

THE PERFECT VOICE



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Expect economic growth of 6.5-7 pc this fiscal: Agarwal ... pg 6



At Rs 20.50 lakh, Abhishek Dalhor most expensive buy in ISPL ... pg 10

At 18, Gukesh youngest world chess champion

THE ONLY SECOND INDIAN TO CLINCH THE COVETED PRIZE AFTER VISHWANATHAN ANAND



New Delhi: In an important development, the Supreme Court on Thursday restrained till further directions the courts in the country from entertaining fresh lawsuits and passing any effective interim or final orders in pending ones seeking to reclaim religious places, especially mosques and dargahs (a muslim shrine). "As the matter is sub-judice in this court, we deem it appropriate that no fresh suit would be registered and proceedings are undertaken till further orders of this court," the

No court to entertain, pass directions till orders

CJI-led bench said. The direction of a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and K V Viswanathan stalls proceedings in about 18 lawsuits filed by various Hindu parties seeking survey to ascertain original religious character of 10 mosques including Gyanvapi at Varanasi, Shahi Idgah Masjid at Mathura and Shahi Jama Masjid at Sambhal where four persons' lives were snuffed

Cases of Religious Places

out in clashes. The special bench was hearing about six petitions, including the lead one filed by lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay, challenging various provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991. The 1991 law prohibits conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of the re-

ligious character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947. However, the dispute relating to Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid at Ayodhya was kept out of its purview. There are several cross petitions which seek strict implementation of the 1991 law to maintain communal harmony and to preserve the present sta-

Surgeon dies after marathon **Panaji:** A 29-year-old dental surgeon died of a massive heart attack after completing a marathon in Goa, his father said. Dr Mithun Kudalkar from Vasco city in south Goa, died on Sunday, his father Dr Dynaneshwar Kudalkar, who is former chief medical officer of Mormugao Port Trust hospital, told PTI. "He felt uneasy after taking part in the Goa River Marathon on Sunday.

Over 1,300 posts vacant in IAS, 586 in IPS

New Delhi: There are 1,316 and 586 vacant posts of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Indian Police Service (IPS) officers, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Thursday. Of the total sanctioned strength of 6,858 IAS, there were 5,542 officers in-position, as on January 1, 2024, he said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha. There were 4,469 IPS officers working against their sanctioned strength of 5,055, said Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel. Of the 1,316 vacant posts of IAS, 794 were meant for direct recruit and 522 were promotion posts, he said. Of the 586 vacant IPS posts, 209 were for direct recruit and 377 were promotion posts. There are 2,151 Indian Forest Service (IFS) officers in-position against their sanctioned strength of 3,193. Of the 1,042 vacant IFS posts, 503 were for direct recruit and 539 promotion posts, he added. The IAS, IPS and IFS officers are selected through the civil services examination conducted by the UPSC annually.

Cabinet nod to bills for simultaneous polls

New Delhi: The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved two bills, including one to amend the Constitution to implement "one nation, one election", and the draft legislations are likely to be introduced in Parliament in the ongoing winter session, sources said. As of now, the Cabinet has given its nod to draft legislations to hold simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and legislative assemblies only, the sources said. While a high-level committee led by former president Ram Nath Kovind had also proposed holding the municipality and panchayat polls along with the national and state elections in a phased manner, the Cabinet has decided to stay away, "as of now", from the manner in which local body elections are conducted. The Constitution amendment bill to hold simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies will not require ratification by at least 50 per cent of the states, the sources noted. Another Constitution bill proposed by the Kovind panel was aimed at creating



provisions to hold simultaneous elections to municipalities and panchayats, along with the elections to the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, by inserting a new Article 324A. It would have required ratification by half of the state assemblies. But the Union Cabinet has kept the local body polls out of it. The decision was taken at a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The second bill will be an ordinary one to amend provisions in three laws dealing with Union territories that have legislative assemblies -- Puducherry, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir -- to align the terms of these Houses with other legislative assemblies and the Lok Sabha as proposed in the

Constitution amendment bill. The statutes it proposes to amend are the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act-1991, the Government of Union Territories Act-1963 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act-2019. The proposed bill will be an ordinary legislation not requiring a change in the Constitution and will also not need ratification by the states. The government is keen on holding wider consultations on bills that are likely to be referred to a parliamentary committee. The sources said the government also wants to consult the speakers of various state legislative assemblies through the committee. Moving ahead with its "one nation, one election" plan, the government in September accepted the recommendations of the high-level committee for holding simultaneous polls for the Lok Sabha, state assemblies and local bodies in a phased manner. **Top 10 recommendations by panel ...Page4**



A variety of food items, called 'Byanjana' in Odia, offered at Gour Bihar Ashram on the occasion of 'Byanjana Dwadashi' in Puri on Thursday. Pic: PTI

Woman kills 1-yr-old son after quarrel

Thane: A woman allegedly killed her one-year-old son by throwing him in a water tank following a dispute with her mother-in-law over the infant's health issues in Maharashtra's Thane district, police said on Thursday. The incident took place at Kasane village near Vasind in Shahapur taluka on Wednesday and the Padgha police later arrested the woman, they said. The child's father, who worked as a security guard at a nearby godown, married the woman in 2022. Last year, the couple's son was born with a congenital illness and had been receiving treatment at the Wadia Hospital in Mumbai, an official from Padgha police station said. The woman and her mother-in-law were frequently at odds over the

child's care and well-being. On Tuesday, the child's grandmother, concerned about his health, decided to take him to Titwala during a visit to her daughter. However, the child developed a fever there and his grandmother brought him back to Kasane late Tuesday night, the official said. Later, a heated argument took place between the child's mother and grandmother over his health condition, he said. The child's father left for his night shift work after attempting to calm the situation. When he returned on Wednesday morning, he briefly played with his son before falling asleep. During this time, the child's mother allegedly drowned him in a water

tank located on the first floor of the house, the official said. Later, when the man was unable to find his son, he began a search for him along with family members and friends. In the meantime, the child's mother approached police with a complaint, claiming her son had gone missing, the official said. Her husband grew suspicious and confronted her. The woman then confessed to him that she had killed their child, he said. The man subsequently contacted the Padgha police and filed a complaint. The body was recovered and sent to a government hospital for post-mortem, police inspector Bala Kumbhar said.

Garland worn by Mahatma open for bids in UK

By Aditi Khanna **London:** A tinselled garland presented to and worn by Mahatma Gandhi during the iconic Dandi March of the Indian freedom struggle in 1930 remains open for bids after it failed to meet its GBP 20-30,000 guide price estimate at a UK auction this week. The garland, in folded paper wrappers inscribed in Gujarati, is said to have been presented as the Salt March passed near the Ahmedabad home of Gandhi's personal physician Dr Balvantrai N Kanuga and was offered by his wife,

Nanduben Kanuga. It came up for auction as part of an 'Islamic and Indian Art' sale by Lyon & Turnbull in London on Wednesday. "I am very surprised that the 'Gandhi Garland' did not find a home on the day of the auction," said Kristina Sanne, Head of Sale at the auction house specialising in fine arts and antiques. "That said, we have had quite a lot of interest since the sale and hope to sell it to the highest bidder. It deserves a great home," she said. The garland is composed of a large teardrop-shaped

medallion of pink cloth backed on card, applied with silver and gold thread and sequins in an elaborate decorative pattern. It is edged with gold tinsel, with four smaller rectangular medallions and two triangular medallions similarly decorated and all connected with gold threads to form a necklace. It passed on through descent from the collection of the late Dr Balvantrai N Kanuga, who along with his wife spent extensive periods at Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram as fellow satyagrahis. An amateur photograph of Gandhi



being presented with the garland is inscribed on the reserve to read: "Gandhiji Nanduben Kanuga. On the day of Dandi March. At



Bungalow 12th March 1930". The literature with the auction lot states: "This garland was presented to

Gandhi to mark an auspicious beginning to the Salt March, a major non-violent protest in India in March-April 1930. The Salt March was one of the most successful campaigns in Gandhi's struggle against British rule in India to win equal rights and freedom for Indians. "Starting at his ashram (religious retreat) at Sabarmati (near Ahmedabad), the march reached Dandi after a journey of some 240 miles. On the morning of April 6, Gandhi and his followers picked up handfuls of salt from along the seashore. In so doing, they

technically 'produced' salt and broke the law." A photograph accompanying the garland shows Nanduben Kanuga placing the garland around Gandhi's neck and it is said to have been subsequently returned to the Kanugas after the march. "A few weeks later, Dr Kanuga further contributed to the cause by paying 1600 Rupees for the grains of salt that Gandhi had made at Dandi," reads the footnote. While the garland remained unsold, the auction attracted fierce bidding for its other highlight lots with

a very fine illustration from a Bhagavata Purana series from Punjab going under the hammer for GBP 27,700 - overshooting its estimate of GBP 15-20,000. A group of six Rajput Equestrian Portraits from Rajasthan exceeded their estimate to fetch GBP 20,160 and an album of Kalighat Paintings sold for GBP 21,420. "The Indian Art section saw frantic bidding throughout and was over 90 per cent sold. A real testament to the buoyancy of the Indian Art market," said Sanne. **-PTI**

Most of fatal accidents involve Olectra vehicles

Mumbai: Olectra electric buses were involved in 10 of the 12 fatal accidents of wet-leased buses in civic-run BEST's fleet in the current financial year, officials said on Thursday.

