THE PERFECT VO



Death toll seven; experts probe announced



'Slowdown due to multiple factors'



Shami in focus as engal face rampant Baroda in ... pg 10 quarters

CUET-UG: Students can appear for any subject irrespective of class 12 subjects

By Gunjan Sharma

New Delhi: CUET-UG will be conducted only as a computer-based test (CBT) from 2025 and students will be allowed to appear for any subject irrespective of the subjects studied in class 12, according to UGC Chairman Jagadesh Kumar.

In an interaction with PTI, Kumar said an expert panel set up by the University Grants Commission (UGC) conducted a review of the exam and proposed several changes.

"The exam will be conducted only in CBT mode from 2025 unlike hybrid mode last year. We have also reduced the number of subjects from 63 to 37 and admissions for the dropped subjects will be conducted on the basis of scores of the General Aptitude Test (GAT)," Kumar said.

"Candidates will also be allowed to opt for subjects in CUET-UG which they haven't studied in class 12 to allow the students to



cross over the rigid disciplinary boundaries in higher education," he added.

Explaining the changes in the 2025 edition of the exam, Kumar said students will be able to appear for CUET-UG in a maximum of five subjects as against six previously.

"Similarly, the exam duration which varied from 45 minutes to 60 minutes depending upon the subject, has now been standardised as 60 minutes. The concept of optional questions in the exam has also been done away with and all questions will be compulsory now,"

Kumar said. In the first edition of the exam in 2022, CUET-UG was plagued by technical glitches. Also, as a result of tests for a subject being conducted over multiple shifts, the scores had to be normalised during the announcement of results.

The exam was conducted in hybrid mode for the first time in 2024. It was cancelled across Delhi a night before it was to be held citing logistical reasons.

No mismatch in votes polled, **VVPAT: ECI**

Mumbai: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Tuesday said no mismatch was found between the votes polled and corresponding tally of Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail slips in random counting in the last month's Maharashtra assembly elections.

The mandatory counting of VVPAT slips from five randomly selected polling stations in each assembly constituency was completed successfully, the ECI said in a statement.

Opposition parties in the state had questioned the integrity of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) after the ruling BJP-led Mahayuti coalition won a landslide victory in the November 20 elections.

The counting of VVPAT slips aims to verify the tally of votes recorded EVMs against the corresponding VVPAT slips, the ECI said, adding that representatives of candidates were present throughout the process.

In Maharashtra's 288 assembly constituencies, officials verified a total of 1,440 VVPAT machines. Representatives of candidates and EC observers randomly selected polling stations, the statement said.

"There was no discrepancy found between the candidate-wise vote counts recorded in EVMs and the corresponding counts from the VVPAT slips.



Volunteers during launch of the global campaign on women's safety 'Secure our City', with 100 women from various walks of life on board a chartered flight at Chennai International Airport in Chennai on Tuesday.

Plea for Durgadi fort

Muslim trust's claim on mosque rejected

Thane: The Kalyan civil court on Tuesday dismissed a suit filed by a Muslim trust claiming ownership of a mosque inside Durgadi fort in the district, ruling in favour of the Government Maharashtra.

The legal battle over the mosque and Edgga (prayer space) inside the fort was going on since 1976 when Mailish-e-Mushavreen Majjid Trust filed the suit.

The fort also houses a Hindu temple.

The mosque and Edgga

space were being used by er, held that the trust did the local Muslim community for daily prayers until

Kalyan Municipal Council, the suit claimed. Civil Judge, Senior Division A S Lanjewar, howev-

1968 when the Government

of Maharashtra granted

lease of the premises to the

not file the suit within three years from the date of dispossession, as prescribed under the Limitation Act. The suit was barred by limitation and hence liable to be rejected under the Civil Procedure Code, the judge said.

India finish sixth in Handball

New Delhi: India lost to 10time silver medallists China 30-41 to finish sixth. their beat-ever performance at the Asian Women's Handball Championship (AWHC) here on Tuesday.

India gave a spirited fight to heavyweights China in the 5th-6th place playoff match before losing the encounter.

Japan stunned reigning and record champions South Korea in a gripping final, overturning a 9-12 deficit from half-time into a 25-24 win.

Japan claimed their second title, breaking South Korea's streak of seven straight championship

India began their bout in high spirits, leading to a combative opening in which both teams fought for zonal domination.

As the game progressed, China, using their considerable experience at this level, opened up a small gap before racing away to victory

India's Menika remained upbeat about her side's performance across the tournament. "We'll learn from our mistakes and we're looking forward to the next opportunity."

'Need to probe if driver used vehicle as weapon'

Mumbai: Police on Tuesday informed a court here that they needed to probe if the driver of the BEST bus that moved down seven persons and injured 42 others had committed the act "deliberately" and used the vehicle as a "weapon".

The court has remanded the driver, Sanjay More (54), to police custody till Decem-



der) and 110 (attempt to commit culpable homicide) of the Bharatiya Nyaya San-



The bus operated by the Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking hit several vehicles and pedestrians in the incident, 9.30 pm on Monday on the SG Barve Marg in Kurla (West)

sections 105 (culpable homi-

cide not amounting to mur-



civic-run Brihanmumbai which took place at around

More was detained after the incident. He was later arrested and booked under

hita and relevant provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act.

The police produced him before a magistrate court and sought his remand, citing that the alleged crime was serious and a thorough investigation was needed.

It submitted that it needed to investigate the accused's intention in committing the crime and if there was any conspiracy.

Police further said it

needed to probe if the driver used the bus in his possession as a "weapon" and drove it recklessly in a congested area, endangering the lives of passengers and pedestrians.

It is necessary to investigate if the accused had received the training to drive the bus and if he was under the influence of narcotics at the time of the incident. they said.

Police also said the transport department was yet to examine the bus involved in an accident.

Opposing the police's plea, More's lawyer, Samadhan Sulane, said the accident could have occurred due to technical fault in the

He argued that it was the administration's responsibility to thoroughly check these vehicles before handing them over to drivers.

The lawyer also cited the examples of vehicles catching fire due to short circuits and said More had received proper training and had been driving the bus regularly.

After hearing arguments from both sides, the court remanded the accused to the custody of police till December 21.



Nobel laureate in physiology or medicine Gary Ruvkun holds his award during the Nobel Prize ceremony in Stockholm, Sweden on Tuesday.

Do more to stop atrocities against Hindus in B'desh: RSS

Nagpur: RSS leader Sunil Ambekar on Tuesday said the government should take "more concrete steps" to stop atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh, and also speak to other countries for this purpose.

Ambekar, all-India prachar pramukh' of the Sangh, spoke at a gathering organised here under the banner of `Sakal Hindu Samaj' to condemn attacks on minority Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and other communities in the neighbouring country.

Every Hindu should be outraged by what is happening in Bangladesh, he said, adding, "The Indian government should take more concrete steps '

The Bangladesh government should ensure that atrocities against Hindus stop and the guilty are punished, and the Indian government should speak with other countries as part of efforts to stop these atrocities, Ambekar said.

He expressed hope that foreign secretary Vikram Misri's visit to the neighbouring country would lead to some solution.

If it yielded no positive outcome, India will have to find some other remedy, Ambekar said.

Certain global powers were behind those creating trouble in Bangladesh, and "we need to identify such powers and expose them and tell them to stop such things with regard to Hindus in our country and in other countries as well."

The arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das and attack on his lawyer in Bangladesh crossed the limit of atrocities, Ambekar added.

Bangladeshi Hindus have conveyed a very inspiring message that they are not running away but raising voice against the atrocities unitedly, he said.

Rajnath meets Putin in Moscow

New Delhi: India-Russia friendship is "higher than the highest mountain and deeper than the deepest ocean", Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said at a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Tuesday.

Both leaders expressed that the partnership between the countries holds immense potential and combined efforts will pave the way for remarkable outcomes, an Indian readout of the meeting said.

Singh called on Putin after co-chairing the 21st session of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military Cooperation along with Russian Defence Minister Andrey Belousov.

"During the meeting, Rainath Singh said 'friendship between our countries is higher than the highest mountain and deeper than the deepest ocean'," the readout by the defence ministry said.

Singh conveyed to Putin that India has always stood by its Russian friends and will continue to do so in future, it said. The defence minister also conveyed warm greetings of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to President Putin.

IPL, World Cup, elections top Google India searches in 2024

New Delhi: A Google blog released on Tuesday revealed that sports and politics dominated search queries in 2024, with the IPL, World Cup, and election results featuring prominently

in the trending topics. India's searches spanned a fascinating spectrum -- a vibrant mix of sports fervour and entertainment love across languages to also exploring indie music hits, memes, and quirky lingo, according to the blog.

Indian Premier League,

T20 World Cup, Olympics, Pro Kabaddi League, and Indian Super League featured in the overall top trending search list.

Sports accounted for five of the top ten trending searches for individuals, with Vinesh Phogat, Hardik Pandya, Shahshank Singh, Abhishek Sharma, and Lakshya Sen emerging as the most popular figures.

Also, in the top 10 rankings were election results 2024, Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), and Indian National

Congress (INC). People also expressed questions and concerns about weather and health, with trending searches for "excessive heat" and "AQI (Air Quality Index) near

me", as per the blog. India's pursuit of entertainment showcased a variety of interests, encompassing different genres, languages, and diverse styles of music.

Stree 2, Kalki 2898, 12t Fail, Laapataa Ladies, and Hanu-Man were the most



searched movies, while web shows like Heeramandi, Mirzapur, Big Boss 17, and Panchayat topped the

Songs like Nadaaniyan, Husn, Illuminati, and Katchi Sera were the most looked up on Google with its 'Hum to Search' feature, according to the blog.

This year's top trending meme was all about relationships, with the "Orange Peel Theory" meme, sparking online conversations. "Throning Dating" emerged as the most trending datingrelated search.

The "Hamster Meme" and "Very Demure, Very Mindful" meme also gained popularity.

People searched for the meanings of GenZ lingo like "Pookie," "demure," and "Moye Moye".

The Palestine conflict sparked local interest, with many people inquiring about the phrase "All Eyes on Rafah'

Meanwhile, the Lok Sabha elections ignited a surge in searches related to India's political scene, as individuals sought to understand the outcomes and their consequences, making "How to vote Lok Sabha" the most popular "How To"

India's culinary interest was well mirrored in recipe

searches for Ugadi Pachadi, Chammanthi, and Onam Sadhya, alongside cocktails and pickles.

The wanderlust soul in Indians led them to journeys spanning from the beaches of Bali to the historic streets of Azerbaijan. which became a popular choice this year. Closer home, the mountains of Manali and the lively city of Jaipur called out to travellers in search of adventure and cultural experiences.

Padalkar dares Pawar to make Sule resign

ichand Padalkar on Tuesday dared NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar to ask his daughter and grandnephew to resign as MP and MLA, respectively, if they don't trust EVMs.

This remark of Padalkar, a vocal critic of Pawar, comes amid an intense debate in the opposition camp over the credibility of EVMs following the massive rout in the Maharashtra assembly polls.

BJP MLA Padalkar and MLC Sadabhau Khot addressed a public meeting in Markadwadi village in Solapur district which has emerged as the epicentre of anti-EVM protests after villagers unsuccessfully tried to hold a mock "repoll" using ballot papers last week.

Separately, Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole visited the village under the Malshiras assembly constituency to express solidarity with villagers.

Patole alleged that attempts are being made to



abrogate the voting rights of people by using Electronic Voting Machines in elections.

"Amid such attempts, people of Markadwadi have revolted for the protection of Indian democracy. I am here to understand the sentiments of the people and to witness the movement started by them," the Congress leader told reporters.

Patole claimed several villages in Maharashtra are adopting resolutions in their gram sabhas against EVMs in future polls.

"Villagers of Mangaon in Raigad district tried to demonstrate the functioning of EVM but police stopped them. Why is the government stopping peo-

Kolewadi gram sabha in Satara district has resolved to conduct future elections on

ballot papers, becoming the second village in the state to pass a resolution against

represented by senior Congress leader and former chief minister Prithviraj Chavan. He

lost the electoral contest in November against BJP candidate Atul Bhosale by 39,355

The resolution was passed after residents of Kolewadi expressed doubts over the

This resolution was passed days after a section of villagers from Markadwadi in

Solapur's Malshiras constituency tried to conduct mock "re-polling" using ballot

papers expressing doubt on the credibility of EVMs. Their bid was thwarted by the

"The resolution was passed on December 2 in the gram sabha meeting respecting

ballot papers and not on EVMs," Shankarrao Patil, husband of the village sarpanch

the sentiments of villagers who demanded that upcoming elections be held on

The village comes under the Karad (South) assembly constituency, earlier

Village passes resolution to use ballot papers

administration and police, leading to the registration of cases.

votes cast through Electronic Voting Machines.

Ratnamala Patil, said on Tuesday.

know who they voted for?" Patole said the opposition would raise the injustice meted out to several residents of Markadwadi who were booked by police with the administration and the Election Commission.

Addressing a public meeting, Padalkar accused Sharad Pawar of trying to portray the Dhangar community in Markadwadi village negatively.

"Pawar tried to create the impression that the Dhangar community is against the democratic election process. I have come here to foil Pawar's attempts," the Dhangar leader said.

In a stinging attack on Pawar, Padalkar said, "One Sharad Pawar is born after 100 Shakuni mamas die".

"Pawar tried to create an impression that Dhangars didn't believe in law. In 100 villages in the (Malshiras) constituency, why Markadwadi was chosen (for anti-EVM protest)? The Dhangar community respects democracy," Padalkar said.

> Padalkar alleged. Markadwadi village hit the news last week after a section of villagers tried to conduct mock "re-polling" using ballot papers expressing doubt about the credibility of EVMs. Their bid was thwarted by the administration and police, leading to the registration of cases

protests against EVMs.

its representative,'

Padalkar said while term-

ing Pawar as the "greatest

the opposition MVA's vic-

tory in the Lok Sabha elec-

tions but when the tables

were turned and Mahayuti

triumphed in the assembly

polls, the NCP (SP) chief is

described as the politics of

betrayal. People used to re-

gard Pawar as a smart poli-

tician but this Markadwadi

episode shows his wisdom

is also exhausted,"

"Pawar's politics can be

taking refuge in EVMs.

He said Pawar had hailed

betrayer".

According to villagers, the winning candidate from Malshiras constituency, Uttam Jankar who belongs to NCP (SP), should have secured a huge margin but fell short due to discrepan-



People take part in a protest organised by Sakal Hindu Samaj against the atrocities on religious minorities in Bangladesh in Nagpur on Tuesday.

Four friends die in accident

Latur: Four men in their twenties, returning after celebrating a friend's selection in the State Reserve Police Force, died after their car collided with a truck. The accident took place at Waghala near Ambajogai, police said.

Azim Pashamiya Shaikh (30), resident of Karepur village, was recently selected for the SRPF, and he and five of his friends visited Manjarsumbha on Monday night for celebration, said an official.

