Fatima Khan (11) managed double-digit scores, with Sonam slaying the entire middle-order to send them reeling at 43 for six.

In reply, India lost opener Trisha Gongadi for a duck before Kamilini and Sanika Chalke (19 not out) were involved in an unbeaten match-winning 67-run

partnership. Wicketkeeper-batter Kamilini, 16, smashed four boundaries and three sixes to decimate the feeble Pakistan attack.

India will next play Nepal in their last Group A outing on Tuesday before the teams for the Super Four stage are decided.

Pakistan U19: 67 for 7 in 20 overs (Komal Khan 24, Sonam Yadav 4/6) lost to India U19: 68 for 11 in 7.5 overs (G Kamilini 44 not out) by 9 wickets.

-PTI

Money isn't the reason I play chess: Gukesh

Singapore: The "multi-millionaire" tag does "mean a lot" to new world champion D Gukesh but he doesn't play the game for material gains but for that unbridled joy, which he has been able to retain since the time a chess board used to be the "coolest toy" for him.

Gukesh, the 18-year-old from Chennai, is now richer by Rs 11.45 crore which he will receive from FIDE as prize money for beating Ding Liren of China in the final.

Gukesh's father Rajnikanth gave up his career as an ENT surgeon to accompany his son on the circuit while mother Padmakumari, who is a microbiologist, became the sole earner of the family.

Asked what exactly does being a multi-millionaire mean to him, Gukesh said, "It means a lot. When

I got into chess, we (as a family) had to make some hard decisions. My parents had gone through financial and emotional hardships. Now, we are more comfortable and parents don't need to think about those things," Gukesh told FIDE in an interview.

"Personally, money isn't the reason I play chess," he said.

He always tries to remember why he started playing the game when he got his first chess board.

"I am still the kid who loves chess. It used to be the coolest toy," the reticent world champion explained.

For him, his parents mean the world. Gukesh's dad doubles up as his manager by taking care of all the off-board activities and allowing him to concentrate on the game, while his mother is the emotional

and spiritual pillar of strength.

"She (mother) still says, I will be happy to know that you are a great chess player but I would be happier to hear that you are a greater person," Gukesh said.

Still in his teens, Gukesh feels that as a student of the game, the more he learns about chess, the more aware he will become of how little he knows.

"Even the greatest of players make a lot of mistakes. Even though technology is so advanced, there is still a lot to learn about chess. I strongly believe that the more you learn something, more you realise that you don't know that thing."

"Whenever I am on the chess board, I feel I learn something new. It's a process of unlimited beauty."

-PTI

Exceptional focus and patience

Gukesh broke the four-decade-old record of chess legend Garry Kasparov, who won the title in 1985 at the age of 22 years, 6 months, and 27 days. The President of the All-India Chess Federation, Nitin Narang, congratulated Gukesh on this achievement and said, "Gukesh's victory is not just a milestone in his career but also inscribes India's name in golden letters in the history of chess. Throughout the tournament, he displayed exceptional focus and patience, which is truly inspiring. Gukesh has emerged as a role model for the youth of today."

Narang said, "After the 'King of Chess,' Viswanathan Anand, it would not be wrong to call Gukesh the 'Crown Prince of Chess.' Today, Gukesh has proven himself to be the Abhimanyu of chess, breaking through his opponent's defenses with the right moves at the right time. In the truest sense, Gukesh has reaped the rewards of his ten years of hard work."