On December 9, an Olectra bus went out of control on an arterial road in Mumbai's Kurla West area and rammed into several vehicles, killing seven and injuring more than 40 persons.

Of the 12 fatal accidents in 2024-25, eight involved 12-metre long electric buses from EVEY TRANS, while two each belonged to Olectra Greentech and Tata Motors, as per data from Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking.

BEST BUS CRASH

The December 9 accident involved a 12-metre Olectra bus registered with EVEY TRANS.

According to sources, insufficient training of drivers of wet-leased buses may be among the major reasons for the accidents involving vehicles from BEST's fleet, with many of them getting just 15 days' training against the 3-month course provided to the undertaking's own



drivers.

Drivers of wet-leased buses are provided by the operator and are not BEST staffers.

BEST officials said the undertaking has more than 700 electric buses hired on wet lease from Tata Motors, Switch Mobility (double deckers) and Olectra. These comprise

340 from Tata Motors, 315 from Olectra and 50 from Switch Mobility.

Currently, BEST's fleet consists of 2,913 buses, comprising 1,013 owned buses and 1,900 wet-leased buses. Of the wet-leased buses, 705 are electric ones while 1,195 run on fossil fuels and are sourced from two wet-lease operators, the officials added.

EVEY TRANS and Olectra Greentech are subsidiaries of electric bus manufacturer Olectra, they said.

Earlier, Olectra Greentech provided 40 nine-meter long buses, and this year, EVEY TRANS supplied 275 twelve-meter long electric buses, the official informed.

Video shows man stealing victim's valuables

Mumbai: An unidentified person allegedly stole the gold jewellery of a woman under the pretext of helping her as she was fatally wounded in the BEST bus accident in Mumbai, police said on Thursday.

A viral video showed a man telling others that he was taking the woman's jewellery for safe custody and will inform her relatives about it.

Based on her family's complaint, police have registered a case of theft of her valuables, the police said.

Fatima Kaniz Ansari (55) was among the seven persons who died after being mowed down by the BEST bus in Kurla area here on Monday, they said.

Ansari, who worked as an attendant at a hospital, was hit by the speeding BEST bus when she was waiting outside a building on the S G Barve Marg, an official said.

She was found trapped under a car, the official said, adding the unidentified man took away her gold bangles and mobile phone while pretending to help her.

Ansari's relatives claimed her bangles were stolen by an unidentified person after her death while her mobile phone was returned.

The Mumbai police on Thursday registered a case against the unidentified culprit under sections 303 (theft) and 315 (dishonest misappropriation of property possessed by deceased person at the time of death) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the official said.

A probe was on into the case, the police added.

The out-of-control electric bus operated by the civic-run Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking rammed into pedestrians and vehicles at around 9.30 pm on Monday on the SG Barve Marg in Kurla (West).

Besides killing seven persons and injuring 42 others, including four policemen on 'bandobast' duty, the accident also wrecked 22 vehicles.

The bus driver has been arrested for culpable homicide not amounting to murder, according to police.



More collected backpacks, jumped out of window

Mumbai: The CCTV footage of the BEST bus that mowed down seven persons in Mumbai's Kurla area shows driver Sanjay More collecting two backpacks from the cabin and jumping out of a broken window after the accident.

Four to five video clips with a duration of 50 seconds to over 1 minute went viral on social media on Wednesday.

The visuals show passengers panicking as the electric vehicle (EV) ran amok, hitting vehicles and pedestrians on Monday night on a busy street in Kurla.

Some passengers tried to

tightly hold on to the poles and grab handles, while others rose from their seats to fathom what was happening on the streets as the bus moved forward.

After the bus swerved to a halt, several passengers jumped out of the shattered windows.

A clip shows Sanjay More coming out of the bus cabin holding two black backpacks, and jumping out of a broken window on the left side of the bus.

The bus conductor got down from the rear side door.

The out-of-control electric bus operated by the

civic-run BEST undertaking rammed into pedestrians and vehicles at around 9.30 pm on Monday on the SG Barve Marg in Kurla.

Besides killing seven persons and injuring 42 others, including four policemen on 'bandobast' duty, the accident also wrecked 22 vehicles.

The bus driver has been arrested for culpable homicide not amounting to murder and remanded in police custody till December 21.

According to details that have emerged so far, More had no experience in driving electric vehicles and underwent only a 10-day

training for steering EVs.

Top officials of BEST and the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) held meetings on Wednesday with private operators who supply buses to government agencies under the wet lease model and affirmed to focus on driver training and taking extra safety steps.

BEST will also make breath analyser test mandatory for drivers in the wake of the Kurla crash.

At the meetings, the private operators were asked to provide details of training given to drivers, their

appointment criteria, training infrastructure and modules, officials said.

Another meeting was held between senior BEST officials and the Maharashtra transport commissioner, who directed BEST to conduct an internal investigation and submit a report, which will be sent to the state government.

Under the wet lease model, the responsibility of providing drivers and carrying out maintenance of hired buses remains with private contractors. The state-run transport bodies, on their part, pay them a specific amount for the buses.

Man who caused pedestrian's death held

Mumbai: Police apprehended a 20-year-old man on Thursday, a day after his motorcycle rammed into a pedestrian that resulted in the latter falling down and being run over by a civic transport bus in Mumbai, officials said.

The accident occurred around 4.30 pm on Wednesday near the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) in south Mumbai.

The deceased, identified as Hasenar Anduhi, hailing from Kasaragod district in Kerala was first hit by the motorcycle and then run over by the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking's bus, an official said.

"On the basis of technical inputs, the motorcyclist, Mohammed Sahil Siddique, a resident of Dongri in Mumbai, was apprehended by the MRA Marg police on Thursday," he said.

Anduhi was walking when he was hit by Siddique's motorcycle, which ultimately resulted in his death under a rear wheel of the BEST bus, he said.

After the incident, the police registered a case and launched a search for the motorcyclist, he said.

Newbies in the House Part-4

Strong opponent to Dharavi Project

By Ruddhi Phadke

Having to manage the herculean task of finding a solution to the long-awaited and debated Dharavi redevelopment is the new MLA from here, Jyoti Gaikwad. The 47-year-old daughter of veteran Congressman Eknath Gaikwad and sister of the incumbent MP, Varsha Gaikwad. An Ayurveda practitioner who graduated from RA Podar Medical College (Ayurved), she is currently pursuing her PHD from Tilak College, Pune.

Gaikwad points out that she is not new to social work and politics and that she has learnt a lot from her father Eknath Gaikwad. Besides, her medical profession has always given her a pool of opportunities to serve the people. She said she has been a part of several medical camps and has volunteered during covid crisis. "As the head of the anatomy department of Sion Ayurved Hospital which is very close to the Dharavi area, I have closely watched the problems of Dharavi residents and have always had an urge to do something for them," she says.

With her sister in Parliament, Jyoti jumped into the fray to retain the Dharavi assembly constituency within the family. "It was necessary that someone from the Gaikwad family won the Dharavi seat otherwise the Adani project will end up ruining the lives of a lot of innocents. We will not allow a builder to elevate his standard of living even further by pushing these innocent people to build their homes in deplorable lands like dumping grounds and salt pans. We are not against redevelopment; we are against the way residents of Dharavi are planned to be relocated," she says.

Jyoti also listed a few other issues that have been concerning Dharavi for years like toilets inside the house, public BMC built toilets to be allowed to be open all night, water crisis, and sanitation. Even as Jyoti denies lack of safety being a concern in Dharavi, a domestic help working in Mumbai and a resident of Dharavi anonymously told The Perfect Voice, "My daughter once went to my brother's place in the city for a sleep over at his newly



Jyoti Gaikwad

bought house in a proper housing colony. Since then, she refused to come back to Dharavi and moved to my brother's home permanently. Eve teasing, constant fear of being sexually abused right in the backyard of your own house keep most of us in terror and we are scared to leave our daughters alone at home while at work."

Jyoti says her campaign focussed on real issues of everyday living rather than a religious plank. "A place where people are so concerned about not having enough water running in their taps, who cares about being Hindu or Muslim. Dharavi is a secular place where residents from all communities happily live together. They are struggling for basics," she says.

When asked about the heated discussions over dynasty politics, Jyoti says: "I believe that if someone is not competent and he/she gets an opportunity due to a political backing then that's wrong. However, any highly educated young aspirant must get an opportunity to work for the society. The criteria should be educational qualification and commitment towards the people."