On the way back, their car collided with a truck on the Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar-Latur road. Balaji Mane (27), Deepak Savare (30) and Farukh Shaikh (30) died on the spot, while Hrithik Gaikwad (24) succumbed at hospital.

Sarpanch abducted, killed in Beed; two held

Chhatrapati Sambajinagar: A village head was allegedly abducted and murdered by a group of persons following an enmity in Maharashtra's Beed district, police said on Tuesday.

Two persons have been arrested in connection with the incident which took place in Kej area on Monday, they said.

Massajog village sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh was abducted from a toll plaza located near Dongaon Fata village in Beed at around 3 pm on

Monday. While the sarpanch was crossing the toll plaza in a car along with his cousin Shivraj Deshmukh in the driver's seat, a black fourwheeler with six persons arrived there, as per the

One of the six persons then vandalised the driver's side glass window of the sarpanch's car. Another person came to

the co-driver's side, pulled Santosh Deshmukh out of the vehicle and took him to the black car while beating him up with a stick, the FIR said.

The car carrying the sarpanch then moved towards Kej.

Another car, suspected to be carrying some associates of the kidnappers, then followed the black vehicle, as per police.

Shivraj Deshmukh later approached the police with a complaint, alleging the sarpanch was abducted over a previous enmity with some persons.

The complainant also

identified the person to whom the black car belonged.

The police subsequently registered a case against the alleged car owner and five other unidentified persons under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections for intentionally causing harm, voluntarily obstructing the way and abduction with the intent to murder,

as per the FIR. Later, police found a body in Daithana area of Kej and the deceased was identified as sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh, as per an official.

So far, two persons have been arrested in connection with the case, Beed Superintendent of Police Avinash Bargal told PTI over phone.

MMR Growth Hub Project initiated

MHADA HOLDS WORKSHOP TO DRIVE EIGHT LAKH AFFORDABLE HOUSING GOALS BY 2030

By Correspondent

Mumbai: The Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) conducted a workshop on Tuesday to outline a comprehensive roadmap for the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) Growth Hub Project. The workshop focused on engaging stakeholders, including private developers and construction professionals, to gather their inputs, address challenges, and collaboratively shape solutions. Discussions emphasized participatory decision-making, covering key aspects such as premiums, building permissions, and the practical difficulties faced by stakeholders in implementing housing and redevelopment projects.

This ambitious initiative, a key component of NITI Aayog's vision, aims to propel MMR's GDP from \$140 billion in 2023 to \$300 billion by 2030, while addressing critical housing shortages, expediting redevelopment, and generating substantial employment opportunities.

The workshop was led by Sanjeev Jaiswal, Vice President & CEO, MHADA, who

presented a detailed vision for the project. Senior officials, including Milind Shambharkar, Chief Officer, Mumbai Building Repairs & Reconstruction Board, Milind Borikar, IAS. Chief Officer, Mumbai Board, MHADA, and Anil Wankhede, Deputy CEO. MHADA, shared their insights and strategies to achieve the ambitious targets set for Year 2030. Jaiswal highlighted that

the MMR Growth Hub Project aligns with NITI Aayog's vision of economic transformation, aiming to contribute to India's larger goal of achieving a \$1.5 trillion economy by 2047. He elaborated on seven key pillars driving the project, including affordable housing, global service hubs, tourism and recreation, transit-oriented development, inclusivity, sustainability, and advanced infrastructure. A central focus of the project is the delivery of 3 million affordable housing units by 2030, of which 2.2 million units will be completed through slum rehabilitation (SRA) and 800,000 through affordable housing schemes



He highlighted that MMR was chosen for this initiative due to its under utilised potential in housing development. To achieve this target given by NITI Aayog private developers' role is very important.

Shambharkar stressed the need for regulatory reforms to expedite stalled projects. He highlighted issues related to policies under 33(7) and 33(9), which propose for amendments for faster approvals and smoother implementation. He also emphasized the role of 91(A) in mandating the demolition of unsafe buildings to protect the public. Furthermore, he proposed the creation of an online portal to improve transparency, facilitate redevelopment propsal approvals, and manage citizen grievances more efficiently.

Borikar presented MHA-DA's ambitious housing targets, stating that 8 lakh housing units will be delivered by 2030, including 2,25 lakh houses across MHADA Mumbai Boards 114 layouts, with redevelopment playing a crucial role.

He emphasized the importance of affordable pricing and how MHADA plans to utilize 2000 hectares of land for cluster-based redevelopment, which will ensure sustainable urban planning and infrastructure upgrades. He further stressed that government collaboration to reduce project costs would make housing more affordable, benefiting middle- and low-income families.

Wankhede shared MHA-DA's focus on innovative housing models that address diverse population needs. He highlighted plans for housing categories such as rental housing, student hostels, shared units, and industrial housing, which are designed to align with the evolving urban demands of MMR.

The workshop concluded with a call for collaboration among government agencies, private developers, and citizens to achieve the ambitious goals of the MMR Growth Hub Project.

Tension in Parbhani

Mumbai: An unidentified person on Tuesday damaged a replica of the Constitution held by the statue of B R Ambedkar outside Parbhani railway station, triggering arson and stone-pelting, police said.

A crowd of around 200 people gathered near the statue after the word spread about the damage caused to the replica of the Constitution and slogans were raised, a senior police official said.

Stones were hurled and incidents of arson were also reported from the area, he said.

Meanwhile, protesters suddenly rushed towards the railway station around 6 pm. Some demonstrators pulled down the locomotive pilot of the Nandigram Express train and roughed him up, the official said.

They blocked the railway tracks for over 30 minutes before being evicted by Government Railway Police (GRP) and local police personnel.

The train finally left the Parbhani station around 6:52 PM.

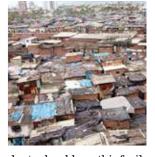
Protesters demanded strict action against the person responsible. The situation is peaceful now, the official added.

DRP call centre for residents

By Correspondent

Mumbai: The Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP) has intensified its efforts to engage with residents and address their concerns with a robust outreach programme that includes a dedicated call centre, periodic community meetings, and presurvey awareness campaigns.

The DRP call centre, comprising a team of 10 telecallers proficient in Marathi, Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati and English makes and receives over 8000 calls every month to inform residents about the ongoing door-to-door surveys and to address their queries. "We urge Dharavikars to use the toll-free helpline (1-800-268-8888) more proactively to seek clarifications on issues such as eligibility, documentation requirements, their entitlements etc. We are trying to increase the frequency of calls for better outreach. We expect similar cooperation from residents to make this a more fruitful exercise," said a DRP-SRA official emphasising how resi-



dents should use this facility more frequently and seriously to get their doubts cleared.

To further build trust and share accurate information, DRP is regularly organising meetings with community leaders and influencers. These key individuals are playing a pivotal role in assisting the survey process by addressing local concerns and cascading critical information to slum clusters. Such engagements have proven useful in countering misinformation and easing resistance on the ground.

Besides direct outreach, the DRP has implemented a range of other awareness initiatives. These include door-to-door visits, distribution of pamphlets, and large-scale community meetings with slum

Gadgil gets UN's highest environmental honour

New Delhi: The United Nations on Tuesday recognised ecologist Madhav Gadgil with the annual Champions of the Earth award, the UN's highest environmental honour, for his seminal work in the Western Ghats, a global biodiversity hotspot.

Gadgil, the only Indian on the list of this year's award recipients, chaired the government-constituted Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel to study the impact of population pressure, climate change, and development activities on the ecologically fragile region in India.

led by MHADA and CIDCO.

in 2011 that the entire hill range be declared an Eco-

It also recommended a ban on mining, quarrying, new thermal power plants. projects in ESZ 1. However, faced opposition from state

The panel recommended

logically Sensitive Area (ESA) and divided into three Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZ 1, 2, and 3) based on their environmental sensitivity.

hydropower projects, and large-scale wind energy these recommendations



governments, industries, and local communities.

In an interview with PTI. Gadgil said he was happy that he stood up for what's

"There are not many who would write the kind of

very honest reports, including official reports like the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, which provide very concrete facts and bring out a clear picture. It is available for people to look at, understand the issues, and engage in at least some good, honest discussion," the 82-year-old nature scientist said.

"I can certainly feel happy for standing up and writing such a report, which nobody ever writes." He said even when he was writing the report, many people advised him to refrain from

being "so honest", as it would have made the ruling classes unhappy.

"I said, 'Look, I am a citizen of India, and I have been asked to write this Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel report as a citizen of India, and I will make recommendations which are completely in line with our Constitution and with the facts on the ground," Gadgil recalled.

He said the gap between the haves and have-nots in accessing information is narrowing, and a lot of people are now readily able to access what he has written.

"Even if the government did not agree and translate it into all the Indian languages, now the facilities on the internet are available with very good translations. People are accessing it, and there is an awareness, and I can see signs of that," he said.

Gadgil said eventually, it will be people's awareness and their ability to get organised and resist this environmental degradation that will begin to turn the

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Women run your houses. Whatever budget you give them, they're running your house, and they're running it in the best

comparison?"

possible way-not just financially, but emotionally and in every way. They're keeping families together. What is a company in

> Vidya Balan, Actor

Death toll seven; experts probe announced

Mumbai: The death toll in the BEST bus accident in Mumbai has risen to seven, officials on Tuesday said as experts inspected the wet leased vehicle to ascertain if it had any mechanical fault.

As many as 42 other persons were also rushed to various hospitals after being injured in the incident on the SG Barve Marg in Kurla (West) at around 9.30 pm on Monday when the bus dashed into pedestrians and some vehicles after its driver lost control over the wheels, they said.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday expressed deep sorrow over the loss of lives in the incident and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured persons.

In a message on X, Fadnavis announced a financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh to the kin of each of the deceased from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund

The medical expenses of the injured will be covered by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation and the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking, he

"We stand with the families of those who lost their lives in this unfortunate incident. I pray for the speedy recovery of the injured," the CM said.

Necessary instructions had been issued to ensure the victims and their families receive prompt assistance, he assured.

The BEST bus, after ploughing through pedestrians and vehicles, entered into a residential society, Buddha Colony, and came to



a halt, the officials said.

Three deaths were reported on Monday.

A civic official on Tuesday said the death toll in the incident has gone up to

The official said a total of 49 persons were rushed to various hospitals after the

Of them, 35 were taken to the civic-run Bhabha Hospital in Kurla. Two of them were brought dead, while two others were declared dead after admission at the medical facility, the official

Later, six injured persons were shifted from the Bhabha Hospital to Sion Hospital where one of them died during treatment.

Out of the total 49 injured, three were rushed to the private Kohinoor Hospital nearby where one person was declared dead, while the condition of the other two was reported to be critical.

Six other injured persons were taken to the private Habib Hospital where one of

them was declared dead while the others were undergoing treatment.

Four police personnel were also injured in the accident. They were admitted to the civic-run Seven Hills Hospital and their condition was stable.

Besides, a 35-year-old man was admitted to the private City Hospital in Kurla, the official said

Police took the bus driver, Sanjay More, into custody after the incident and he was booked on charges of culpable homicide not amounting to murder, as per officials.

His blood samples were also collected to examine whether he was under the influence of alcohol, an of-

In details shared with the (RTO) said. media after more than five hours of the accident, BEST

said "as per the initial infor-

mation, the driver lost con-

the accident, in which sev-

eral vehicles were dragged

or damaged along the way,

the transport body said the

bus "speed accelerated" af-

ter the driver lost control

A BEST official said the

bus suffered extensive dam-

age on its front portion and

windscreen and some win-

dow glasses were also shat-

The bus was removed

from the spot with the help

of a crane and an earth mov-

er machine at around 12.30

am on Tuesday and brought

A team of motor vehicle

inspectors examined the bus

to find out if there was any

mechanical problem in it.

They will submit a report to

police on the basis of their

findings, sources at the Re-

gional Transport Office

to Kurla depot by 1.15 am.

tered in the accident.

trol of the bus".

over the wheels.

The bus was a 12-metre long electric vehicle manufactured by Hyderabadbased Olectra Greentech and it had been taken by Further commenting on BEST on wet lease, an official earlier said.

> No official communication was received so far from the wet leasing company EVEY Trans and Olectra on the accident.

Meanwhile, the Mumbai police shut the SG Barve Marg, connecting to Kurla station, for traffic movement.

As a result, BEST was operating buses on as many as 10 routes from other nearby locations instead of plying to Kurla station, an official from the transport body

Barve road is one of the busiest routes connecting to Kurla station.

Scores of passengers travel in buses from Kurla bus stand located on Barve road to reach the Bandra-Kurla Complex and other

Newbies in the House

Disciple victorious against mentor

By Ruddhi Phadke

Then Uddhav Thackeray received the news of Jogeshwari East MLA Ravindra Waikar's defection to a rival party in April this year, the Shiv Sena (UBT) chief promptly thought of Anant Nar, as the man who could replace Waikar. The former councilor and once a close aide of Waikar, was told to prepare for the state assembly elections. He was pitted opposite Waikar's wife Manisha from Jogeshwari East. The brain behind Manisha was her husband, a Member of Parliament, who planned and ran the campaign for her. The close fight saw Nar defeat Manisha by a mere 1541 votes.

Nar has been a member of the undivided Shiv Sena for the past 35 years was a councilor for the last 10 years. He was also the president of the Ward Committee, Improvement Committee and Building Committee of the cash rich Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation. That helped him expanding his reach in the

However, Nar's heart lies in the Shiv Sena shakha. Like any grassroots worker, he has made it a habit to visit the shakha every evening and listen to the problems of the people. Jogeshwari has the most vibrant Shiv Sena shakha in Mumbai.

Nar's connect with the ordinary workers and the party's robust network on ground gave him the confidence that he could take over the mighty Waikars. Ravindra Waikar was a councilor for 10 years and the only person to have got an opportunity to lead the BMC standing committee, a powerful decision making body, twice. He led it for four years. He subsequently won the assembly elections from Jogeshwari since 2009. Waikar and his wife Manisha were known as members of Thackeray's 'kitchen cabinet' when Uddhav Thackeray was the Chief Minister between 2019-2022.

Nar was confident about his victory. Their choice of candidate was wrong, he told The Perfect Voice. "I have a thorough understanding of the constituency. I understand the issues of the people. I



Anant Nar

have worked on ground for over 35 years," he says. Nar joined the Shiv Sena in 1986 soon after completing school. Although he didn't pursue education after school. Nar had the foresight to build a CBSE board-affiliated BMC school in Jogeshwari East. He even conceptualized Shilpagram, a garden that resonates Indian culture. "My hard work prompted Uddhavji to give me the opportunity to contest 2024 Assembly elections," he said.

The victory means that Nar has a body of work to finish. Development funds may be difficult as the Shiv Sena (UBT) is not in power and Waikar may not fully cooperate with the MLA who defeated his wife. Jogeshwari East has witnessed a lot of new housing projects in the last couple years. The middle class and low middle class residents, however, are still struggling to get their houses redeveloped. These are the core voters of the Shiv Sena. Nar has won their trust. Now, it is time to deliver on the promises made to them.