While Jyoti has promised to not let Adani take over settlements of the innocent and poor people, it is not going to be an easy battle for her. With BJP-led Mahayuti coalition's big win in Maharashtra's assembly elections and Devendra Fadnis returning as chief minister, among all other stalled projects that are set to get expedited, Dharavi Redevelopment Project is also ready to get a fresh push.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Had the police decided, they could have averted Santosh Deshmukh's murder. Police and the accused seem to be hand in glove. Police can't do anything here because of the terror of some people."

Dhananjay Munde, Leader, NCP



ABVP protests at Mumbai University

Mumbai: Members of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad on Thursday protested at Mumbai University's Kalina campus over alleged administrative irregularities and mistreatment of students by officials of the varsity's examination department.

ABVP, the student wing of the BJP, accused the university of suppressing students' voices and neglecting their constitutional rights, and levelled many other allegations, including a few concerning hostels. A university official has

so far responded to one allegation tied to the hostels.

According to ABVP members, the students who raised concerns about alleged inefficiencies in the university's examination department were served disciplinary notices instead of receiving resolutions.

The students had cited a delay in the issuance of essential documents. The documents should have been provided within eight days but they often take up to 25 days, ABVP said.

Two female students seeking updates on their

documents were allegedly subjected to rude behaviour and obscene language by an official and their papers were reportedly thrown away, claimed the student body.

It also accused examination controllers of refusing to address complaints or engaging with the aggrieved students.

ABVP said in a statement that Mumbai University officials met their members after a protest two days ago and gave verbal assurances but later issued a notice to Prashant Mali, their Mum-

bai metropolitan secretary who had led the demonstration. The move prompted the student organisation to stage another protest on Thursday.

ABVP said attempts are being made to protect "corrupt" and "inefficient" officials. "Why is the university trying to suppress the voices of students? Are students not allowed to protest against the inconveniences and atrocities they face? Does the university not value democratic norms," Mali asked. ABVP activists have also



claimed irregularities in the university's hostels, including unauthorised installations of an LED TV and an air conditioner in a student's room. An open pit has remained unattended for five months near the hostel for blind students, it said.

The student organisation claimed that its members spotted "piles" of liquor bottles on the university premises.

A university official told PTI that they allowed a student to install a TV and AC on medical grounds after following all rules.

Fifth murder in Delhi in a fortnight

New Delhi: A 32-year-old man was shot at by a group of attackers, allegedly due to a long-standing enmity between their families, police said on Thursday.

Two of the three suspects have been apprehended in the case, they said.

The incident occurred on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday when the victim, Ravi Yadav, was warming his hands by a bonfire near his home in the Trilokpur area, police said.

Yadav sustained multiple bullet injuries and was rushed to Max Hospital, where his condition is reported to be critical.

A caller, identified as Virender Yadav, informed the police that his nephew had been shot.

Pregnant woman shot dead by miscreants

Bhubaneswar: A pregnant woman was shot dead by two unidentified persons in Odisha's Sundargarh district, police said. The deceased was identified as Soumyamaye Behera, wife of Deben Behera of Jhirdapali village under Tikayatpali police station in the district. She was seven months pregnant, they added.

According to a police statement, he alleged that Sunil Gupta, alias Golu, and two of his associates were involved in the firing.

"Ravi and his family have a long term enmity with the family of Golu," said Virender Yadav, who is a practicing advocate in Karkardooma Court in east Delhi.

"The victim was involved in an attempt to murder case where he and his associates assaulted Golu with a knife and sticks in March this year," police said. It is alleged that Golu's brother, Vipin, lost his job recently due to multiple complaints and RTIs filed by Virender Yadav, police said.

-PTI

Girl killed in celebratory firing

Chandigarh: A 13-year-old girl was killed after suffering bullet injuries during celebratory firing at a wedding function in Haryana's Charkhi Dabri, police said on Thursday. The girl along with her family was attending the function at a banquet hall located on Bhiwani road in Charkhi Dabri when the incident took place on Wednesday night, they said.

Panchamasali agitation over OBC intensifies

Belgaum (Karnataka): The protests by Panchamasali Lingayat community demanding their inclusion in the 2A category of Other Backward Castes (OBC) intensified on Thursday with the BJP backing them. The Panchamasali Lingayat community led by the pontiff of Kudalasangama Panchamasali Math Basava Jayamruthunjaya Swami is demanding their inclusion in 2A category.

Soudha in Belgaum. The Legislative Council Opposition Leader Chalavadi Narayanaswamy, BJP state chief B Y Vijayendra and several MLAs and MLCs too joined Ashoka in the protest. Speaking on the occasion, Ashoka said the government responded with a lathi charge when Panchamasali Lingayats demanded reservations under 2A category.



Union Minister Giriraj Singh stage a protest over Congress leader Sonia Gandhi's alleged links with an organisation funded by the George Soros Foundation in New Delhi on Thursday.

Woman leader alleges cyberbullying over viral video

Kollam (Kerala): A woman leader of the ruling CPI(M) has alleged that she was subjected to cyberbullying after visuals of her drinking water from a reusable bottle, which resembled a beer bottle, during the party's Kollam district conference surfaced on social media. In a Facebook post, CPI(M) state committee member Chinthra Jerome said that when someone mistakes a bottle of karungali water (a herbal drinking water) for beer, their mental state should be questioned.



A fan of actor Rajinikanth stands outside his residence on his birthday in Chennai on Thursday. Pic: PTI

Seven Naxalites killed

Narayanpur: At least seven Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district on Thursday, a senior police official said. The gunfight broke out around 3 am in the forest of south Abujhmad when a joint team of police and the Central Reserve Police Force was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, he said.

Kejriwal does a Shinde

New Delhi: AAP supreme Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday announced the launch of the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojna to give a monthly assistance of Rs 1,000 to women in Delhi, and promised the amount would be raised to Rs 2,100 after the elections. However, he clarified the elections are likely to be announced soon and therefore the money could be credited in beneficiaries' accounts only after the polls.

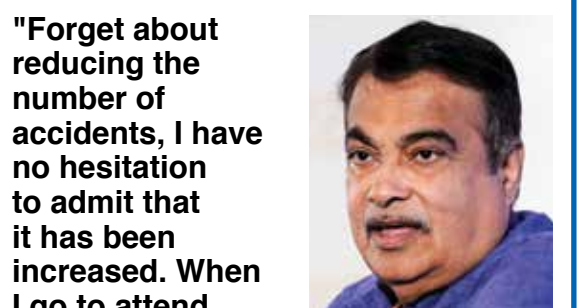
Assam 'banana republic': Oppn

Govt's decision to link NRC with Aadhaar criticised. Guwahati: Opposition Congress and Trinamool Congress on Thursday criticised the Assam government's decision to make NRC application a pre-condition for obtaining an Aadhaar card, stating the state has turned into a 'banana republic' under CM Himanta Biswa Sarma and BJP.

'No songs on alcohol': Advisory to Diljit

Chandigarh: Chandigarh Commission for Protection of Child Rights (CCPCR) has advised singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh, set to perform here on Saturday, to refrain from singing alcohol-themed songs during his live show, citing their adverse impact on children of impressionable age. The advisory issued by the CCPCR chairperson Shipra Bansal on Thursday, specifically mentioned songs like 'Patiala Peg', '5 Tara', and 'Case' etc, cautioning against even altered versions that promote alcohol, drugs or violence.

QUOTE OF THE DAY



"Forget about reducing the number of accidents, I have no hesitation to admit that it has been increased. When I go to attend international conferences where there is a discussion on road accidents, I try to hide my face."

Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister

All-women panel wins JNU executive council

New Delhi: In a first at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, an all-women panel has been elected to the three seats reserved for teachers in the Executive Council (EC), the varsity's teachers body said on Thursday. Previously, these seats have seen one or, at most, two women representatives, the JNUTA said.

voter turnout of over 90 per cent, as 634 faculty members cast their ballots, as per the JNUTA. According to the results, Gupta secured 141 votes in the professor category, Hariharan won with 84 votes in the associate professor category, and Khanikar received 121 votes in the assistant professor category.

They have pledged to address concerns related to Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) promotions and probation, among other pressing matters. JNU's EC, the highest decision-making body of the university, comprises 14 members, including the Vice-Chancellor as Chair and the Registrar as Secretary.

Israeli airstrikes kill 28 in Gaza

Jerusalem: Palestinian medical officials say Israeli airstrikes have killed at least 28 people in the Gaza Strip, including seven children and a woman, hours after the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly approved a resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

One of the strikes overnight and into Thursday flattened a house in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp, according to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the nearby city of Deir al-Balah, where the casualties were taken.

Two other strikes killed 15 men who were part of local committees established to secure aid convoys. The committees were set up by displaced Palestinians in coordination with the Hamas-run Interior Ministry.