Driver arrested; had no experience of driving EVs

Mumbai: The driver of a BEST bus that mowed down seven persons in Kurla area here had no experience of driving electric vehicles (EVs), police said on Tuesday, as he was arrested for `culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

He had undergone only a ten-day training for driving electric buses, the driver allegedly told police.

The civic-run Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking said it has set up a committee to probe the tragedy, even as local BJP leaders demanded that it review the wet-lease model under which buses are hired from private contractors.

Sanjay More (54), the driver, was first detained and later arrested under sections 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and 110 (attempt to commit culpable homicide) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and relevant provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, a police official said.

He was produced before a magistrate's court which remanded him in police custody till December 21.

The bus hit several vehicles and pedestrians



around 9.30 pm in the crowded Kurla (West) locality after the driver lost

During his interrogation, More told police he had started driving BEST's electric buses only since December 1, and prior to that he drove mini buses, said an official.

He also claimed to have undergone training for electric buses only for 10 days, and told police that he could not control the bus on Monday night as he had no experience, the official

Police found More mentally alert during the interrogation, and primary medical reports suggested he was not under the influence of alcohol, the official

Meanwhile, the 12-metre long bus, manufactured by

Hyderabad-based Olectra Greentech, was examined by forensic science experts and Regional Transport Officers to ascertain if it had any mechanical failures that led to the accident.

The injured persons were undergoing treatment at various hospitals including Bhabha Hospital, Sion Hospital and Seven Hills Hospital, police said, adding that condition of some of the injured persons was critical.

The injured included four police personnel, who were on bandobast duty at the time. Their condition was said to be stable.

Locals caught driver More after the accident, and thrashed him before handing him over to police, officials said.

Some people mistook the conductor of the bus for the driver and he was also beaten up, said an eye-witness.

In a statement, BEST said a committee, headed by Chief Manager (Transport) Ramesh Madavi, will investigate the accident.

BEST would provide Rs two lakh each to the families of those who lost their lives and bear treatment expenses of the injured, it



Driver sent to police custody till December 21

Mumbai: A Mumbai court on Tuesday remanded the driver of the BEST bus involved in an accident, which claimed seven lives and left 42 others injured, to police custody till December 21.

The driver, Sanjay More, has been booked for 'culpable homicide not amounting to murder', a day after the horrific

The bus operated by the civic-run Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and



Sanjay More

Transport (BEST) undertaking hit several vehicles and pedestrians at around 9.30 pm on Monday on the SG Barve Marg in Kurla

More, who was at the wheel of the bus was detained after the accident and later arrested under the provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita

The police produced him before a magistrate court's and sought his remand for further probe into the accident.

The court allowed the police plea and sent More to their custody till De-

A heartbreaking tale of lives cut short

Mumbai: Twenty-year-old Afreen Shah had ambitions bright as the morning sun when she left home, eager to begin her first day at work. Her father Abdul Salim

Shah's heart swelled with pride, unaware that this would be the last time he would see his daughter

In a cruel twist of fate, Afreen became one of the seven victims who were mowed down by a runaway BEST bus on SG Barve

Shah last spoke to his daughter when she was struggling to get an autorickshaw to return home after her first day at a new job with a private company and was advised by him to walk towards the highway to look for an alternative mode of transport.

"It was her first day at work at a new company. After work, she reached Kurla railway station, from where she called me at 9.09 pm saying she was not getting an auto rickshaw for Shivaji Nagar," he recalled.

"I told her to walk towards the highway and get an auto rickshaw. But, at 9.54 pm, I got a call from my daughter's phone, and it was a staffer from Bhabha Hos-



pital," Shah said. Among the victims was

also Vijav Gaikwad, a retired railway employee. Just moments before his life was tragically snuffed out, he told his family he was stepping out of their home for a simple errand.

Those would be the last words they would ever hear from him, leaving his loved ones grappling with the unbearable weight of loss.

Gaikwad resided in the Brahmanwadi area close to the spot where the incident occurred. A shopkeeper, who witnessed the incident, said Gaikwad was the first person to be hit by the BEST bus before it rammed into other victims.

Local resident Zaid Ahmed, who rushed to the scene, recalled the horrifying moment. "I heard a loud noise and ran to the spot. The bus had hit pedestrians and several vehicles. I saw dead bodies in front of my

Kin allege gold earrings stolen from victim's body

Mumbai: Family members of Mumbai resident Kaneez Ansari, who was among the seven persons killed in the BEST bus crash, on Tuesday alleged gold earrings were missing from her body after she was shifted to civic-run Bhabha Hospital in Kurla.

They also claimed when her body was being taken to Rajawadi Hospital, another municipal medical facility, for a post-mortem they were asked to pay for the coffin, medicines as well as ambulance.

"We gave Rs 900 for ambulance. We did not get any facility," said one of the relatives.

An out of control bus of the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking rammed into pedestrians and vehicles on the SG Barve Road in Kurla (West) on Monday night, killing seven persons and injur-

ing 42 others. Abid Sheikh, son-in-law of Kaneez Ansari (55), described the horrific accident and how it snuffed out her life.

"My mother-in-law worked as an aayah (attendant) in Desai Hospital in front of the Anjum Islam School. She used to usuallv leave home for her workplace at around 8 pm, but on Monday she left at around 9 pm.

"She was standing outside Desai Hospital when suddenly a bus dashed her. She was stuck between a vehicle and the BEST bus. We got a call from her mobile phone someone asking us to immediately rush to



Bhabha Hospital," Sheikh

When Kaneez Ansari was brought to the civicrun hospital, her gold earrings were intact, he said. "However, when we saw

the body for a second time

in the hospital afterwards, her earrings were missing. We told top officials as well as the dean of the hospital about it, but they asked us to wait till panchnama (a verification and assessment exercise) was done," Sheikh said.

Kaneez Ansari, a resident of Kurla (West), was brought dead to Bhabha Hospital.

Medical Superintendent of Bhabha Hospital Padmashree Ahire said "Family members of Kaneez Ansari have brought to

our notice an incident (of theft of ornaments from her body). We are verifying CCTV footage of the hospital to ascertain the facts and will take appropriate action in the matter."

Kaneez Ansari, who is survived by two sons, was the only earning person in her family. She lost her husband long back.

Her family members were not satisfied with the compensation for the bus accident victims announced by the Maharashtra government. Chief Minister Deven-

dra Fadnavis has announced a financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh to the kin of each of the deceased from the CM's Relief Fund. Another relative of Ka-

neez Ansari, Sameer Ansari, said BEST drivers often steer buses in a very rash manner. "Many times we have

complained against such bus drivers, but nothing has been done...it reflects failure of the government," he said.

Pak's former spymaster indicted

By Sajjad Hussain

Islamabad: In an unprecedented move, Pakistan's former spymaster Lt Gen (retd.) Faiz Hameed has been indicted on multiple charges, including engaging in political activities, violating the Official Secrets Act, and misusing authority and government resources, the army said on Tuesday.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the military's media wing, the process of Field General Court Martial (FGCM) was initiated against Hameed on August 12, 2024.

The former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief was charged under provisions of the Pakistan Army Act and "in first place Lt Gen Faiz Hameed (Retd) has been formally arraigned on charges of engaging in political activities, violations of Official Secret Act detrimental to safety and interest of the state, misuse of authority & government resources and causing wrongful loss to a person(s).'

"During the process, involvement of Lt Gen Faiz Hameed (Retd), in events related to creating agitation and unrest, leading up to multiple incidents including but not limited to 9th May 2023 incident for fomenting instability; at the behest of and in collusion with vested political interests, is also being separately investigated," it added.



The military said that the former general was being provided all legal rights as per the law.

Hameed, who served as director general of the ISI from 2019 to 2021, was considered extremely powerful when he headed the spy agency. He was appointed to the coveted post when then ISI chief and current Army chief Lt Gen Asim Munir was prematurely removed from the post. It was reported then that then Prime Minister Imran Khan was not happy with Munir.

Later, the army decided to replace Hameed, a move vehemently opposed by Khan and it is believed that it was the beginning of the souring of his ties with the powerful military.

Hameed resigned in November 2022, four months before his retirement date, when he was overlooked for the appointment of the army chief.

His problem began when on November 8, 2023, Moeez Ahmed Khan, the owner of Top City, filed a petition in the Supreme Court in which he accused Hameed

Never met Adani, says Stalin

Chennai: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Tuesday said he never met industrialist Gautam Adani and sought to know if the BJP and its ally, the PMK, were prepared for a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) probe on the Adani issue.

of misusing his authority.

The petition filed in the

Supreme Court stated that

on May 12, 2017, at the be-

hest of Hameed, ISI offi-

cials raided the top city of-

During the raid, valua-

bles, including gold, dia-

monds and money, were

seized from the house by ISI

officials, the petitioner

The petition also stated

that Sardar Najaf, the

brother of Hameed, also

contacted him to resolve

that Hameed later person-

ally met him to resolve the

issue, in which he assured

that some of the items

which had been taken away

by the ISI officials during

the raid would be returned.

However, 400 tolas of gold

and cash will not be re-

leged that the ISI officials

extorted Rs 4 crore cash

the Supreme Court, which

included then Chief Justice

Qazi Faiz Isa, Justice Attar

Minullah and Justice

Aminuddin, heard the case

and decided to send it to the

Ministry of Defence to

April this year that it con-

stituted a high-level in-

quiry committee headed by

a major general to look into

the allegations. The post of

ISI chief is considered one

of the most important in

The army announced in

probe the allegation.

The petitioner also al-

A three-judge bench of

The petition also claimed

fice and his house.

alleged.

the issue later.

turned to him.

from him.

Responding to a question raised by PMK leader G K Mani in the Assembly, Stalin said he had no connection whatsoever with the industrialist whom the PMK and the BJP were spreading a 'misinformation' campaign that he had

"Electricity Minister Senthil Balaji has already explained in a detailed manner. I and Adani have no ties at all. Are you prepared for a JPC probe on the issue," Stalin asked, pointing at Mani.

The Congress and some other opposition parties have been demanding a JPC probe following the indictment of Adani and other company officials in a US court over bribery allegations.

Initially, Assembly Speaker M Appavu declined to allow Mani to raise the issue, which was already in Parliament.

However, the PMK legislator insisted that the Adani indictment was a serious issue and that the chief minister should himself clarify his position.

Responding, the chief minister said Mani and his party leaders have been speaking on this subject outside the Assembly too.

"I expected Mani to say all that in the House but he didn't. Probably he came to know the truth. I have no contact with Adani. He has not met me nor have I seen him. What further explanathe Pakistan Army. -PTI : tion do you require?'



Tibetans-in exile during commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the conferment of the Nobel Peace Prize the Dalai Lama at Mcleodganj in Dharamshala on Tuesday.

ED begins restitution of Choksi's assets

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate Tuesday said it has begun restituting assets worth more than Rs 2,500 crore as part of a money laundering investigation against absconding businessman Mehul Choksi in connection with the alleged Rs 13,000 crore PNB loan fraud case.

The federal agency said in a statement that it initiated the 'restitution of assets' to the rightful owners in this case following an order passed by a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court

based in Mumbai. "In pursuance to the order, the process of handing over of assets has been initiated and properties worth more than Rs 125 crore have been handed over to the Liquidator of Gitanjali

Gems Ltd (a company of Choksi).

"The handed over properties include six flats in Kheni Tower at Santacruz in east Mumbai and two factories/godowns situated at Santacruz Electronic Export Processing Zone (SEEPZ) in the capital city of Maharshatra," it said.

The ED has attached or seized assets worth Rs 2.565.90 crore in this PMLA case against Choksi and the court has allowed "monetisation" of all these properties.

The agency said it took "proactive steps" to initiate the restitution process and the probe agency, along with the affected banks, "agreed to take a common stand" and moved the

The court, on September

would "facilitate" the banks, liquidators in different Gitanjali Group companies to carry out valuation and auction of the attached or seized properties. It also directed that after auction of the said properties, the sale proceeds would be de-

Choksi has been staying in Antigua since 2018 after leaving India.

posited in the Punjab Na-

tional Bank (PNB) and ICI-

CI Bank (affected lenders)

as fixed deposits.

10, ordered that the ED

Choksi, his nephew, fugitive diamond trader Nirav Modi and their family members and employees, bank officials and others were booked by the ED and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in 2018 for perpetrating the alleged loan fraud at the Brady House branch of the PNB in Mumbai.

It was alleged that Choksi, his firm Gitanjali Gems, and others "committed the offence of cheating against PNB in connivance with certain bank officials by fraudulently getting the LoUs (letters of undertaking) issued and got the FLCs (foreign letter of credit) enhanced without following prescribed procedure".

The agency has filed three chargesheets against Choksi till now.

Nirav Modi, declared a fugitive economic offender. is lodged in a London jail after he was held by the authorities there in 2019 on the basis of a legal request made by the ED and the CBI in this case. He is contesting extradition to India.

Dharam summoned in cheating case

New Delhi: A Delhi court (Tiwari), on behalf of achas summoned veteran Bollywood actor Dharmendra and two others in a on record prima-facie indicheating case related to the Garam Dharam Dhaba franchise, according to the complainant's lawyer.

Judicial magistrate Yashdeep Chahal passed the order against the 89-year-old actor on a complaint filed by Delhi businessman, Sushil Kumar, who alleged that he was lured into investing in the franchise, the lawyer D D Pandey said.

The judge said there was a prima facie case of cheating and criminal conspiracy against the actor and the co-accused persons, Deepak Bhardwaj and Umang Tiwari, and directed them to appear before the court on February 20, 2025.

The judge noted in an order passed on December 5 that the documents on record prima facie pertained to "Garam Dharam Dhaba" and the letter of intent also bore the logo of the restaurant

"It is fairly apparent that the transaction between the parties pertain to Garam Dharam Dhaba and was being pursued by accused number 2 (Bhardwaj) and 3

cused number 1 (Dharam Singh Deol). The evidence cates that the accused persons induced the complainant in furtherance of their common intent and the ingredients of the offence of cheating are duly disclosed," the judge said.

The court summoned Bhardwaj and Tiwari for allegedly criminally intimidating the complainant when he enquired about the project after the payment.

It is fairly apparent that transaction between the parties pertains to Garam Dharam Dhaba and was being pursued by the co-accused on behalf of the actor, the court noted.

According to the complaint, in April 2018, the coaccused approached him on behalf of Dharam Singh Deol (Dharmendra) with an offer to open a franchise of Garam Dharma Dhaba on NH-24/NH-9 in Uttar Pradesh.

He claimed that he handed over a cheque for an amount of Rs 17.70 lakh in September, 2018. However, the accused stopped responding to him thereafter, the complainant alleged.

A Turkish gendarme helps a young girl with belongings as Syrian families wait to cross into Syria from Turkey at the Cilvegozu border gate near the town of Antakya, southern Turkey on Tuesday.