On Wednesday, the UN General Assembly approved resolutions demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and expressing support for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees that Israel has moved to ban. General Assembly



Syrians wait to cross into Syria from Turkey at the Ocupinar border gate near the town of Kilis in southern Turkey on Thursday. Pic: AP

UNGA demands ceasefire in Gaza

The UN General Assembly overwhelmingly approved resolutions Wednesday demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and backing the UN agency for Palestinian refugees that Israel has moved to ban. The votes in the 193-nation world body were 158-9 with 13 abstentions to demand a ceasefire now and 159-9 with 11 abstentions to support the agency known as UNRWA. The votes culminated two days of speeches overwhelmingly calling for an end to the 14-month war between Israel and the militant Hamas group. General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding, although they reflect world opinion.

resolutions are not legally binding, although they reflect world opinion.

The war in Gaza began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250 people. Some 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's offensive has killed over 44,800 Palestin-

ians in Gaza, more than half of them women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not say how many were combatants. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence. Palestinian medical officials say Israeli airstrikes have killed at least 28 people in the Gaza Strip, including seven children and a woman.

One of the strikes overnight and into Thursday flattened a house in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp, according to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the nearby city of Deir al-Balah, where the casualties were taken. An Associated Press reporter saw the bodies at the hospital's morgue.

Two other strikes killed 15 men who were part of local committees established to secure aid convoys. The committees were set up by displaced Palestinians in coordination with the Ha-

mas-run Interior Ministry. The Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis received the bodies and an Associated Press reporter counted them. The hospital said eight were killed in a strike near the southern border town of Rafah and seven others in a strike 30 minutes later near Khan Younis. - AP



The Military Wives Choirs conducted by Hilary Davan Wetton, perform for King Charles III and Queen Camilla at Buckingham Palace in London. Pic: AP

Tight security for Taliban minister's funeral

Kabul: Tight security measures were in place Thursday for a Taliban minister's funeral in Afghanistan after he was killed in a suicide bombing claimed by an affiliate of the Islamic State group. Cabinet member Khalil Haqqani was the most high-profile casualty of an assault in the country since the Taliban seized power three years ago. He died in a blast Wednesday at the Ministry for Refugees and Repatriation in the capital, Kabul, along with several other victims. Officials have not given the latest toll for the dead and injured. Haqqani is the uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani, the acting interior minister and the leader of a power-

ful faction within the Taliban. The US placed a bounty on both their heads. In a statement carried by the Amaq News Agency, the IS affiliate said one of its fighters carried out the suicide bombing. The fighter waited for Haqqani to leave his office and then detonated his device, according to the statement. The minister's funeral is Thursday afternoon in Garda Serai district, eastern Paktia province, which is the heartland of the Haqqani family. Hamdullah Fitrat, the government's deputy spokesman, said Thursday that top officials will attend and security measures are in place. A video purportedly from the scene of the funeral

showed a vast but empty patch of land with a row of guards and armoured vehicles on one side. A fire truck is on standby. The UN Mission in Afghanistan was among those to condemn the ministry attack. "There can be no place for terrorism in the quest for stability," the mission said on the X platform. The IS group's affiliate, a major rival of the ruling Taliban, has previously carried out bombings across Afghanistan. But suicide attacks have become rare since the Taliban seized power in August 2021 and US and NATO forces withdrew. Such assaults have mostly targeted minority Shiite Muslims, especially in the capital. -AP

Prez Biden pardons 39

Washington: President Joe Biden is commuting the sentences of roughly 1,500 people who were released from prison and placed on home confinement during the coronavirus pandemic and is pardoning 39 Americans convicted of nonviolent crimes. It's the largest single-day act of clemency in modern history. The commutations announced Thursday are for people who have served out home confinement sentences for at least one year after they were released. Prisons were uniquely bad for spreading the virus and some inmates were released in part to stop the spread. At one point, 1 in 5 prisoners had COVID-19, according to a tally kept by The Associated Press.

Attack on Israeli bus kills child

Israeli hospital officials say a young boy died after being wounded in a shooting attack in the occupied West Bank that also wounded two adults. An Israeli bus came under fire from a suspected Palestinian attacker late Wednesday, the military said, and Israeli forces are searching for the shooter. The shooting took place just outside Jerusalem in an area near major Israeli settlements. Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem said the boy was 12 years old, after initial reports said he was 10. A spokesperson for the hospital did not immediately respond to a request for clarification. The hospital said two other people, ages 24 and 55, were also wounded.

Russian mercenaries abused Mali civilians

Dakar: Mali's armed forces, supported by Russian mercenaries, committed abuses against civilians since the withdrawal of a UN peacekeeping mission late last year, Human Rights Watch said in a report released Thursday. Malian armed forces and the Russia-backed Wagner Group deliberately killed at least 32 civilians, including seven in a drone strike, kidnapped four others, and burned at least 100 homes in towns and villages in central and northern Mali since May, the rights group said. Human Rights Watch also accused jihadi groups in the region of having summarily executed at least 47 civilians and displaced thousands of people since June. It said the groups burned thousands of houses and looted livestock, which is vital to the survival of the nomadic communities in the region. "The Malian army with the Wagner Group and Islamist armed groups have been targeting civilians and their property in violation of the laws of war," Ilaria Allegrozzi, senior Sahel researcher at Human Rights Watch, said in the report. Mali, along with its neighbors Burkina Faso

and Niger, has for over a decade battled an insurgency fought by jihadi groups, including some allied with al-Qaida and the Islamic State group. Following military coups in all three nations in recent years, the ruling juntas have expelled French forces and turned to Russia's mercenary units for security assistance. Wagner has been present in Mali since late 2021 following a military coup, replacing French troops and international peacekeepers to help fight the militants. At the same time, the mercenary group has been accused of helping to carry out raids and drone strikes that have killed civilians. In December last year, the United Nations ended its decade long peacekeeping mission in Mali, known as MINUSMA following the government's request that alleged the force was inadequate to respond to the insurgency. "Since MINUSMA left Mali a year ago, it has been extremely difficult to get comprehensive information on abuses, and we are deeply concerned that the situation is even worse than reported," Allegrozzi said. -AP



Water is dropped onto the Franklin Fire by helicopter in Malibu on Wednesday.

Serbia Prez: Won't flee like Assad

Belgrade: Serbia's president accused Tuesday foreign intelligence services of trying to unseat him in the wake of spreading protests in the Balkan state and that he wouldn't flee the country like the ousted Syrian leader Bashar Assad. President Aleksandar Vucic posted a video message on Instagram saying: "I will fight for Serbia and serve only my Serbian people and all other citizens of Serbia, I will never serve foreigners, those who seek to defeat, humiliate, and destroy Serbia," he added.

Opponents of the populist leader compared him to Assad who fled to Moscow following a stunning rebel advance, ending his family's half-century of iron rule. Vucic's opponents in Serbia have compared him to Assad and other world dictators, predicting that he may also try to flee the country if he loses his firm grip on power amid the protests triggered by a rail station roof collapse in the northern city of Novi Sad that killed 15 people on Nov. 1. The protesters in Novi

Sad, Belgrade and other Serbian cities have blaming the deadly collapse on rampant corruption in the country that led to sloppy renovation work on the station building in Novi Sad — part of a wider deal with Chinese state companies involved in a number of infrastructure projects in the Balkan country. The canopy collapse has become a flashpoint for broader dissatisfaction with Vucic's growingly autocratic rule, reflecting public demands for democratic changes in the country.

Horrific tales of migrants

Beirut: Isatta Bah wakes up from a nap in a crowded shelter on the outskirts of Beirut, clutching her baby, Blessing. The 24-year-old from Sierra Leone spends her days waiting for an exit visa that could put her and her 1-year-old on a plane back to the West African nation. She wants to reunite with her family after what she called exploitative work conditions and sexual violence, along with the recent horrors of war in Lebanon. "My experience in Lebanon is not good for me. I am really tired," Bah said. "I want to go home." Hundreds of migrant workers in Lebanon are waiting to be repatriated after the ceasefire ending the 14-month war between the Lebanon-based Hezbollah and Israel went into effect last month. Lebanon has long drawn migrant workers dreaming of building better lives for their families. Enticed by promises of stable jobs and decent pay, they enter Lebanon via recruitment agencies under a sponsorship-based labour system known as Kafala — only to find themselves often trapped with confiscated passports, long hours, withheld wages and, for many, abuse.

The Kafala system has long been criticized by human rights groups, but the government rarely if ever addresses the criticism. Bah knew little of that when she came to Lebanon in 2022. She was promised a job at a supermarket with a \$200 monthly salary, she said. Instead, she was sent to care for an older woman once she arrived. Within a month of her arrival, her 3-year-old son back home fell ill and died. She said she was not given the time to grieve and fled her employer's house. Since her employer held her passport and other documents, Bah said she had to leave them behind. Her experience in Lebanon then took a darker turn. One day she and five housemates were picked up by a taxi driver who said he would take them home. Instead, she said, the driver dropped them at the wrong spot. As they tried and failed to find another cab, a group of men chased them and raped them. Not every migrant worker escaped the attacks. An estimated 37 have been killed and 150 wounded since October 2023, said Jolelle Mhanna with the UN's International Organization for Migration. There were few places to

turn. Most government-run shelters refused to take in displaced people who were not Lebanese, said activist Dea Hajj Shaheen. After supporting migrant women during previous crises in Lebanon, she stepped in again along with other volunteers. To house over 200 women from Sierra Leone including Bah, they repurposed an abandoned space owned by her family — a former car dealership that was later a venue for pop-up events and named The Shelter. The kitchen was alive with activity as women cooked, some dancing to Nigerian music. In another area, rows of thin mattresses lay in the dim light from broken windows. Despite the modest conditions, the women set up a Christmas tree crafted from sticks. While some migrants have been accepted at government-run shelters, there were regular reports of others being evicted or denied access. Some migrants hesitate to approach the government shelters for fear of detention or deportation, Mhanna said. "As a result, most are being hosted by embassies, NGOs and community-based organizations including churches."

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I will fight to the end to prevent the forces and criminal groups that have been responsible for paralyzing the country's government and disrupting the nation's constitutional order from threatening the future of the Republic of Korea."



Yoon Suk Yeol, President, South Korea

Gay veterans win compensation amid 'moral stain'

London: British military veterans who were discharged or suffered other forms of discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity will receive up to 70,000 pounds (USD 89,300) under a government compensation programme announced Thursday. Prior to 2000, service personnel who were discovered to be lesbian, gay or trans were forced to leave the military under policies that designated them as unfit to serve in the armed forces. Many others were

subjected to brutal investigations into allegations about their sexual orientation. "The historic treatment of LGBT veterans was a moral stain on our nation," Defence Secretary John Healey said in announcing the compensation. "Our government is determined to right the wrongs of the past and recognise the hurt that too many endured." Former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak last year apologised for the past mistreatment of gay service members and accepted the



recommendations of an independent review, including the principle of financial compensation. Thursday's announcement provides 75 million pounds

for the compensation effort. Veterans who were dismissed from the military because of their sexual orientation or gender identity will receive 50,000 pounds, with additional payments of up to 20,000 pounds for those who were negatively affected by the ban in other ways. Advocates for gay veterans said the programme didn't go far enough. Craig Jones, whose charity Fighting With Pride was among those calling for compensation, said the

amounts are too low compared to what service personnel suffered. "In my years of serving, I watched many of my colleagues marched away by the Special Investigation Branch of the Royal Military Police, and I watched that happen with great sadness," Jones said. "I was lucky not to get caught, but it's been a privilege and an honour to go back, as we do in the armed forces, and find those who have not fared so well and to support them."

EDITORIAL

Fragile Harmony

Few symbols in India resonate as deeply as the Constitution and the legacy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. They embody not just the legal framework of the nation but also the aspirations of its marginalized communities. In Maharashtra's Parbhani district, that potent symbolism turned combustible following the vandalism of a replica of the Constitution near a statue of Ambedkar that sparked two days of unrest, highlighting the simmering tensions that underlie public order in India.

The incident began with a drunken act of desecration—or so the authorities claim. Protests swelled into mob violence, with vehicles set ablaze, shops attacked, and roads and railway tracks blocked.

This unrest lays bare two glaring issues. First, the sluggishness of local administration in responding to such incidents. Despite the initial uproar on Tuesday, authorities failed to take pre-emptive action to prevent Wednesday's escalation.

Second, the incident reveals a deeper malaise: the swift politicization of such actions. While authorities attributed the miscreant's actions to mental instability, political leaders and activists questioned this narrative, accusing the police of attempting a cover-up. Calls for narco-analysis tests and conspiracy theories abound, further polarizing an already volatile situation. This reflects a broader trend where incidents involving symbols of Dalit identity, such as Ambedkar statues, often ignite social unrest.

The violence in Parbhani also underscores the fragility of communal harmony. Acts of vandalism targeting Dalit symbols frequently carry the potential to trigger widespread unrest, fuelled by decades of marginalization and mistrust. The question remains whether the police's response to such provocations is measured and just—or prone to stoking resentment through perceived bias.

Maharashtra, with its long-standing Ambedkarite legacy, has seen such tensions before.

The authorities must investigate the incident with transparency, ensuring that the truth is brought to light. At the same time, local administrations need to adopt proactive measures to defuse tensions before they spiral out of control. Empty condemnations and reactive policing will not suffice.

Dr. Ambedkar once warned against the fragility of social harmony in a deeply hierarchical society. The events in Parbhani are a stark reminder of how easily that harmony can be shattered when symbols of equality are defiled. Anything less risks emboldening those who would exploit such acts for their gain—and further alienating communities whose faith in the system already hangs by a thread.

NATIONALISM FIRST

From Independence to Insecurity: Can Bangladesh reclaim Mujib's vision?



By
Rajeve Puri

Bangladesh, a South Asian star not long ago, once boasted the region's fastest growth rate and celebrated pulling more than half its population out of poverty within a decade. Yet today, it finds itself plunged into near-anarchy, where mobs roam the streets with impunity, targeting its Hindu minorities and members of the deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League.

This unravelling, while seemingly abrupt, has its roots in the country's complicated history. The ideological warnings of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh, loom large over the nation's present crisis. His prescience is captured in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: Rebel to Founding Father, a biography by Syed Badrul Ahsan, who was family confidant and a former speechwriter for Sheikh Hasina, Mujib's daughter and the country's long-serving prime minister.

In December 1971, just after Bangladesh's independence and when his popularity was at its zenith, Mujib offered Hasina a stark caution: the forces of opposition—comprising Jamaat-e-Islami ideologues and pro-Pakistan sympathizers—remained sizable, albeit subdued by the Pakistani military's overreach during the war. He warned that their resurgence could imperil the country, urging constant vigilance and ruthless suppression when necessary. His fears, dismissed by many as overly cautious at the time, have tragically materialized.

Mujib's mistrust of ideological adversaries was not unfounded. As a young man, he was inspired by fiery orators like Syed Badruddin, who championed the cause of Muslim rights in undivided India, and even

cycled 1,000 kilometers to meet Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Ironically, both figures left Mujib disillusioned. Badruddin remained in secular India after Partition, while Mujib's mentor, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, did little to support East Pakistan during his tenure as Pakistan's prime minister in the late 1950s.

The treatment of Bengalis by the Punjabi-dominated Pakistani establishment cemented Mujib's resolve for autonomy. East Pakistan endured humiliation, both culturally and politically, as the ruling elite lampooned their food, language, and lifestyle. The imposition of Urdu as the state language in 1952 sparked violent protests, deepening the chasm between East and West Pakistan.

Field Marshal Ayub Khan's 'Single Unit' policy in the 1960s, merging provinces in the west to counterbalance the population of the east, exacerbated tensions. East Pakistan was rendered defenceless during the 1965 Indo-Pak war, further alienating its people. By the time Cyclone Bhola devastated the region in 1970, Islamabad's callousness had become unforgivable. The Awami League's sweeping electoral victory that December was as much a rejection of West Pakistan's hegemony as an endorsement of Mujib's leadership.

Pakistan's brutal crackdown in March 1971, 'Operation Searchlight', unleashed unspeakable atrocities on East Pakistanis. Hindus were the first targets, followed by Awami League supporters and intellectuals. Looting, rape, and indiscriminate killings became the norm, driving all Bengalis, regardless of ideology, into a united front against the Pakistani military.

This unity, however, was fragile. The euphoria of independence masked ideological divisions that quickly resurfaced after Mujib's assassination in 1975. The very forces he had warned against—the Jamaat-e-Islami and pro-Pakistan elements—began to regroup, exploiting the weaknesses of successive governments.

Sheikh Hasina, who survived the 1975 coup by being in India, returned to Bangladesh years later to continue her father's



mission. During her first tenure as prime minister (1996-2001), she kept Mujib's ideological adversaries in check. Her second stint, from 2009 onwards, was marked by an even firmer crackdown, including the execution of senior Jamaat leaders for war crimes.

Mujib's concerns about the latent strength of Jamaat-e-Islami and pro-Pakistan elements were not unfounded. These groups, relegated to the periphery after Bangladesh's independence, reemerged during periods of political instability. The

military-backed governments of the 1980s provided fertile ground for their resurgence. By the 1990s, their political arms had consolidated power, influencing policy and societal narratives. Sheikh Hasina, echoing her father's foresight, moved decisively to suppress their activities. Her administration's war crimes tribunal, which convicted and executed several Jamaat leaders, was hailed by her supporters but sharply criticized by international human rights groups for procedural shortcomings.