Manyavar, Aquarius take lead in Bridge

Pune: Manyavar and Aquarius took the lead in the teams event of the Ashok Ruja Memorial Winter National Bridge Tournament here on Tuesday.

Team Manyavar, represented by Anil Padhye, Anand Samant, Sundaram Sridhar, Jitu Solanki and Rajesh Dalal, secured the top spot after four rounds with a strong score of 59.63 points.

Team Aquarius was

placed second with 57.20 points, followed by Dhampur Sugar Mills at third position with 55.38 points.

The tournament is being played in a Swiss League format, with a total of seven rounds. The remaining three rounds will be played on Wednesday and the winning side will qualify directly for the trials for the Indian team selection for the World Championships. Meanwhile, 83 pairs are competing in the mixed pairs event in which Kamna Sharma and Piyush Baroi took the lead after the initial rounds. The remaining rounds in mixed pairs will also be held on

Wednesday. Results (teams event): 1. Manyavar (59.63pts); 2. Aquarius (57.20pts); 3. Dhampur Sugar Mills (55.38pts); 4. Shree Cements (49.10pts); 5. Cogito (47.05pts).

Key accused in Laos trafficking case netted

Tuesday made a major breakthrough in the Laos human trafficking and cyber slavery case with the arrest of an absconding accused, who was nabbed with support of the Delhi Police's Special Cell.

Kamran Haider's arrest marked a significant step towards dismantling the international human trafficking syndicate, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) said in a statement.

Along with his co-accused, Haider was allegedly directly involved in arranging flight tickets and documents for the victims and facilitating their "illegal border crossings" with the help of contacts in the Golden Triangle region.

The Golden Triangle is referred to a large, mountainous region comprising parts of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos.

The NIA chargesheeted Haider and four others in October in the case relating to a wellorganised network of traffickers and touts involved in various illegal activities, the NIA said. The four co-accused

were identified as Manjoor Alam alias Guddu, Sahil,

New Delhi: The NIA on Ashish alias Akhil, and Pawan Yadav alias Afzal alias Afroz.

All the accused were "actively involved" in sending vulnerable Indian youngsters to the Golden Triangle region in Lao PDR (Laos), where they were allegedly forced to commit cyber scams targeting European and US citizens, the NIA said.

They allegedly operated through a consultancy firm, Ali International Services, which functioned as a front for human trafficking, NIA investigations have revealed.

Besides facilitating the entire operation, Haider was also allegedly involved in extorting money through cryptocurrency wallets from victims who tried to escape the clutches of Chinese scammers.

Haider was carrying a cash reward of Rs 2 lakh for information leading to his arrest and also had a nonbailable warrant issued against him by the Special NIA Court, Patiala House Courts, New Delhi, the agency said.

The NIA investigation in the case is continuing, it added.

-PTI

Three nabbed over Islamic attack

Berlin: Two young men who sympathised with the Islamic State group and a suspected accomplice have been arrested in Germany for allegedly making preparations for an attack, authorities said Tuesday.

The two German Lebanese brothers aged 15 and 20 from the southwestern city of Mannheim and a 22-year-old German Turkish man from the neighbouring state of Hesse were arrested on Sunday, prosecutors and police said in a statement

The brothers are accused of preparing for an attack motivated by their religious ideology and "profound sympathy" for the Islamic State group, procuring among other things an assault rifle and ammunition. The weapon was found at the 22-year-old's home, the statement said.

Investigators also found a balaclava, a protective vest and several knives, along with cellphones. A judge on Monday ordered the suspects kept in custody pending a possible indictment.

Prosecutors and police said there was never any "concrete danger to the

MahaKumbh: AI-enabled cameras to be deployed

Mahakumbh Nagar (UP): Artificial intelligence-enabled cameras will be installed at the Maha Kumbh 2025 to ensure an accurate headcount of devotees visiting one of the world's largest religious gatherings.

More than 40 crore people are expected to attend the Maha Kumbh, making it a record-breaking event. With AI-driven crowd density algorithms, the Uttar Pradesh government expects to achieve an impressive headcount accuracy of up to 95 per cent.

Organised every 12

years, the Maha Kumbh will be held from January 13 to February 26. Devotees from across the country gather at Prayagraj's sacred Triveni Sangam of the Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati.

The state government has created a new district, Mahakumbh Nagar, comprising 66 villages of four tehsils -- Sadar, Soraon, Phulpur and Karchhana -for the Kumbh Mela.

The Uttar Pradesh government said in a statement on Tuesday that with the integration of modern systems, every devotee will be accounted for, creating a new milestone in crowd management and setting a global benchmark for such monumental events.

Under the guidance of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the fair administration is striving to make this the "largest headcount in the world", leveraging AI along with other innovative methods to achieve this groundbreaking feat, it

It noted that the gathering of devotees in Prayagraj during the Kumbh and

Maha Kumbh has always been massive but the absence of precise technology for counting them posed challenges in the past.

The government said that to ensure precise headcount data, AI-enabled cameras are being deployed extensively.

"These advanced cameras will provide real-time updates every minute, with a primary focus on tracking devotees at the ghats," the

statement said. "The system will operate actively from 3 am to 7 pm, the peak hours for bathing rituals," it said.

"Previously, similar methods were successfully implemented during the Magh Mela, demonstrating their reliability. With these advanced measures, the headcount at the Maha Kumbh 2025 is expected to achieve an impressive accuracy of up to 95 per cent," it added.

Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant said more than 40 crore people are expected to attend the Maha Kumbh 2025, making it a record-breaking event. To manage this unprece-

dented crowd, special measures have been put in

To ensure effective monitoring of the vast gathering, dedicated viewing centres have been established at the Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC), Police Line Control Room and in Arail and Jhunsi areas, he added.

Technical experts managing the headcount modelling at the ICCC in the fair area emphasised the importance of tracking the turnaround cycle to avoid doublecounting devotees.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Wake up, @ **UNHumanRights!** Wake up—at least today, on #HumanRightsDay. Your silence and blind eye toward the ongoing #Bangladesh human rights violations are deeply



saddening and heartbreaking." **Radharamn Das**

Spokesperson, ISKCON

Notice for moving no-confidence motion against Dhankhar

ties of the INDIA opposition bloc on Tuesday submitted a notice to bring a motion in Rajya Sabha for the removal of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, accusing him of "partisan' conduct as the chairman of the Upper House.

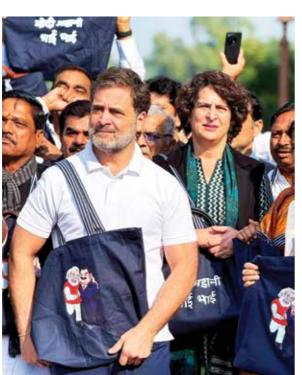
If the motion is moved, these parties need a simple majority to get it passed, but they do not have the requisite numbers in the 243-member House. Opposition members, however, insisted that it was a "strong message to fight for parliamentary democracy".

On behalf of the opposition, Congress leaders Jairam Ramesh and Naseer Hussain submitted the notice signed by 60 opposition MPs -- including from the Congress, RJD, TMC, CPI, CPI-M, JMM, AAP, DMK, Samajwadi Party -- to Rajya Sabha Secretary General P C Mody.

This is the first time that a notice for bringing a motion to remove the Vice President has been moved in the Rajya Sabha. A 14day notice has to be given and it should be approved by the Deputy Chairman before the motion is taken

Notably, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi and the floor leaders of various opposition parties are not among the signatories to the notice, the sources said.

Similar notices for removal of the Speaker of



Opposition protest on Adani issue

Several Opposition MPs on Tuesday demonstrated over the Adani issue in Parliament premises, carrying black 'iholas' (bags) with caricatures of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and billionaire Gautam Adani printed on it and 'Modi Adani Bhai Bhai' written on the obverse side. This is the latest in the series of unusual protests led by the Congress daily ahead of the sitting of Parliament in the morning.

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, MPs from the Congress, DMK, JMM, Left, among others, protested in front of the Makar Dwar steps.

They were carrying black 'jholas' with caricatures of Modi and Adani printed on one side and 'Modi Adani Bhai Bhai' written on the obverse side of the bag.

Lok Sabha have been submitted in the past, but none against the Vice President Rajya Sabha Chairman.

Three motions have come in the past against Lok Sabha Speakers -

December 18, 1954, against Hukam Singh on November 24, 1966 and against Balram Jakhar on April 15,

While the motions against Mavalankar and Jahar were negatived, that against Hukam Singh was rejected as less than 50 members rose in the chair to take up the motion.

The present move, spearheaded by the Congress. comes in the wake of verbal clashes between opposition parties and the Rajya Sabha chairman.

The opposition has been upset with Dhankhar over multiple issues. The latest trigger was allowing BJP members to raise the allegations of links between Congress leaders and organisations backed by billionaire investor George Soros which the ruling party claims are involved in "anti-India activities".

Noting that the role of the Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha is of pivotal importance, the parties said Dhakhkar is expected to conduct himself in a nonpartisan manner but has instead reduced "the prestige of the position he presently occupies to that of a mere spokesman for the Government of the day".

The opposition said his conduct of the House on December 9, 2024, was particularly one-sided and totally unfair, and said he was "encouraging and provoking" the Treasury Benches to make outrageous re-



Members of various Hindu outfits and other organisations protest rally against atrocities on Bangladeshi Hindus in Dehradun.

Gyanvapi: Hearing adjourned till Tuesday

Prayagraj: The Allahabad High Court on Tuesday adiourned till December 17 hearing of a petition challenging the Varanasi court's order that refused to direct the ASI to undertake a survey of the 'wazukhana' area inside the Gyanvapi mosque located next to the Kashi Vishwanath temple.

When the case was taken up, the high court was informed that a related matter before the Supreme Court is likely to be heard on December 16, on which the high court fixed December 17 for hearing.

The order was passed by Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal on a civil revision filed by Rakhi Singh, one of the plaintiffs in Shringar Gauri worshipping suit before the Varanasi court.

The revision plea has been filed challenging the



Portion of mosque demolished for 'encroachment' Fatehpur (UP): Amid tight security, a portion of the 185-yearold Noori Masjid in Uttar Pradesh's Fatehpur district was demolished by local authorities on Tuesday claiming it was illegal and obstructing the widening of the Banda-Bahraich Highway. The mosque's management committee chief, however, claimed that the Noori Masiid in Lalauli town was constructed in 1839 while the road around it came up only in 1956, and said they have already moved the Allahabad High Court which will take up the petition on December 12.

Varanasi district judge's order dated October 21. Archeological Survey of

2023 refusing to direct the

here could not be held on Tuesday due to the death of a lawyer of the court. India (ASI) to undertake a

survey of the 'wazukhana'

area except for the 'shivling'

inside the Gyanvapi

Budaun mosque:

Budaun (UP): The

hearing in the Jama

Masjid Shamsi versus

Neelkanth temple case

Hearing postponed

mosque Rakhi Singh in her revision has pleaded that the survey of the 'wazukhana' (ablution) area is necessary in the interest of justice. It shall benefit the plaintiffs and defendants alike and help the court arrive at a just decision, the plea said.

One killed in clash over DJ at wedding

Kaushambi (UP): A dispute over playing a song during a wedding in the Kokhraj area here escalated into a violent clash, leaving one person dead and another injured, police said on Tuesday.

Superintendent of Police Brijesh Kumar Srivastava stated that the incident occurred late Monday night in Baghelapur village.

"The argument started between the hosts (gharatis) and the groom's party (baratis) during the ritual of dwar pooja over playing a specific song on the DJ. This led to a fight involving lathis and sticks," Srivastava said.

Two members of the bride's side. Bablu (32). from Barai Bandhwa village in Karari area, and Rohit from Badegaon village in Sandipan Ghat area, were seriously injured in the clash.

Bablu succumbed to his injuries while being taken to the hospital and his body has been sent for post-mortem, the SP said.

Rohit is currently receiving treatment at the Muratganj Health Center.

An FIR will be registered and further legal action will be taken.



Shiv Sena Dogra Front members stage a protest against National Conference government on the Rohingyas issue in Jammu.

Pakistan-born man gets Indian citizenship after 43 years

Panaji: Karachi-born Shane Sabastian Pereira entered India to live in his ancestral village in Goa just four months after his hirth but it has taken him 43 years to obtain Indian citizenship.

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Tuesday handed over the Indian citizenship certificate to the Pakistan-born Christian man under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

Shane is the second person from the coastal state to receive the certificate, after Joseph Francis Pereira, another Pakistani citizen who was granted Indian citizenship in August this year.

Shane, originally from Demello Wado in Anjuna, North Goa, said his parents had migrated to Karachi, where he was born in August 1981. Four months after his birth, the family moved back to Goa, where he completed his schooling. He married Maria Gloria Fernandes, an Indian citizen, in 2012.

He said his attempts to obtain Indian citizenship over the years had been unsuccessful.

"Finally, inspired by Mr Joseph (Pereira), I applied again for citizenship," he

The certificate mentions that Shane is registered as a citizen of India under the provisions of section 6B, fulfilling the conditions under section 5(1)(c) of the Citizenship Act, 1955, with effect from the date of his entry into India.

Suave, sophisticated Krishna no more

Bengaluru: Ex-Karnataka Chief Minister and former External Affairs Minister SM Krishna died here early on Tuesday, leaving behind a rich legacy of statesmanship and public service that saw the 92 year-old leader scale heights of political achievements

Suave, sophisticated and a man with enviable academic credentials, Somanahalli Mallajah Krishna started off his political innings as an independent MLA from Maddur in 1962, stunning a then Congress veteran in the elections. In his later years, he went on to become the state's CM and also the country's External Affairs Minister

Tributes poured in for the former Maharashtra Governor, who breathed his last at 2.45 am on Tuesday. Krishna had been ailing for quite some time.

From being a minister on different occasions in the state and at the central government and a Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha member to heading the Congress in Karnataka -- he indeed had a long innings.

He served as a member of the legislative Council and Assembly, and had



been Speaker, deputy chief minister, External Affairs Minister and Governor at different points of time.

"He played a proactive role in putting Bengaluru on the global map," a senior IT industry executive said.

"He gave a boost to the IT sector during his tenure as the chief minister resulting in Bengaluru growing as an alternative to Silicon Valley in California and generating jobs for youths," he added.

Born in Somanahalli in Karnataka's Mandya district on May 1, 1932, Krishna kicked off his electoral foray in style winning as idependent from Maddur against Congress stalwart K V Shankar Gowda in the 1962 assembly polls.

He later associated himself with the Praja Socialist Party before joining the Congress

A graduate of Mahara-

ja's College, Mysuru, he obtained a law degree from the Government Law College here. Further, he studied at Southern Methodist University, Dallas in the US and later at George Washington University, where he was a Fulbright Scholar.

Back home, he worked as a Professor of International Law at Renukacharya Law College.

He made his debut in the Parliament in 1968 as a 'Socialist' MP and became a member of the fourth Lok Sabha.

He was chief minister from October 1999 to May 2004 and later served as the Governor of Maharashtra from December 2004 to March 2008. He was inducted as the External Affairs Minister in the Manmohan

May 2009 to October 2012, in the Congress-led UPA II. In 2017, he joined the BJP, ending his nearly 50-year-long association with the Congress. He retired from politics on January 7, 2023.

Singh-led government from

Krishna was also a tennis buff. Krishna is survived by wife Prema and two daughters-- Malavika Krishna and Shambhavi.

Justice's comments New Delhi: In a significant

SC notes

development, the Supreme Court on Tuesday took note of news reports over the purported controversial statements of Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav at a VHP function and sought details from the Allahabad High Court on the issue.

The development assumes significance amid the rising clamour seeking action from Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna against the high court judge for his remarks.

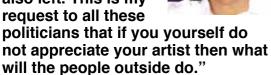
"The Supreme Court has taken note of the newspaper reports of a speech given by Mr Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, a sitting judge of the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad. The details and particulars have been called from the High Court and the matter is under consideration (sic)," a statement said.

At a 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.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I saw that CM sahab and others got up and left in the middle of the show. As soon as they left, all the delegates also left. This is my



Sonu Nigam, Singer

Odisha to provide homestay options for visiting NRIs Bhubaneswar: As Odisha

is gearing up to host the three-day Pravasi Bharatiya Divas from January 8 to be attended by around 7,000 NRIs, the state government is making homestay arrangements for the visitors apart from hotel accommodations.

The homestay owners have been provided training in guest management and safety protocols.

"It is a big opportunity for the people of Odisha to host the NRIs. We will also make homestay arrangements for them apart from

hotel accommodation," Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida said.

Odisha's hospitality would be on the like of "Atithi Deva Bhabo" (Guest is God), she said.

In order to facilitate the visitors to book their accommodation, Parida said the Odisha Tourism Department has blocked 200 hotels with more than 3,700 rooms in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Puri.

The families owning homestays, who would host the visiting NRIs, have been provided basic training in



guest management and safety protocols, a senior official said.

The aim is to provide the Indian diaspora with the experience of Odisha's at-

mosphere as well as the culture and tradition in Odia homes This apart, in view of cyber frauds in hotel book-

ings, the state government has advised the delegates to book their accommodation through a dedicated website 'pbdindia.gov.in.'

The state tourism department has shared the names and other details of hotels with the Ministry of Home Affairs for the safety of delegates.

The department has also identified as many as 30 tourist destinations in Bhu-

baneswar, Puri, Konark, Chilika-Satapada and Raghurajpur crafts village where the NRIs may pay visits, the official said.

The PBD event began in 2003 and is being held in Odisha for the first time.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Monday reviewed the preparations for the programme.

Majhi said the cleanliness of Bhubaneswar should be of international standard. For this, he suggested that a special cleanliness campaign be conducted in the state capital.

All the roads in the city are being renovated, illuminated and decorated, while tourist places are being beautified.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is scheduled to attend the first day on January 8, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 9 and President Droupadi Murmu on January 10.

The event will feature a Plenary Session on topics such as 'Unraveling India's Best Kept Secret' and 'Odisha - the Land of Opportunities'.

-PTI

'Slowdown due to multiple factors'

Mumbai: The growth slowdown is due to a multiplicity of factors, and not due to the Reserve Bank's repo rate, outgoing Governor Shaktikanta Das said on Tuesday.

Addressing a press conference on his last day at work, Das said restoring the growth-inflation balance is the most important task ahead for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The six years during which Das was the RBI governor included the Covid period and major geopolitical upheavals like the wars in Ukraine and the Middle

The RBI has chosen to maintain interest rates at elevated levels for nearly two years, with the Dasheaded Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) opting for a status quo at 11 consecutive meetings

Making it clear that people are entitled to their views, the outgoing governor told reporters that the effort has been to make the monetary policy "as appropriate as possible", keeping in mind the ongoing conditions and also future outlook

Urging people to not look

Finmin-RBI ties the best in my stint

Shaktikanta Das on Tuesday said he gave his best to the

institution, and asserted that ties between Mint Road

and the finance ministry were "the best" in his six-year

all such issues through internal discussions," Das, the

"The relationship between the government, and the

finance ministry in particular, and the Reserve Bank

of India... I think they have been at their best. We had

career bureaucrat-turned-central banker, said.

excellent cooperation, excellent coordination."

stint. "...in my tenure, I think we have been able to resolve



at the issue of rate-setting

in a simplistic way, Das

said, "as I look at it, I think

growth is impacted by mul-

tiplicity of factors, not just

one factor of, you know, the

RBI, I think we are con-

vinced that what we have

done was the best option

available... under the cir-

Sitharaman and Piyush

Goyal are among those who

have publicly pressed for a

reduction in lending rates

in the recent past, and the calls for action among some

watchers only got louder

after official data suggested

real GDP growth hitting a

seven-quarter low of 5.4 per

cumstances," he added. Union ministers Nirmala

"Within the MPC and

repo rate".

formational" unified lending interface (ULI) will have a nationwide launch, and also for Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) to be carried ahead as it is the "future of currency"

Recalling some challenges during his tenure, Das said the focus always was to ensure that taxpayers' money is not used to bail out an institution or merging a problematic institution with a well-performing

Fiscal-monetary coordination at its best

Shaktikanta Das on Tuesday said the fiscal-monetary coordination was at its best during the last six years even as he thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for giving the opportunity to head the monetary authority of the country. Das, in a series of posts on X, on his last day of his six-year term as RBI Governor, also thanked the Finance Minister, various stakeholders and his colleagues at the central bank.

cent for the July-September period.

Das said the Indian economy is resilient and robust. and has the capacity to deal with global spillovers very effectively.

On his successor, Das said Sanjay Malhotra has a very wide experience and will do the best for the

Das said he does not see an issue with the major changes in the MPC, which will soon have five of six members with a small ratesetting experience.

A big institution like the RBI is always a work in progress and there will always be tasks that need to be finished, Das said, when asked about his unfinished agenda.

He hoped that the "trans-

Citing the case of YES Bank, Das said the RBI managed to ensure that an SBI-led consortium of lenders gave the required capital to save the private sector

lender saddled with bad

The YES Bank crisis resulted in a learning for the RBI to increase supervision, which is much sharper today, Das said.

On the RBI's increased propensity to slap business restrictions on regulated entities under him, Das said efforts are always made to avoid such outcomes by engaging with entities and sometimes conversations stretch up to a year before a decision is

-PTI



Big task for Malhotra

By Correspondent

Mumbai: The new Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra will need to balance growth risk considering India's real GDP growth slowed more than expected to 5.4 percent year-on-year in Jul-Sep and inflation remaining beyond the ambit of comfort.

Malhotra will also have substantially different policy challenges as well as macro and global landscape while stepping into CY25 compared to what the Dasled regime faced at beginning-CY24 as the policy trade-offs are getting acute, experts said.

The trade-offs include –



"entrenched state of India's stagflation, tricky timings and small window of conventional rate cuts as global dynamics turn more fluid, mounting FX pressures and increasing cost of FX intervention none of these were challenging in the same period last year," said a note by Emkay Global Financial Services.

Amid the change in guard at the apex bank, the rupee weakened further on Tuesday, slipping below 84.85 mark to the US dollar as sustained FII selling and escalating geopolitical tensions continued to weigh on sentiment.

"The end of Shaktikanta Das's term as RBI Governor and the appointment of Saniay Malhotra introduces unfolded packages into India's financial landscape. Market participants remain cautious as this leadership change could bring shifts in monetary policy and financial market dynamics," said Jateen Trivedi, research analyst with LKP Securities

"The elephant in the room, at least for FX investors, could be the RBI's de facto FX policy, which has helped keep the rupee's volatility depressed. We see the USDINR pair likely continuing on its grind higher, amid India's weak basic balance, soft equities outlook and hence outflows momentum and expensive valuation," said Tanvee Gupta Jain, Chief India Economist, UBS.

Most experts were unanimous in their view that high real policy rate and softening growth could create room for the RBI to lower the repo rate by 75 basis point starting in Feb

Merchant Shipping Bill introduced in LS

New Delhi: A bill to expand the eligibility criteria for ownership of the merchant shipping vessels and minister Sarbananda Soprovide for investigation and enquiries on marine casualties was introduced in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

The Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024 empowers the central government to take charge and detain vessels within India or in coastal waters as a vessel without nationality, if such vessel is not legally entitled to fly the flag of a state or has lost such right.

The bill seeks to repeal the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 and provides for contemporaneous, futuristic and dynamic legislation to meet the requirements of India as an emerging

economy. As per the statement of objects and reasons of the bill, the proposed legislation would provide for maritime liability and compensation in claims arising out of collision of vessels and accident at sea leading to damage or loss of vessel, cargo or property.

It also provides for limitation of liability for damages in respect of certain claims; and constitution of limitation fund.

Besides, the bill, which was tabled in the Lower House by Union Shipping nowal seeks "expanding the eligibility criteria for ownership of the vessels and increasing tonnage under the Indian flag".

It also provides for marine incident and emergency response in order to provide time-effective and efficient emergency responses to a marine incident and provides for "investigation and inquiries on marine casualties".

There was a brief lull in the din created by the opposition over Adani and other issues when the Merchant Shipping Bill was being introduced by Sonowal.

Opposing the bill at the introductory stage, Manish Tewari (Cong) said the government lacked legislative competence to legislate on merchant shipping as the subject has no direct entry in the central or concurrent list on which the Union (central government) can bring laws

said the proposed legislation will only help hand over more powers to the bureaucracy.



The BSE building, seen in the Mumbai skyline in Mumbai on Tuesday. Pic: PTI

Two crore SC/ST farmers benefit from PM-KISAN

New Delhi: Over 2.04 crore farmers from Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) have been beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme, the government informed

Parliament on Tuesday. Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, in his written reply to the Lok Sabha, revealed that since the scheme's launch in February 2019, the central government has disbursed more than Rs 3.46 lakh Saugata Roy of the TMC $crore\ to\ farmers\ through\ 18$

> installments. The latest, 18th installment of the scheme, was released to 9.58 crore beneficiaries, with a detailed

breakup showing 1.16 crore SC farmers, 88.34 lakh ST farmers, and 7.54 crore farmers in the 'others' category

Addressing potential barriers to farmer inclusion, the minister said the government has implemented several measures to ensure seamless registration, particularly for SC, ST, and OBC communities facing land ownership documentation challenges.

Key flexibility measures include, relaxing land seeding conditions in northeastern states; accepting alternative land ownership proofs in states like Manipur, Nagaland, and Jharkhand; and recognising Forest Rights Act (FRA) patta holders as eligible beneficiaries

Under PM-KISAN, eligible farmers receive a financial assistance of Rs 6,000 annually, transferred in three equal installments directly into their Aadhaarlinked bank accounts.

The minister clarified that the scheme applies only to cultivable landholding farmers and does not provide accommodation for agricultural labourers from SC, ST, or OBC communities. Notably, the government

does not maintain separate data for OBC farmers, who are included in the 'others' category.

Equity MFs inflow drops 14 pc in Nov

New Delhi: Equity mutual funds witnessed an inflow of Rs 35,943 crore in November, marking a drop of 14 per cent on a month-onmonth basis, amid heightened volatility in stock markets driven by various macroeconomic factors, geopolitical events and US election results.

Despite this, it marked the 45th consecutive month of net inflows into equityoriented funds, reflecting the growing popularity of mutual funds among investors, according to data from the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) released on Tuesday.

Moreover, monthly contributions from the Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) remained flat at Rs 25,320 crore last month against Rs

25,323 crore in October. "There was heightened volatility due to various macroeconomic factors, geopolitical events and the US election results. This resulted in investors opting for a wait & watch approach while allocating larger amounts and thus decline in lumpsum flows including flattish SIP numbers for November 2024," Akhil Chaturvedi, CBO, Motilal Oswal AMC, said.

Overall, the mutual fund



industry experienced an inflow of Rs 60,295 crore in the month under review, which was way lower than Rs 2.4 lakh crore in October. This could be due to a huge decline in inflows in debt funds to Rs 12,915 crore in November from Rs 1.57 lakh crore in the preceding month.

Despite the decline, the industry's net assets under management rose to Rs 68.08 lakh crore last month from Rs 67.25 lakh crore in October.

"Defying a tumultuous month in the equity market, the mutual fund industry's assets reached a new pinnacle of Rs 68.08 lakh crore, driven primarily by robust inflows into growth-/equity-oriented schemes. The unwavering monthly SIP inflows remained above Rs 25,000 crore in November, showcasing the investors' longterm vision and commitment to their financial goals, despite the shortterm market fluctuations.' Venkat Chalasani, Chief Executive, AMFI, said.

Shapoorji sells land

Mumbai: Shapoorji Pallonji Gwalior Pvt Ltd. a part of Shapoorji Pallonji Group, has sold 1,820 square metre land at Juhu in Mumbai for Rs 455 crore, according to property consultant Square Yards.

"Agarwal Holdings Pvt Ltd has acquired a land parcel in Juhu locality of Mumbai, valued at Rs 455 crore," Square Yards said in a statement on Tuesday.

The plot was acquired from Shapoorji Pallonji Gwalior Private Limited, a part of Shapoorji Pallonji Group, a prominent business conglomerate with diversified interests across construction and engineering, infrastructure, real estate, energy and textiles among others.

According to the registration document reviewed by Square Yards, the land parcel spans an area of about 1,819.90 square metre (19,589.22 sq ft).

The transaction was finalised and registered in November 2024, with a stamp duty of Rs 27.30 crore and registration charges amounting to Rs

"Only a smaller portion of the Juhu land has been monetised with the larger parcel remaining under the group's ownership."

16-fold rise in urban sector investments

New Delhi: Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Tuesday said there has been a substantial increase in investments in the urban sector since 2014 and emphasised the Centre's dedication to realising the vision of 'Viksit Bharat' by

Addressing a press conference on achievements of his ministry, the Union Housing and Urban Affairs minister said investments have increased 16-fold, rising from approximately Rs 1,78,053 crore between 2004 and 2014 to Rs 28,52,527 crore since 2014.

Urban development schemes have been expanded and implemented with greater speed and efficiency in the past six months, asserting that the rapid pace of urbanisation has made urban development a key pillar of India's growth strategy, he said.

The minister said that under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) between 2004 and 2014, proiects worth Rs 66.837 crore were sanctioned, but the Modi government has sanctioned projects worth Rs 2.73 lakh crore under the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) since

Talking about urban housing and PMAY 2.0, Khattar said a new rental housing vertical has been introduced under the second phase of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), benefiting the migrant population.

Under this scheme, new initiatives such as provisional sanctions for around 7 per cent of the planned 1



crore urban houses based on the population of states signing MoUs, have been made and it will ensure timely allocation and expediting the process.