However, Hasina's authoritarian streak also alienated sections of society, particularly students protesting against reservation policies. What began as localized dissent soon spiralled into a nationwide agitation, bolstered by support from Jamaat and alleged Pakistani intelligence operatives. These protests devolved into targeted violence against Hindus and Awami League members, culminating in the current chaos. One of the most visible casualties of Bangladesh's political upheaval has been its Hindu minority. Numbering nearly 20% at independence, their proportion has dwindled to less than 9% today.

The point is that Mujib's fears, dismissed as paranoia decades ago, have been vindicated in the most tragic manner. The ideological rifts he identified remain raw and unresolved, threatening to undo the progress Bangladesh has made. The descent into quasi-anarchy underscores the enduring relevance of his cautionary words.

Bangladesh's journey from economic darling to cautionary tale is a stark reminder that historical grievances and ideological fault lines, if left unaddressed, can unravel even the most promising nations. Whether Sheikh Hasina can restore order or whether Bangladesh is destined for further turmoil remains uncertain. The lessons of its founding father, however, echo louder than ever.

(The author is a political commentator and global affairs observer with a keen eye on South Asia's evolving dynamics. Views personal.)

GLOBAL WATCH

Cleaning Up the Soviet Mess

Kazakhstan's announcement this week that it has decontaminated 363,000 cubic metres of Soviet-era oil waste on the shores of the Caspian Sea is a step forward in addressing Central Asia's grim ecological inheritance. Yet, it is a drop in a polluted ocean. The region's environmental hazards, a relic of Soviet planning and industrial overreach, continue to haunt its present and threaten its future.

The Soviet Union, with its singular focus on industrial growth and resource extraction, treated the environment as expendable. Central Asia, with its vast mineral and energy reserves, was a key victim of this mindset. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Caspian Sea, the world's largest inland body of water. Over decades, oil extraction and poor waste management turned stretches of its coastline, particularly in Kazakhstan's Mangystau region, into industrial wastelands. Marine ecosystems suffered greatly while surrounding communities endured the consequences of poisoned soil and water.

The Caspian's plight mirrors a broader pattern of environmental devastation across the region. Pollution from the oil and gas industry is compounded by climate change, which is causing the inland sea's water levels to fall at alarming rates. The shrinkage echoes the tragic fate of another of the region's



water bodies, the Aral Sea. Once the world's fourth-largest lake, the Aral was sacrificed to irrigate Soviet cotton fields. Beginning in the 1960s, Moscow rerouted the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers to meet its agricultural ambitions, causing the sea to shrink to a fraction of its size. The desiccation left behind toxic dust storms laced with salt and pesticides, devastating health outcomes for nearby communities and ruining their economic lifeblood.

The scars of Soviet mismanagement extend beyond water. In Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, millions of cubic metres of radioactive waste remain stored in decaying Soviet-era facilities, a byproduct of the USSR's relentless uranium mining. These sites, many situated near rivers that flow into populous areas, pose a constant risk of contamination. The mountains of toxic sludge are a stark reminder of the environmental costs of Soviet industrialization.

Efforts to remediate this toxic legacy have gained momentum in recent years, particularly with international support. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has led initiatives to stabilize hazardous sites in Kyrgyzstan. But progress has been slow, funding is scarce and the scale of the problem is daunting. Meanwhile, communities living near these sites bear the brunt of the environmental

risks, often with little recourse to help or relocation.

Kazakhstan's efforts to reclaim its polluted shores provide a glimmer of hope. At the Karazhanbas field in the Mangystau region, the state-owned energy company KazMunayGas has cleaned nearly 363,000 cubic metres of oil waste over four years. The project involved removing oil-contaminated soil and cleaning above-ground storage facilities. This is a laudable start, but the problem is far from resolved. Other oil-producing regions in Kazakhstan continue to grapple with the dual burdens of pollution and global warming.

The Soviet disregard for environmental stewardship was not unique, but its scale in Central Asia was particularly egregious. Resource-rich nations like Kazakhstan have inherited a toxic legacy that collides with their current development ambitions.

Cleaning up the Soviet mess is a monumental task, but it is also an opportunity. Kazakhstan's reclamation work shows that progress is possible with state commitment and adequate resources.

Central Asia's ability to reconcile its past with the demands of sustainability will determine not only its ecological survival but also its standing in a world increasingly defined by green accountability.

STATES WATCH

Down, But Not Out

The Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), reeling from an ignominious defeat in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, has quickly recalibrated its strategy to remain a key player in Telangana's political ecosystem. The party's performance was dismal, failing to win a single seat despite a strong showing in the earlier Assembly elections. However, rather than retreating into irrelevance, the BRS has made notable strides in reorganising its structure and refocusing its efforts on reconnecting with voters, particularly in rural areas where it lost considerable support.

Despite its founder, K. Chandrashekar Rao, staying largely out of the public eye, the BRS leadership, led by K.T. Rama Rao (KTR) and T. Harish Rao, has been relentlessly targeting the Congress government. The ruling party in Telangana, under Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, is grappling with its own list of unfulfilled promises, offering ample ammunition for the BRS to launch sustained attacks. Whether it is the delay in disbursing agricultural subsidies or the unfinished business of the crop loan waiver, the BRS has made sure to highlight these gaps in governance, presenting itself as the party of accountability.

One of the most persistent issues raised by the BRS is the Congress's failure to implement its election guarantees. KTR has vocally criticised the Congress for

not fulfilling its promises, from stalled loan waivers to the unkept pledge of creating jobs for the youth. He has also sharpened his attacks on the Congress's handling of issues like the Musi Riverfront Development Project, which has seen the demolition of poor and middle-class homes.

trying to defend its record, the BJP seems less inclined to take advantage of this turmoil. Although it has made occasional noises, particularly around issues like the Musi Riverfront, the BJP has been largely aloof, even content to let the BRS do their job in cranking up the pressure on the Congress.

In contrast, the BRS continues to maintain a strong public presence, even without KCR's direct involvement. The party has managed to rally its leadership, who have organized protests and social media campaigns that keep the government on edge. The Congress's failure to respond decisively to these attacks only highlights the BRS's growing political

influence.

However, the path ahead is far from smooth for the

BRS. The ruling party is not only dealing with internal dissatisfaction but also with inquiries into its past government's actions, particularly around irrigation and power deals. These investigations present a real challenge for the BRS, as they could undermine its ability to portray the Congress as the sole failure in the state.

That said, the party's determination to rebuild and its consistent focus on the government's shortcomings are proof that it is far from out of the race. While the coming months will be crucial in shaping the party's future, it is clear that the BRS is positioning itself as the key challenger to Congress in Telangana. The Congress may hold the reins for now, but the BRS is watching, waiting, and biding its time.



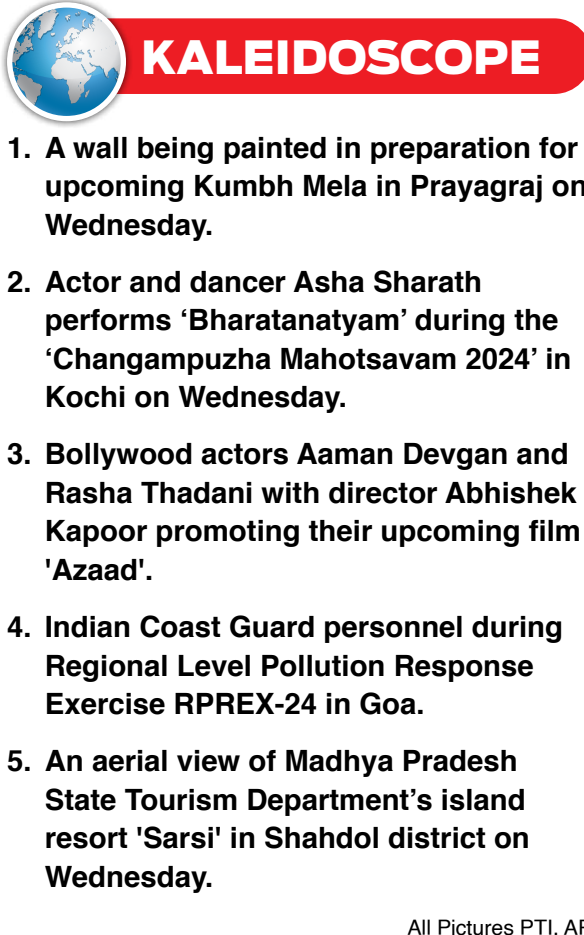
TELANGANA

KTR's open letter on the first anniversary of Congress rule is perhaps the most direct and scathing attack the party has made against the incumbent government. He accused the Congress of betraying the people of Telangana, from farmers to women, through its failure to deliver on core promises. The Congress has found itself on the defensive, with the BRS pushing the narrative of incompetence and mismanagement.