To streamline operations, sanctions to states will be finalised based on the demand received by March 31, 2025, providing clarity on yearly house allocations, he said, adding that 88.32 lakh houses have competed under the PMAY

Khattar said a revamped National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) will soon be launched, informed by the results of a pilot project currently underway in 25 cities.

Giving details about the PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVA-Nidhi), the union minister said loan amounts of 13,422 crore have been disbursed under the scheme so far.

Under the Swachh Bharat Mission, since June 9, 2024, the government has released more than Rs 1,123

Over the past six months since June 9, two major dumpsites in Ahmedabad and Hyderabad have been completely remediated, successfully addressing approximately 2.5 lakh metric tonnes of legacy waste, Khattar added.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"First is USA -- Rs 78 lakh crore, secondlargest automobile industry is in China--Rs 47 lakh crore, and now India is at Rs 22 lakh crore. I am

confident that within 5 years, we want to make Indian automobile industry number 1 in the world."

> Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister, Road Transport

Syria's upheaval?

borders.

How is US countering IS group during

Washington: Massive US airstrikes on Islamic State militants in Syria were meant in part as a message to the group and a move to ensure that it doesn't try to

take advantage of the chaos following the overthrow of President Bashar Assad's government. The US and its partners want to make sure the Islamic State group, which still has a presence in Syria, can't step into the leadership void and once again exert control over wide swaths of the country, Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina

Singh said Monday. The US on Sunday struck about 75 IS targets in the Syrian desert. The US has had troops in Syria for the last decade to battle IS. The tumult

following a rebel offensive that toppled Assad has

The US has about 900 troops and an undisclosed

number of contractors in Syria, largely at small bases in

the north and east, with a small number farther south

US special operations forces also routinely move in and

Islamic State militants seized large parts of Iraq and

Syria in 2014, declaring a caliphate. The US gathered

a coalition of allies and was able to defeat IS in Iraq

Democratic Forces, or SDF, and after fierce fighting,

ultimately declared an end to the caliphate in Syria

in 2019. The US has, over the past decade, routinely

the group at bay and prevent it from coalescing.

targeted IS leaders, camps and weapons in Syria to keep

In the past year, as Israel's war with Hamas widened into

by Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Syria as well as by the

a broader conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon, attacks

in 2017. The US partnered with the Kurdish-led Syrian

out of the country but are usually in small teams and are

at the al-Tanf garrison closer to the Iraq and Jordan

raised fears of an Islamic State resurgence.

not included in the official count.

Horrific stories from slaughterhouse Saydnaya

SYRIANS DESPERATELY RUSH TO THE HORRIFIC PRISON IN SEARCH OF MISSING LOVED ONES

Damascus: They came from all over Syria, tens of thousands. The first place they rushed to after the fall of their longtime tormentor, former President Bashar Assad, was here: Saydnaya Prison, a place so notorious for its horrors it was long known as "the slaughterhouse."

For the past two days, all have been looking for signs of loved ones who disappeared years or even decades ago into the secretive, sprawling prison just outside Damascus.

But hope gave way to despair Monday. People opened the heavy iron doors lining the hallways to find cells inside empty. With sledgehammers, shovels and drills, men pounded holes in floors and walls, looking for what they believed were



to let that happen." Antony Blinken, Secretary of State, US





secret dungeons, or chasing sounds they thought they heard from underground. They found nothing.

Israeli warplanes pound Syria

Insurgents freed dozens of people from the Saydnaya military prison on Sunday when Damascus fell. Since then, almost no one has been found.

"Where is everyone?

Where are everyone's children? Where are they?' said Ghada Assad, breaking down in tears.

She had rushed from her Damascus home to the prison on the capital's outskirts, hoping to find her brother. He was detained in 2011, the year that protests first erupted against the former president's

Israel carried out a wave of heavy airstrikes across Syria as its troops advanced deeper

monitor said Tuesday. Associated Press reporters in Damascus heard heavy airstrikes

online showed destroyed missile launchers, helicopters and warplanes. There was no

immediate comment from the insurgent groups — led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS

- that have taken control of Damascus. Israel had earlier seized a roughly 400-square-

kilometre buffer zone inside Syria that had been established after the 1973 Mideast

war, a move it said was taken to prevent attacks in the aftermath of the overthrow of

overnight and into Tuesday on the city and its suburbs. Photographs circulating

into the country, drawing to within 25 kilometres of the capital, a Syrian opposition war

rule – before they turned into a long, gruelling civil war. She didn't know why he was arrested.

"My heart has been burned over my brother. For 13 years, I kept looking for him," she said. When insurgents last week seized Aleppo — her original hometown — at the start of their swiftly victo-

> But few were giving up, a sign of how powerfully Saydnaya looms in the minds of Syrians as the heart of Assad's brutal police state. The sense of loss over the missing — and the sudden hope they might be found -- brought a kind of dark unity

rious offensive, "I prayed particularly after the 2011 that they would reach Daprotests began, any hint of mascus just so they can dissent could land someopen up this prison," she

Civil defense officials helping in the search were as confused as the families over why no further inmates were being found. It appeared fewer were held here in recent weeks, they

among Syrians from

across the country. During Assad's rule and

one in Saydnaya. Few ever emerged. In 2017, Amnesty International estimated that 10,000-20,000 people were being held there at the time "from every sector of society." It said they were effectively slated for "extermination."

Thousands were killed

in frequent mass execustarved themselves, the tions, Amnesty reported, human rights group said. citing testimony from Five White Helmet teams, with two canine freed prisoners and prison officials. Prisoners were teams, came to Saydnaya

Islamic State group have escalated.

to help the search. They even brought in the prison electrician, who had the floor plan, and went through every shaft, vent and sewage opening. So far, there were no answers, Abu al-Dahab

UK pauses decisions on Syrian asylum claims

London: The UK has paused all decisions on Syrian asylum claims after the collapse of the Bashar al-Assad regime over the weekend, following which Prime Minister Keir Starmer called for peace and stability in the region.

subjected to constant tor-

ture, intense beatings and

rape. Almost daily, guards

did rounds of the cells to

collect bodies of inmates

who had died overnight

from injuries, disease or

starvation. Some inmates

fell into psychosis and

The Home Office said that it will keep matters under review after its asylum applications pause for thousands of Syrian refugees following similar moves by Germany, Greece and Austria. "The Home Office has paused decisions on Syrian asylum claims whilst we assess the current situation. We keep all country guidance relating to asylum claims under constant review so we can respond to emerging issues," a statement said. The war in Syria has forced millions of people to flee the country.

Israeli warplanes pound Syria as troops advance

President Bashar Assad.

Damascus (Syria): Israel carried out a wave of heavy airstrikes across Syria as its troops advanced deeper into the country, drawing to within 25 kilometres of the capital, a Syrian opposition war monitor said Tuesday. Israel denied its forces were advancing toward Damascus.

Associated Press reporters in Damascus heard heavy airstrikes overnight and into Tuesday on the city and its suburbs. Photographs circulating online showed destroyed missile launchers, helicopters and warplanes.

There was no immediate comment from the insurgent groups - led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS that have taken control of Damascus.

Israel had earlier seized a roughly 400-square-kilometre buffer zone inside Syria that had been established after the 1973 Mideast war, a move it said was taken to prevent attacks in the aftermath of the overthrow of President Bashar Assad.

Israel has also said it is striking suspected chemical weapons sites and heavy weapons to prevent them from falling into the



hands of extremists. Israeli officials rarely acknowledge individual Israel has a long history

of seizing territory during wars with its neighbours and occupying it indefinitely, citing security concerns. Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war and annexed it in a move not recognised internationally, except by the United States.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which has closely tracked the conflict since the civil war erupted nearly 14 years ago, said Israel has carried out more than 300 airstrikes across the country since rebels overthrew Assad over the weekend, ending his family's half-century rule.

The Observatory, and Beirut-based Mayadeen TV, which has reporters in

Syria, said Israeli troops are advancing up the Syrian side of the border with Lebanon. It was not possible to independently confirm the reports.

Lt Col Nadav Shoshani,

an Israeli military spokesperson, said "the reports circulating in the media about the alleged advancement of Israeli tanks towards Damascus are false." He said Israeli troops are stationed within the buffer zone in order to protect Israel.

Israel's military had previously said troops would enter the buffer zone "and several other places necessary for its defense.

Israeli media meanwhile reported that the air force was methodically destroying Syria's military assets to ensure whoever rules the country next would have to rebuild

The operations "have been systematically destroying all that remains of the escaped tyrant's military," wrote Yossi Yehoshua, the military correspondent for Israel's largest daily, Yediot Ahronot.



Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh pays tribute at the Tomb of the Unknown

March against attacks on Hindus in B'desh

Washington: A large number of Indian Americans held a march from the White House to the US Canitol over attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh.

Raising slogans like "We want Justice" and "Protect Hindus" the peaceful demonstrators urged the Biden administration and the incoming Trump administration to ask the new government in Bangladesh to take steps to protect Hindus but also take action against those responsible for this. The march was held on



Monday over attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh. Organisers of the event --StopHinduGenocide.org, Bangladeshi Diaspora organisations and HinduAC-Tion – demanded that the companies in the US stop Bangladesh, which is heavily dependent on its exports to the US.

Srikanth Akunuri from HinduAction said unspeakable tragedies are happening for the Bangladeshi Hindus.

"We also demand that ISKCON leader Chinmoy Das be released," he said.

Prasenjit Dutta, head of a Bangladeshi community organisation from Atlantic City demanded the release of ISKCON leader Chinmoy

Mass evacuations of Philippine villages

Manila: About 87,000 people were being evacuated in a central Philippine region Tuesday a day after a volcano briefly erupted with a towering ash plume and superhot streams of gas and debris hurtling down its western slopes.

The latest eruption of Mount Kanlaon on central Negros island did not cause any immediate casualties, but the alert level was raised one level, indicating further and more explosive eruptions may occur.

Volcanic ash fell on a wide area, including Antique province, more than 200 kilometers (124 miles) across seawaters west of the volcano, obscuring visibility and posing health risks, Philippine chief volcanologist Teresito Bacolcol and other officials said by telephone.

At least six domestic flights and a flight bound for Singapore were cancelled and two local flights were diverted in the region Monday and Tuesday due to Kanlaon's eruption, according to the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines.

The mass evacuations were being carried out urgently in towns and villag-

es nearest the western and southern slopes of Kanlaon which were blanketed by its ash, including in La Castellana town in Negros Occidental where nearly 47,000 people have to be evacuated out of a 6-kilometer (3.7mile) danger zone, the Office of Civil Defence said.

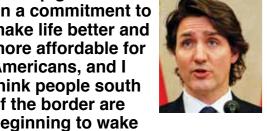
More than 6,000 have moved to evacuation centres aside from those who have temporarily transferred to the homes of relatives in La Castellana by Tuesday morning, the town's mayor. Rhumyla Mangilimutan, told The Associated Press by telephone.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said authorities were ready to provide support to large numbers of displaced villagers and that his social welfare secretary flew early Tuesday to the affected region. "We are ready to support the families who have been evacuated outside the 6-kilometer danger zone.'

Scientists were monitoring the air quality due to the risk of contamination from toxic volcanic gases that may require more people to be evacuated from areas affected by Monday's

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Trump got elected on a commitment to make life better and more affordable for Americans, and I think people south of the border are beginning to wake



up to the real reality that tariffs

on everything from Canada would make life a lot more expensive."

Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister, Canada

By Aditi Khanna

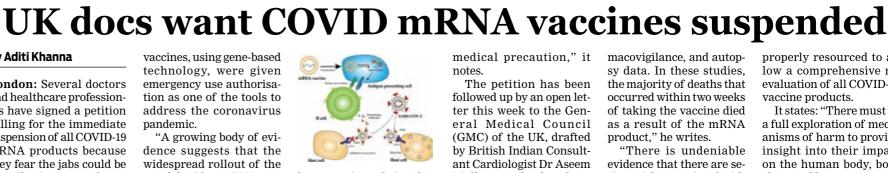
London: Several doctors and healthcare professionals have signed a petition calling for the immediate suspension of all COVID-19 mRNA products because they fear the jabs could be contributing to an alarming rise in excess deaths.

A petition known as the **HOPE** Accord attracting signatures from around the world went online recently to alert the international community on the continued use of the COV-ID mRNA vaccines. These

vaccines, using gene-based technology, were given emergency use authorisation as one of the tools to address the coronavirus pandemic.

"A growing body of evidence suggests that the widespread rollout of the novel Covid-19 mRNA vaccine products is contributing to an alarming rise in disability and excess deaths," reads the Hope Accord petition.

"This new technology was granted emergency use authorisation to address a situation that no



longer exists. Going forward, the burden of proof falls on those still advocating for these products to compellingly demonstrate that they aren't resulting in net harm. Until such evidence is presented, regulators should suspend their use as a matter of standard

medical precaution," it

The petition has been followed up by an open letter this week to the General Medical Council (GMC) of the UK, drafted by British Indian Consultant Cardiologist Dr Aseem Malhotra who has long campaigned for a more evidence-based approach to all COVID vaccines.

"Serious harms from the vaccine have been confirmed from a combination of clinical, mechanistic. randomised controlled trials, observational, pharmacovigilance, and autopsy data. In these studies. the majority of deaths that occurred within two weeks of taking the vaccine died as a result of the mRNA product," he writes.

"There is undeniable evidence that there are serious risks associated with COVID-19 vaccine for at least some individuals...As of right now, the data is clear that the vaccines cause greater harm than benefit," he cautions.

Meanwhile, the online petition calls for independent investigations to be properly resourced to allow a comprehensive reevaluation of all COVID-19 vaccine products.

It states: "There must be a full exploration of mechanisms of harm to provide insight into their impact on the human body, both short and long term.

Effectiveness must be reassessed through a comprehensive review of actual clinical impact on illness and mortality, as opposed to synthetic results based on modelled assumptions.

- PTI

EDITORIAL

Polarising Rhetoric

Itija Mufti, the scion of a political dynasty deeply entrenched in Jammu and Kashmir's contentious politics, has sparked a fresh controversy by labelling Hindutva a "disease." While she claimed her remarks drew a distinction between Hindutya and Hinduism, they have predictably ignited a storm of condemnation from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has demanded an apology for her derogatory

Iltija has alleged that Hindutva, a political ideology championed by figures like Veer Savarkar, is allegedly 'distorting' Hinduism's essence by weaponizing faith for political gain. Her comparison of the 'Jai Shri Ram' slogan with incidents of mob have opened a Pandora's box of religious and political sensitivities.

Iltija's outrage rings hollow when viewed against the historical backdrop of Islam's bloody conquest of Kashmir. In the 14th century, the region witnessed a violent transition as Sultan Sikandar Shah Miri's reign brought forced conversions, the destruction of Hindu temples and the imposition of Islamic laws. Kashmiri Pandits, the indigenous Hindu community, suffered centuries of persecution, culminating in their mass

Hinduism, by contrast, has long been recognized as a religion of peace, inclusivity and philosophical depth. It has thrived on a foundation of tolerance, embracing diverse beliefs and practices under its broad spiritual umbrella. Hinduism itself has consistently offered a framework of coexistence, advocating principles of ahimsa (non-violence) and sarva dharma samabhava (equality of all religions). To conflate the two, as Ms. Mufti has done, is to grossly distort the essence of a tradition that has nurtured pluralism for millennia.

The PDP, the party to which she belongs, has often been accused of pandering to separatist sentiments. For decades, its leadership, including Ms. Mufti's mother, Mehbooba Mufti, has walked a tightrope-voicing support for secularism while appeasing elements sympathetic to Pakistan. The PDP's selective outrage over Hindutva conveniently ignores the Islamist extremism that has plagued the Valley for decades, eroding its pluralistic ethos.

Iltija's language, vilifying an entire belief system and an ancient civilization considered to be among the world's most tolerant to score petty political points, is appalling to say the least. The debate over Hindutva and its implications for India's social fabric is not new.

But the moral authority of Iltija mufti's critique is completely undermined by her family's history of courting Islamist sympathies. For those watching from the sidelines, Ms. Mufti's pronouncements may seem less like a principled stand and more like another move in a high-stakes game of political chess. If the PDP truly seeks to champion secularism, it must first confront its own historical baggage. Only then can its critique of others carry any weight. As things stand, Iltija Mufti's remarks appear less about fostering a genuine dialogue and more about perpetuating a cycle of division that serves no one except opportunistic politicians.

FRANKLY SPEAKING

Leave the 'Brain Rot' behind in 2024



Aditi Pai

s the year draws to a close, newsmagazines and papers do a round-up of the year's biggest newsmakers; events and people that captured our collective attention. Growing up in the 1990s in the age of Channel V and MTV, I eagerly awaited their charts which had the biggest hit songs of the year. It is all about collating the highs of the year and crystallizing them into a ranking or a list. Another yearend ritual I await is the Oxford Dictionary's word of the year which makes it to the lexicon of what is considered the ultimate authority on the English language. British English, as we were strictly taught to follow in school.

This year's word is something I love and a feeling or condition that may resonate with many. It's 'brain rot'; loosely described as the "cause or effect of spending hours online viewing trivial information. It communicates concerns about the impact of consuming excessive amounts of low-quality online content, especially on social media". Brain rot seems to be the new 'pandemic' of

In an era of constant connectivity, the silent toll of mindless scrolling is felt in our strained attention and fading focus

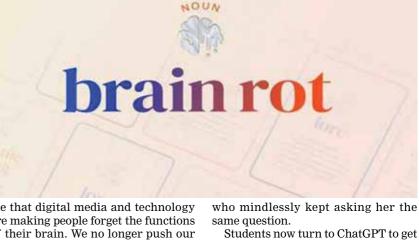
our digitally-obsessed times.

Watching, commenting, liking reels that project the air-brushed lives of celebs and ordinary folk, mindlessly scrolling through social media feeds and consuming news that we weren't interested in to begin with, are contributing to mental and emotional fatigue. In the course of my journalistic career, a topic that I have frequently written on is the impact of the digital world on human health and relationships. Mental healthcare experts have, time and again, stressed on the harmful effects of excessive screen time. Fatigue, sleepless nights, lethargy, an inability to focus are some of the initial warning signs. Forgetting thoughts, tasks and words is the next level. What else is brain rot, if

"My brain felt dead," was how a young woman described her condition when she landed up in the couch of a Mumbai-based psychiatrist. Until she realised a deteriorating physical condition, stemming from lack of sleep, anxiety and a total disinterest in real-world social interactions, the 28-year-old was glued to her mobile phone for up to 10 hours in a day. Mindless scrolling numbed her brain and senses

Brain rot is having a huge impact on mental health. And before we think it's not affecting young adults who are typically expected to be more 'tech and digital savvy', this condition is probably equally widespread in an older age group too. It's not uncommon to see retired septuagenarians obsessively discovering new features on social media apps and following random content. The digital world has successfully managed to wean people off face-to-face conversations, sports and hobbies like reading and painting. Movies are all about laptop and tab screens rather than travelling to the cinema hall, watching

strangers and munching on popcorn. A mental health counsellor once told



me that digital media and technology are making people forget the functions of their brain. We no longer push our brain to delve into its deepest corners to recollect a forgotten name or place; we simply 'Google it'. Phone numbers that were etched in our memory to make late-night calls to friends are merely saved in our phone's memory and we no longer memorise or write down a number or a message; we quickly 'screenshot it'. Our brain has little to tax it; little to do. It only consumes a barrage of images, colours and sounds that are thrown at it.

Medical practitioners will call it mental fogginess or cognitive decline. Lay people will simply describe it as a dumbing down of the human race. It's evident all around. People find it difficult to comprehend spoken messages; the notso-fine print in emails is conveniently overlooked and few remember what they've read an hour ago. We don't jot down or remember important messages in conversations; those are recorded on the phone. I overheard a conversation at a hotel concierge recently where the young woman behind the desk repeated the breakfast timings thrice to the guest who mindlessly kept asking her the

points for essays and I know of journalists who have turned to AI to write perfect copies. What's brain rot if not what's happening to our race?

With the winters here and the weather getting more pleasant, maybe its time to leave the screens behind and head into the outdoors. Fresh air, a good jog and watching the skies, clouds and birds may help us regain some healthy space in our brains. Get the children to take up hobbies not just to pad up admission submissions for universities abroad but to soak in the real joy of playing a sport, playing a music piece or feeling wet clay on their hands. Watch the different flowers, fruits and birds when you travel rather than watching Netflix on your screens in a swanky hotel room. And most importantly, we must make time to feel the troughs and crests in our real world rather than hide in a virtual fantasy world.

It's possible that brain rot may get reversed and 2025 may have a more cheerful word to celebrate next December.

GLOBAL WATCH

A Nation Held Hostage

Taiti, a nation long plagued by instability, has reached a grim nadir. Over the weekend, a massacre in Cite Soleil claimed nearly 180 lives, a macabre crescendo in a year that has seen over 5,000 fatalities due to gang violence. The attacks, reportedly orchestrated by a gang leader on suspicions of witchcraft, reveal the horrifying grip of criminal networks on the nation.

This tragedy is not isolated. October's massacre in Pont-Sonde by the Gran Grif gang, in retaliation for local resistance, was a chilling reminder of how gangs operate with impunity. The gangs, often better armed than Haiti's police, have turned entire neighbourhoods into lawless fiefdoms. They impose taxes, extort businesses, and kidnap for ransom, all while terrorizing residents through indiscriminate killings and assaults. Haiti's political class, mired in infighting, has proven incapable of combating these powerful armed groups. International interventions, including a Kenyan-led security mission, have been underwhelming, hamstrung by insufficient resources and political gridlock in the United

Haiti's crisis is deepened by the humanitarian fallout. With over 700,000 displaced people and half the population food-insecure, the collapse of public services has turned basic survival into a daily battle. Less than half of healthcare facilities in Port-au-Prince are functional, and humanitarian organizations face relentless threats to their operations. The closure of major facilities, such as the State University of Haiti Hospital, underscores the dire situation. Disease outbreaks, including cholera, now loom ominously over overcrowded

Haiti's unravelling demands a global reckoning, not another chapter of neglect.



and unsanitary displacement

This is not the first time Haiti has been caught in the vice of external neglect and internal dysfunction. After the catastrophic 2010 earthquake, billions in pledged aid were mismanaged, entrenching mistrust in international efforts. The latest crisis, however, is uniquely severe. Armed groups wield increasingly modern weaponry, much of it trafficked from the United States. Meanwhile, political paralysis has thwarted Haiti's attempts to organize elections or establish a functional government. A transitional government has tentatively set elections for 2025, but without security, these plans are more aspirational than realistic.

The violence is also undermining what remains of Haiti's fragile social fabric. Humanitarian workers warn that targeted attacks on healthcare infrastructure are not only exacerbating the immediate crisis but also eroding long-term prospects for recovery. A generation is growing up amid unrelenting violence, displacement, and fear, with few opportunities for edu-

cation or stability. The international response has been tepid at best. A U.N.-backed Multinational Security Support mission, led by Kenya, remains under-resourced and lacks a robust mandate. Meanwhile, calls for converting the mission into a fullfledged U.N. peacekeeping force have stalled, blocked by China and Russia in the Security Council. The White House has echoed calls for greater international support, but pledges have yet to materialize. Humanitarian assistance, too, falls woefully short of needs.

What Haiti requires now is a reimagined international approach. The Kenyan-led mission must be bolstered with financial and logistical support, as urged by both the United Nations and the United States. More importantly, this mission must evolve into a full-fledged peacekeeping operation with the mandate to dismantle gangs and restore order. Efforts to curb arms trafficking, particularly from the United States, must also be redoubled. This would require robust international coordination and stricter enforcement mechanisms, both of which have been lacking so far.

At the same time, the Haitian government must take responsibility for accelerating its political transition. The longer it delays substantive reforms, the more entrenched gang rule becomes. The world has abandoned Haiti before, and the results are on harrowing display. The choice for the international community is stark: intervene meaningfully or bear witness to the disintegration of a nation in

STATES WATCH

A Move Towards **National Leadership?**

'n a theatrical flourish at the West Bengal Assembly, Chief LMinister Mamata Banerjee recently took aim at provocative claims from certain Bangladeshi politicians who suggested that their country has a legitimate stake in Bengal, Bihar and Odisha. In a sharp rebuttal, she sarcastically wondered whether Indians would "have lollipop" when external forces tried to occupy Indian lands.

Her retort seemed to underscore a deft balancing act of apparently defending India's sovereignty while preaching restraint to her constituents. Yet, her carefully calibrated rhetoric also hints at ambitions that extend beyond Kolkata.

Banerjee urged West Bengal's citizens not to fall prey to inflammatory rhetoric emanating from Dhaka, where a Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader's statement had stirred emotions on both sides of the border. In an unusual display of unity, she highlighted how even imams in her state condemned the attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh, presenting West Bengal as a beacon of harmony. "The same blood flows in the veins of Hindus and Muslims," she reminded her audience, emphasizing collective responsibility to maintain peace.

At the same time, her critique of Bangladeshi provocateurs was tempered with a swipe at her

West Bengal Chief **Minister Mamata** Banerjee's measured rhetoric over the Bangladesh issue reveals a leader eyeing domestic stability and national prominence.

domestic rivals. She urged media houses to act responsibly, contrasting West Bengal's media freedoms with the heavyhandedness of Uttar Pradesh. Her appeal to calm extended beyond the political spectrum, reminding all parties that destabilization in the region would reverberate



of families with ties in both nations

Banerjee is no stranger to political recalibration. Facing accusations of minority appeasement from the BJP, which has made steady inroads into her state, she has sought to counterbalance the narrative by apparently speaking out on behalf of the persecuted Hindus in Bangladesh. Her latest remarks, directed as much at the BJP as at the Hindu electorate, aim to reclaim ground lost to the saffron juggernaut. By invoking the issue of minority persecution in Bangladesh—a topic that resonates with Hindu nationalist sentimentMs. Banerjee deftly signals empathy for a constituency that has largely eluded her grasp.

Most notably, Banerjee's tone and substance reflected a careful adherence to the central government's policy on Bangladesh. She framed her approach within the parameters of India's official diplomatic stance. By deferring to the Ministry of External Affairs and referencing Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's recent high-level talks in Dhaka, she projected an image of a leader attuned to national interests.

Her remarks carry a subtext of political ambition. Having recently expressed dissatisfaction with the INDIA bloc's cohesion, she hinted at her capacity to lead the opposition alliance, even while managing her responsibilities as Chief Minister. The timing of her statements hints at ambitions that stretch beyond Bengal. In the INDIA bloc's fractious coalition, Banerjee has positioned herself as a leader capable of uniting disparate factions over the Congress' impotent leadership, as evinced by the latter party's debacles in Haryana and especially the Maharashtra Assembly polls.

Her appeal to Hindu voters may be aimed at neutralizing the BJP's advantage in projecting the opposition as beholden to minority interests, thus bolstering her credibility on a national stage. This dual messaging-a commitment to regional stability paired with veiled national aspirations—is quintessential Mamata Banerjee.

Her response to the Bangladesh issue allows her to court Hindu voters, counter BJP narratives and position herself as a potential all-India leader. Whether this strategy vields dividends or alienates her core base – the minorities - remains uncertain. What is clear is her intent to emerge as both West Bengal's 'protector' and a national political force.









KALEIDOSCOPE

- 1. Tourists pose in the snow after fresh snowfall in Solang Valley in Manali of Himachal Pradesh.
- 2. Bollywood actor-couple Katrina Kaif and Vicky Kaushal arrive at the Jodhpur airport for their wedding anniversary celebration.
- 3. Singer and actor Diljit Singh Dosanjh offers prayer at the historical Mahakaleshwar temple, in Ujjain of MP.
- 4. People from the Tibetan community pray for their Spiritual leader Dalai Lama in Dhanbad of Jharkhand.
- 5. Farmers work at a field on a winter morning in the interiors of Dal Lake in Srinagar of J&K.

All Pictures PTI, AF



TALKING SENSE

Why Maharashtra needs a separate Science & Technology department?



Chaitanya Giri

Taharashtra is India's biggest and most industrialised state economy, and it will reach the 1 trillion dollar state gross domestic product mark before 2035. Through its two registrars of companies - Mumbai and Pune -Maharashtra will increasingly house numerous R&D-intensive industries, including enormous data centres, semiconductor OSAT and ATMPs, electronics, automobiles, new energy, large pharmaceutical and biotechnology plants, space, aerospace, and defence companies, speciality chemicals, and other manufacturing and high-end artificial intelligence-based services. Of course, industrial investments are a state subject, but attracting high-end global industries in times of global geoeconomic and geopolitical flux, and harbouring them in Maharashtra, among other states, and encouraging the indigenous ones to follow suit is going to be a national priority for New Delhi. It was not without a reason that the system decided to have a massive show of strength at the oath-taking ceremony of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy Chief Ministers Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar. But how prepared is Maharashtra? There's a new government in

Maharashtra, which, at the outset, is very stable, very accommodating, and likely to be speedy in terms of decision-making and executions. What was evident from the oathtaking ceremony was that it would be a 'double-engine' sarkaar. If one is to make a strategic recommendation in



the larger national interest, this Fadnavis-Shinde-Pawar Mahayuti government may pay heed to it. The government must swiftly establish a sought-after ministerial portfolio with a scientific research and technological development mandate.