While the Congress has found itself hemmed in a reactive position,

After a humbling defeat in the Lok Sabha elections, the BRS is reinventing itself as a fierce opposition to a faltering Congress government in Telangana.

As Central Asia struggles to undo decades of environmental damage caused by Soviet industrial excess, Kazakhstan takes the lead in undoing this toxic Cold War-era legacy.



- KALEIDOSCOPE**
1. A wall being painted in preparation for upcoming Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj on Wednesday.
 2. Actor and dancer Asha Sharath performs 'Bharatanatyam' during the 'Changampuzha Mahotsavam 2024' in Kochi on Wednesday.
 3. Bollywood actors Aaman Devgan and Rasha Thadani with director Abhishek Kapoor promoting their upcoming film 'Azaad'.
 4. Indian Coast Guard personnel during Regional Level Pollution Response Exercise RPRES-24 in Goa.
 5. An aerial view of Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Department's island resort 'Sarsi' in Shahdol district on Wednesday.

All Pictures PTI, AP

FILMS AND ME

Fifty Years of Girish Kasaravalli's Ghatasraddha



By
Shoma A. Chatterji

Not a single print of the original celluloid print of Ghatasraddha (Kannada) remained for today's audience to be able to watch the film. The YouTube prints are not only very blurred but the English sub-titles are also very bad. Thankfully, the late Dr. P.K. Nair had managed to hold on to a single print of the film which fortunately for the persistence of Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, has now been revived by the Film Heritage Foundation, said Girish Kasaravalli himself before the restored print was screened at a special screening of the film at the 30th Kolkata International Film Festival this week.

Added Kasaravalli, "This marks the 47th year of the film and I am extremely grateful to Martin Scorsese's World Cinema Project stepped in to restore it, setting a precedent for his commitment to preserving cinematic history worldwide."

Ghatasraddha (The Ritual, Black & White, 1977) was Girish Kasaravalli's first feature film. The film won him the President's Golden Lotus for the Best Feature Film in 1978. The then-27-year-old became, and remains, the youngest film director to win a President's Golden Lotus, at a time when Satyajit Ray, Adoor Gopal Krishnan, Mrinal Sen and others were at the height of their film-making careers.

The film carries the hallmark of a filmmaker who knew how to tell a story on film in his unique way, placing hard-hitting subjects in as subtle and as low-key a manner as possible.

Ghatasraddha is launches a scathing attack on several social evils that dogged society during the

period in which the story is placed. One of them is child-marriage, an evil custom that victimized the girl-child by marrying her off to a much older man. When the old man died, the girl was forced to lead the life of a widow filled with extreme forms of abstinence in the form of food, clothes, treatment, sex and shelter. If she broke the virginity rule, like the child-widow, then a teenager, Yamuna did it without realizing the consequences with her "lover" leaving her in the lurch, not only was she driven out of the village to live a life of extreme penury on the outskirts, but was doubly humiliated. Her father, a rigid Brahmin who ran a school to train Brahmin boys in Sanskrit and religious texts, agreed with the other village heads to ritually perform her shraddha or death rituals using a pot (ghata) as a symbol to officially claim that she was "dead" to everyone and was therefore, an outcast. Most young girls who got pregnant or engaged in any affair as they turned young, would die of hunger, poverty and socially structured negligence which amounted to inhumanity by one group of humans against a single child-woman.

Ironically, Udupa, Yamuna's father who ran a pathshala in the village, not only performed the ghatasraddha but also agrees to marry a very young girl from the Brahmin community to "rescue" the girl from an unmarried status. This was a practice dominated and controlled by Brahmins driving home the point that Brahmin girls too, were not spared from barbaric treatment that often led to an untimely and tragic death. All this comes across in the film. Strange, that this same Udupi had once saved his daughter's life from snake-bite. And he is the one who not only agrees to perform the ghatasraddha of his living daughter but also throws her out of the village forever after having her head shaved completely.

There is a powerful sub-plot that merges into the main story. It is about a very soft and affectionate relationship that evolves between Yamuna and Nani, a boy who joins the pathshala. Yamuna looks after him with motherly care. They de-

velop a mutual bond, whereas other older students like Shastry and Ganesh would harass Nani all the time. The film is set against a rural backdrop in Karnataka sometime around the 1920s.

Girish Kasaravalli himself wrote the script of the film during his training at the FTII. It is based on a Kannada short story by Dr. U.R. Ananthamurthy. B.V. Karanth scored the music and S. Ramachandra handled the cinematography. Meena Kuttappa as Yamuna and Master Ajit Kumar as Nani played the lead roles.

Kasaravalli says, "It was a very powerful and an extraordinary story. It spoke of rituals and traditions in Brahmin families. It was my first film after I graduated from the Pune Film Institute. I read this novel when I was a student of the FTII and it had remained in my mind. I chose Meena Kuttappa, who was a student at that time, for the role of Yamunakka. It won some state awards also."

The school having shut down for want of funds and also for the scandal involving Yamuna, Nani's father comes to take him back home. On the way back, the small boy suddenly catches a glimpse of Yamuna Akka peeping from behind a tree, her head completely shaved. We see him looking back again and again, his eyes filled with tears, looking at his Yamunakka with her shaved head looking back at him. His father has to drag him along with him because he visibly hates to leave her alone and go away to his village.

The music that holds the film together is quite low-key and subtle yet runs like the waters of a spring. Both Meena and Master Ajit Kumar are gifted with large, almond eyes which are very expressive too.

The best moment captured in the film is when, just before the climactic scene, the Shudra slave tells the main priest, "he saved his daughter even from snakes, but could not save her from a Brahmin" thus summarizing the tragedy of Yamuna in one single sentence.

(The author is a senior film critic based in Kolkata. Views personal.)

EXPLAINER

Why Is Protecting Communication Through Encryption Suggested?

After a sprawling hacking campaign exposed the communications of an unknown number of Americans, US cybersecurity officials are advising people to use encryption in their communications.

To safeguard against the risks highlighted by the campaign, which originated in China, federal cybersecurity authorities released an extensive list of security recommendations for US telecom companies—such as Verizon and AT&T — that were targeted. The advice includes one tip we can all put into practice with our phones: "Ensure that traffic is end-to-end encrypted to the maximum extent possible."

End-to-end encryption, also known as E2EE, means that messages are scrambled so that only the sender and recipient can see them. If anyone else intercepts the message, all they will see is a garble that can't be unscrambled without the key.

Law enforcement officials had until now resisted this type of encryption because it means the technology companies themselves won't be able to look at the messages, nor respond to law enforcement requests to turn the data over.

Here's a look at various ways ordinary consumers can use end-to-end encryption:

Texting

Officials said the hackers targeted the metadata of a large number of customers, including information on the dates, times and recipients of calls and texts. They also managed to see the content from texts from a much smaller number of victims.

If you're an iPhone user, information in text messages that you send to someone else who also has an iPhone will be encrypted end-to-end. Just look for the blue text bubbles, which indicate that they are encrypted iMessages.

The same goes for Android users sending texts through Google Messages. There will be a lock next to the timestamp on each message to indicate the encryption is on. But there's a weakness. When iPho-



hone and Android users text each other, the messages are encrypted only using Rich Communication Services, an industry standard for instant messaging that replaces the older SMS and MMS standards. Apple has noted that RCS messages "aren't end-to-end encrypted, which means they're not protected from a third party reading them while they're sent between devices."

Samsung, which sells Android smartphones, has also hinted at the issue in a footnote at the bottom of a press release last month on RCS, saying, "Encryption only available for Android to Android communication."

Chat apps

To avoid getting caught out when trading texts, experts recommend using encrypted messaging apps.

Privacy advocates are big fans of Signal, which applies end-to-end encryption on all messages and voice calls. The independent nonprofit group behind the app promises never to sell, rent, or lease customer data and has made its source code publicly available so that it can be audited by anyone to examine it "for security and correctness."

Signal's encryption protocol is so reputable that it has been integrated into rival WhatsApp, so users will enjoy the same level of security protection as Signal, which has a much smaller user base. End-to-end encryption is also the default mode for Facebook Messenger, which like WhatsApp is owned by Meta Platforms.

What about Telegram?

Telegram is an app that can be used for one-on-one conversations, group chats and broadcast "channels" but contrary to popular perception, it doesn't turn on end-to-end encryption by default. Users have to switch on the option. And it doesn't work with group chats.

Cybersecurity experts have warned people against using Telegram for private communications and pointed out that only its opt-in secret chat feature is encrypted from end-to-end. The app also has a reputation for being a haven for scammers and criminal activity, highlighted by founder and CEO Pavel Durov's arrest in France.

Making calls

Instead of using your phone to make calls through a wireless cellular network, you can make voice calls with Signal and WhatsApp. Both apps encrypt calls with the same technology that they use to encrypt messages.

There are other options. If you have an iPhone you can use FaceTime for calls, while Android owners can use the Google Fi service, which are both end-to-end encrypted.