Maharashtra is looking towards solving its inherent problems and finding answers for national and global ones. Our farmers of the state are eager to find solutions to environmental stresses that affect agriculture; the solutions can come out of R&D. The under-privileged and middle classes are seeking better houses, transportation, sanitation and next-generation skills - this could again come from R&D; the state is seeking better performance on matters of environmental sustainability, reducing the government's overall carbon footprint, expansive forests, fully decarbonised public transport, and clean air and water bodies, again solutions lie in R&D. To add, the ambitious task of connecting every district with an expressway would also demand attracting world-class R&D-intensive industries in Maharashtra and create new growth

In a world where geoeconomic multipolarity is becoming a reality, India and, for that matter, the Maharashtra government cannot expect scientific and technological

solutions to the issues and challenges affecting the state to come from overseas. A would-be trillion-dollar industrialised state economy must set an example by promoting, financing, and end-using scientific and technological solutions through startups, MSMEs, and corporate R&D

and technology were accorded a national mandate. It was the central government that cultivated career scientists and technologists through proper recruitment and career progression processes. At this point, Maharashtra has several laboratories run by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, the Defence Research Development Organisation, the Indian Council on Agricultural Research, the Indian Council on Medical Research, the Department of Atomic Energy, the Ministry of Earth Sciences, and the Department of Science and Technology, all entities belonging to the central government. Maharashtra, or no state for that matter, can create a new Ministry of Science and Technology without a dedicated workforce and institutions. But what the Maharashtra government can practically do, at a quick pace, is parallelise the mandates of its Department of Industries (MoI) and Department of Skills, Employment, Entrepreneurship and Innovation (DSSEI).



The DSSEI has a tidy Maharashtra State Innovation Society that has been working towards encouraging earlystage innovators, offering them finances through the Maharashtra Innovation and Technological Development Fund, managing a network of startup incubators, and harnessing necessary skills among budding innovation entrepreneurs. However, the DSSEI does not directly facilitate the potential of MSMEs and large-scale industries, which are better endowed to carry out in-house corporate R&D and work on innovations reaching higher levels of commercial readiness than startups do. This falls under the mandate of the Department of Industries.

The Department of Industries (DoI) runs a one-stop promotion body called the Maharashtra Industry, Trade and Investment Facilitation Cell, also known as MAITRI. MAITRI helps investors set their industrial units based on the World Bank's Doing Business Indicators. However, these Indicators do not include facilitation for ramping up corporate R&D.

Moreover, the DoI's MAITRI platform apparently does not currently offer exemptions, tax holidays, or incentives for specifically promoting corporate, large-industry, and MSMElevel R&D.

Now, to address the parochial question often asked by perennial naysayers? Why should the government help the corporates? Every state in India should give their utmost to appear on the global rankings of the world's greatest innovation ecosystems. Apart from the strategic thinking of the central government to increase India's ranking in the Global Innovation Index, which India has been steadily rising in the past 10 years, the states also have a role to play. The DSSEI is setting the foundation for lowtechnology readiness level innovations from its mandate area; the DoI must do the same if Maharashtra intends to attract R&Dintensive companies into its realms. If DoI enables corporate R&D, the same corporates will be better poised

to source and finance low-TRL innovations happening in incubators supported by the Maharashtra State Innovation Society. Where the DSSEI supports low-TRL innovation, the DoI would support high-TRL innovation marching towards commercial

To that end, the Fadnavis-Shinde-Pawar triumvirate should consider reforming the Department of Industries into the Department of Industries, Science and Technology. Such a step would only benefit the young, the aspirational, and the talented citizens of the land of the Metres, Talpades, Mashelkars, Kakodkars, and Naralikars, among other scientific greats our Maharashtra has raised. And lead India's growth story on all fronts

(Dr. Chaitanya Giri is a Space and Emerging Technology Fellow at the Centre for Security, Strategy and Technology, Observer Research Foundation, Mumbai.)

Shami in focus as Bengal face rampant Baroda in quarters

Bengaluru: Continuing his fine run in his comeback from ankle surgery, India pacer Mohammed Shami will be in the spotlight as Bengal face strong challenge from a rampaging Baroda in the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 quarterfinal here on Wednesday.

Shami played a key role in Bengal's thrilling three-run win over Chandigarh to help them enter the last-eight stage.

Batting at No. 10, Shami hit a crucial unbeaten 17-ball 32 to lift Bengal to 159 for 9. With the ball, he bowled a tight spell, taking 1/13 in his initial three overs.

In all, Shami has now played nine domestic games -- one Ranji Trophy (42.3 overs) and eight SMAT T20 games (31.3 over) -- after returning to action. He has bowled a total of 64 overs and taken 16 wickets.

But, Baroda have sounded warning as they sizzled with the bat in the competition by setting a world record for the highest total in men's T20 cricket, posting 349/5 against Sikkim to storm into the quarterfinals.

They also broke the record for most sixes in a T20 innings, hitting 37.

Bhanu Pania led the charge with a blistering 134 off 51 balls, supported by Shivalik Sharma (55 off 17) and Vishnu Solanki (50 off 16).

Baroda's bowlers, led by skipper Krunal Pandya, has been in fine form as well and Bengal will have their task cut out.

The evening match here will see Delhi take on Uttar Pradesh who defeated Andhra Pradesh to make the cut.

Rinku Singh and Vipraj Nigam have been in fine form for UP as the duo added 48 runs in just three overs to seal their four-wicket win.

Delhi have been dominant in the group stage, securing six wins from seven matches to confirm their last-eight berth.

Priyansh Arya, with one century and one fifty, has been their leading run-getter (252), while the likes of Yash Dhull (185), Himmat Singh (179) and Ayush Badoni (102) will also look to play a key role in batting.

At Alur, Madhya Pradesh will take on Saurashtra, while Mumbai will face Vidarbha.

All eyes would be on skipper Shreyas Iyer as Ranji giants Mumbai won five out of six to top their Group E.

In-form Iyer has led from the front with 278 runs, including one century and one fifty, and averages 69.50 at a strike rate of 200.

Mumbai have dropped all-rounder Shams Mulani for the knockout

Saurashtra, who secured direct qualification by being the best secondplaced side in the group stages, will face Madhya Pradesh, led by India batter Rajat Patidar.

Patidar has been in fine form with three fifties in the tournament to be the leading run-getter (253) for his side.

Venkatesh Iyer will also be in focus, having become the third most expensive buy at Rs 23.75 crore in the IPL Mega Auction.

Quarterfinal Lineups:

At Alur: Madhya Pradesh vs Saurashtra (9am); Mumbai vs Vidarbha (1.30pm).

At Bengaluru: Baroda vs Bengal (11am); Delhi vs Uttar Pradesh (4.30pm). -PTI



Sumit Tomar (right) a member of the Army Service Corps (ASC) 'Tornadoes' of the Indian Army, rides a motorcycle in an attempt to break the world record for the 'longest no-hands motorcycle wheelie' in Bengaluru on Tuesday.

MSSA partners with Dream Sports Foundation

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Dream Sports Foundation (DSF) announced a five-year partnership with the Mumbai School Sports Association (MSSA), one of India's oldest and most prestigious school sports organizations. This collaboration will span across 20 sports with a focus on Hockey, Football, Cricket, Athletics, Table Tennis and Badminton.

MSSA has played a historic role in the growth of sports in the city with legends like Dilip Vengsarkar, Sachin Tendulkar, Ajit Agarkar, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Prithvi Shaw, Chirag Shetty and many more, participat-

P DREAM SPORTS

ing in tournaments in their

Through this partnership, DSF will help MSSA promote fitness and discipline among thousands of school-going students in Mumbai while enhancing the quality of their existing championships. In addition to this, the DSF will curate training programs for young athletes, PE teachers nd coaches.

Commenting on the collaboration, Bhavit Sheth, Chief Operating Officer and Co-Founder, Dream Sports said, "We're thrilled to partner with an association that is integral to Mumbai's grassroots sporting culture and has made the city proud. In line with our vision to Make Sports Better, we're excited to support

young athletes and help unlock their potential while contributing to India's vision of becoming a sporting superpower."

Rev. Fr. Jude Rodrigues, President, Mumbai School Sports Association said, "We are excited to take another step forward in improving Mumbai's sporting future by joining hands with Dream Sports Foundation.

This collaboration will help Mumbai athletes stay ahead of the curve while adhering to the foundation's vision and mission. This partnership marks the beginning of an exciting journey to add to Mumbai's illustrious sporting legacy."

Indian batters focus on red-ball preparations

Adelaide: Reeling from their humiliating 10-wicket defeat in the pink-ball Test, the under-fire Indian batters, led by Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, turned their attention to red-ball preparations with an intensive net session here on Tuesday, aiming to bounce back in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

While Australia moved to Brisbane for the third Test from Saturday, the Indian team chose to stay back, focusing on honing their red-ball skills, particularly their defensive techniques and judgment in leaving deliveries.

"It's time to look ahead. Preparations for the Brisbane Test starts right here in Adelaide," the BCCI posted on X, sharing a video of Team India's practice.

Struggling with poor form, having scored just 142 runs with only one fifty (52) in his last 12 innings, the Indian skipper, who rejoined the team after the birth of his son, aimed to quickly regain his rhythm as he faced both Indian spinners and pacers.

Dropped himself to No 6, Rohit capped scores of three and six in Adelaide; first, he was adjudged LBW to a fuller delivery that nipped back, while in the second essay he was cleaned up a by length ball from his Aussie counterpart Pat Cummins that held its line and clipped the off

Kohli, who ended his 16-month century drought with a hundred in Perth, fell victim to edging two deliveries -- first to second slip and then to wicketkeeper in the pink ball Test.

The star Indian batter looked full of intent as had a watchful start to his net session before slowly finding his flow.

KL Rahul looked more subdued, focusing more on his defence, while Rishabh Pant played a few pick up

Young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, who starred with a 161 in India's massive 295run win in the opening Test, was the aggressor among the all, displaying his cheeky shots and even stepped out to the Indian howlers

The bowling unit consisted the likes of Harshit Rana, Akash Deep, Yash Dayal and the spin trio of Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin and Washington Sundar, while there were a few throwdown specialists as well.

cialists as well.

The key Indian pace duo of Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj along with seam-bowling allrounder Nitish Kumar Reddy looked to have a lean day.

-PTI



Indian (in blue) and Chinese players during the 20th Asian Women's Handball Championship 56th place match in New Delhi on Tuesday.

Chennaiyin, Hyderabad desperate for a win to revive campaign

Chennai: Struggling at the bottom-half of the table both Chennaiyin FC and Hyderabad FC will look to revive campaign when they clash in the Indian Super League on Wednesday.

The two teams are in an urgent need for a shift in momentum, with two-time former champions Chennaiyin FC dropping to ninth in the standings following one draw and three spedefeats on the trot. A win can take them to the sev-

enth spot.

Hyderabad FC have also suffered three losses in a row to be one place ahead of the laggards Mohammedan Sporting with seven

points from 10 games.

The Owen Coyle-coached Marina Machans have endured a challenging run, going three games without a goal, a streak they'll aim to break

Despite scoring 16 goals in 11 matches this season, Chennaiyin's attack has faltered recently, and they have failed to score in their last two meetings with Hyderabad.

Head coach Owen Coyle, on the verge of completing 50 ISL matches in charge, will be eager to mark the milestone with a victory.

Connor Shields will have to play a key role in the midfield as his delivery from the flanks will be crucial in supplying chances to forwards like Daniel Chima Chukwu, who has a strong record against Hyderabad, including five goals in previous encounters.

Hyderabad FC has also struggled for consistency, conceding 11 first-half goals this season - more than any other team. Their defensive frailty often force them into catch-up mode, disrupting their rhythm.

Hyderabad have failed to score in four of their last six games. Their only wins in this stretch came when they found the net, underscoring the importance of converting chances.

Pune Paltan rope in Thakur as assistant coach

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Going through difficult times, defending champions Pune Paltan have roped in Ajay Thakur in the role of an assistant coach to change its fortunes in the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL).

According to the team officials, Thakur brings with him a wealth of experience and a deep emotional connection to the squad with whom he spent two seasons.

seasons.

Speaking about his return, Thakur expressed his excitement by saying, "I feel really good because when I was playing, I was also part of this team. Now, in the third phase of my career, I've returned to the

same team."
The timing of his return

is particularly significant. With the team at a crucial juncture in the tournament, Thakur's expertise could be the catalyst they need. The defending champions have had a tough season and are seventh on the points table having lost their last three matches on their home ground.

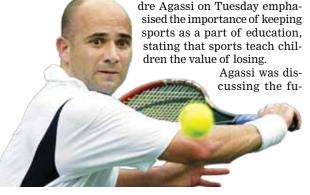
Team CEO Kailash Kandpal highlighted the strategic thinking behind bringing Thakur on board. "We always believe in building our team for the long term. The management sees him not just as a coach, but as a guiding force who can provide invaluable insights to the current players," he explained.

Thakur represented the Puneri Paltan from season 3 and 4, playing 30 matches, scoring 115 Raid Points across both seasons. Ironically, he also made his debut as a coach against the Dabang Delhi K.C., the team with whom he won the PKL trophy in 2021, alongside their current head coach Joginder Narwal.

His return to the PKL mat was also lauded by Dabang Delhi K.C.'s head coach Joginder Narwal, who said, "Ajay is someone I've played with for many years, both in national and international tours and in Pro Kabaddi. We were even roommates when we were on the same team. He's not just an excellent kahaddi player, but also a great person. I'm very happy to see him return as an assistant coach, and he definitely has the capability to contribute to the team '



Sports teaches value of losing: Andre Agassi



Bengaluru: Tennis legend Andre Agassi on Tuesday emphasised the importance of keeping sports as a part of education, stating that sports teach chil-

"Even when you have a failure, you have to get up and play again the next day. So, what sports is teaching you is that focusing on winning and losing is really a distraction from what we need to be thinking about. We need to be thinking about how to get better," he said.

Agassi, who has been investing in education for the "disadvan-

taged" since 2001, shared that he has helped build 130 schools for about 80,000 kids in the United States, a feat he attributes to pushing himself to stay ahead of challenges.

"Sports is all about problemsolving. Tennis taught me how to navigate a very intense environment and maintain my objectivity and problem-solving abilities. It forces me to be present, but also to understand the context of what I'm doing " Agassi said

what I'm doing," Agassi said. Speaking about his rebellious phase, Agassi said it was something he had to go through to reach where he is today. "Vulnerability is essential for

"Vulnerability is essential for growth, and I think vulnerability eventually leads to humility."

The session, called Marathon Mindset, also featured Aakash Chaudhry, Co-Founder and Chief Mentor of Aakash Educational Services Limited (AESL), who discussed the future of EdTech in India.

Agassi agreed that technology in education will play a signifi-

cant role in filling the huge gap in personalised learning that every child deserves. He said this belief is part of the reason why he invested in the Indian EdTech firm, Square Panda.

"I think technology can play an essential role, not just in scalability, but also in optimising personalised learning. That's why I got involved with Square Panda. We are here because of the sheer scale of impact the technology

will bring to education," he said. The tennis legend mentioned that he has been traveling frequently to India—at least two to three times a year over the last few years—"to understand the ground realities". He hopes to "make an impact in English language learning in India in the near future."

"If a child can just be conversational in English in India, it can bring about generational change. What I hope to do is provide a vehicle for that scale and growth in literacy and English as a second language here," Agassi added.