The only catch with all these options is that, as with using the chat services to send messages, the person on the other end will also have to have the app installed.

WhatsApp and Signal users can customize their privacy preferences in the settings, including hiding IP address during calls to prevent your general location from being guessed.

At Rs 20.50 lakh, Abhishek Dalhor most expensive buy in ISPL

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Abhishek Kumar Dalhor emerged as the most expensive buy in the Indian Street Premier League (ISPL) Season 2 auction after Majhi Mumbai, owned by Amitabh Bachchan, successfully outbid the competition with an impressive bid of ₹20.50 lakh. The 15-year-old Sharik Yasir, the youngest player in the auction, was bought for ₹3lakh by Akshay Kumar-owned Srirang Ke Veer.

The ISPL Season 2 auction witnessed intense bidding wars as six teams used the opportunity to build strong teams for the upcoming second season of the league, scheduled to be played at the Dadoji Kondadev Stadium in Thane from January 26 to February 15.

The exciting mega auction took place in Mumbai today with 350 players, selected from 55 cities through extensive trials, going under the hammer. As the bidding gathered pace, a total of 96 players were selected by six teams. As the auction drew to a close, the six franchises had spent more than ₹5.54 cr.

The pioneering tennis-



Bollywood actor Abhishek Bachchan along with Team Majhi Mumbai (C) during the ISPL Season 2 auction in Mumbai.

ball T10 cricket tournament, which was launched earlier this year with the inaugural edition, brings the excitement of street cricket to the stadium, providing a professional platform for talented players in the country.

This year's auction also saw the introduction of the Right-to-Match (RTM) and Icon Player rule as the teams were allowed to add one icon player into their squad and also retain two players from their last season's squad as part of the RTM rule.

Vijay Jaysing for ₹13.75 lakh (Majhi Mumbai, owned by Amitabh Bachchan) and Krishna Satpute for ₹8.50 lakh (Falcon Ris-

ers Hyderabad, owned by Ram Charan), Deepak Dogra for ₹6 lakh (Chennai Singams, owned by Surya), Saroj Paramanik for ₹16.25 lakh (KVN Bangalore Strikers, owned by Hrithik Roshan), Dilip Binjwa for ₹6 lakh (Srinagar Ke Veer, owned by Akshay Kumar), Bhavesh Pawar for ₹8.50 lakh (Tigers of Kolkata, owned by Kareena Kapoor Khan & Saif Ali Khan) were bought as icon players by the teams to bolster their respective squads.

Sachin Tendulkar, Core Committee Member, ISPL, said, "It is encouraging to see the growing interest in ISPL from across the country. Tennis-ball cricket is

an exciting format, and ISPL has provided a competitive platform for players to showcase their skills. The inaugural season highlighted some special performances, and this year, the league has expanded to more cities to identify emerging talent. I hope these players make the most of this chance and receive the recognition they deserve."

Suraj Samat, League Commissioner, ISPL, said, "With a team of experts of the game, we want to spot and nurture talents from every corner of the country. And I am happy to announce that we will be conducting trials in 101 cities in the third season of ISPL.



Players of Haryana Steelers (blue) and Bengaluru Bulls compete during a Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) 2024 match in Pune on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

Treesa-Gayatri pair keep semifinal hopes alive

Hangzhou: The Indian women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand defeated the Malaysian combination of Pearly Tan and Thinaah Muralitharan in straight games in their second Group A tie to keep alive their semifinal hopes at the BWF World Tour Finals here on Thursday.

Treesa and Gayatri, the only Indians to have qualified for the season-ending tournament, beat their opponents 21-19 21-19 in just 46 minutes to stay afloat in the competition.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Indians had lost to world No.1 Liu Sheng Shu



and Tan Ning of China in their opening group match.

Treesa and Gayatri had lost 20-22 22-20 21-14 to Sheng and Tan, who had claimed a silver medal at the Paris Olympics.

The Indians are currently placed second behind the Chinese and will need to win against the Japanese pairing of Nami Matsuyama and Chiharu Shida on Friday to book their semi-

final berth.

Treesa and Gayatri started on an aggressive note and surged to a 6-2 lead in the opening game before the Malaysians roared back and it went neck-and-neck after that.

But the Indians kept their composure in the final stages to pocket the first game.

The second game too was a close affair till the first five points before the Malaysians took a slender lead.

It was again a tight battle till 19 points but the Indians once again held their nerves and pocketed two consecutive points to seal the match. -PTI

Prasar Bharati to broadcast Hockey India League



New Delhi: The upcoming Hockey India League, which is being revived after seven years, will be telecast live on the country's national broadcaster, Prasar Bharati.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in this regard was signed in a ceremony between Abhishek Agarwal, Deputy Director General Sports, Prasar Bharati, and Hockey India Secretary General Bhola Nath Singh.

Set to commence on December 28 in Rourkela, HIL will be broadcast live across the nation through Doordarshan and Prasar Bharati's new OTT platform -- Waves.

This edition of the HIL is path-breaking because it will feature the inaugural season of the women's league alongside the men's competition.

While the men's competition will be played in Rourkela, a four-team maiden tournament for the women

will be hosted at Ranchi. Navneet Sehgal, chairman Prasar Bharati, emphasised the importance of this partnership.

"This is a proud moment for hockey, a sport that has captured the hearts of millions of Indians, and for Prasar Bharati, as we come together to bring the Hockey India League to every corner of the country. Our goal is to showcase this prestigious league to households across India, including remote towns and villages where future hockey stars are emerging.

"With Doordarshan's extensive reach and our OTT platform, Waves, we will ensure that the Hockey India League becomes a national celebration, inspiring a deeper connection between the sport and its fans. Together, we aim to elevate hockey's prominence and turn it into a true festival for the entire nation," he said.

Tambe GT's bowling coach

Ahmedabad: Gujarat Giants on Thursday appointed former leg-spinner Pravin Tambe as their bowling coach, while Australian Daniel Marsh joined the side as batting coach ahead of Women's Premier League 2025.

Michael Klinger, who joined the team last season, will continue as the Giants' head coach. Tambe, who made his IPL debut at the age of 41 back in 2013 for Rajasthan Royals, brings substantial coaching experience, having worked with Kolkata Knight Riders and Lucknow Super Giants.

"I'm eager to work with this talented group of players to sharpen their skills and help them excel," said Tambe.

Marsh carries loads of experience, having served as head coach of the Tasmania men's team from 2013 to 2017 and was appointed as the assistant coach of the Australian women's cricket team in 2022.

"I look forward to developing a fearless approach to our batting with the aim of making our team one of the strongest batting units of the WPL," said Marsh.

Ahead of the WPL 2025 auction to be held in Bengaluru on Sunday, the Giants had retained players such as Ashleigh Gardner and Beth Mooney.



Former tennis player Sania Mirza speaks during launch of an ITC-Nimyle campaign in Hyderabad on Thursday. Pic: PTI

Niki Prasad to lead India U-19 in Asia Cup

New Delhi: Niki Prasad will lead India U-19 in the inaugural edition of the junior women's Asia Cup scheduled to take place in Kuala Lumpur from December 15 to 22.

All matches will be held at the Bayuemas Cricket Oval. Sanika Chalke has been named vice-captain while lanky Gujarat Giants seamer MD Shabnam has also been included in the squad.

India U19 are placed in Group A along with Pakistan and Nepal, while Group B consists of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and hosts Malaysia.

India will meet arch-rivals Pakistan on the opening day of the competition on December 15 followed by game against Nepal. Top two teams from each group will qualify for the Super Fours and the top two from Super Four will play in the final on December 22.

Squad: Niki Prasad (Captain), Sanika Chalke (Vice-captain), G Trisha, Kamalini G (WK), Bhavika Ahire (WK), Ishawari Awasare, Mithila Vinod, Joshitha VJ, Sonam Yadav, Parunika Sisodiya, Kesari Drithi, Aayushi Shukla, Anandita Kishor, MD Shabnam, Nandhana S.

Tendulkars inaugurate sports facility in Satara

Mumbai: The Sachin Tendulkar Foundation (STF), in collaboration with its partner Mann Deshi Champions, inaugurated a modern sporting facility in Satara this week.

The event marked Sara Tendulkar's first visit as a director of STF, showcasing her commitment to taking the foundation's mission forward.

The new facility, inaugurated by Tendulkar, his wife Anjali and daughter Sara, features world-class amenities including courts for basketball and badminton, indoor wrestling and boxing areas, classrooms, administration offices, and hostels for 150 athletes.

It aims to empower rural youth by providing them with access to high-quality sports training and opportunities.

Sara, accompanied by her parents, expressed her admiration for the transformative impact of sports on young lives and shared some moments with the children there.

Mann Deshi Champions has a proven track record of nurturing rural talent, with over 100 athletes joining the army, police, forest, and railways through their programs.

Indian women to reach final LET qualifier



Marrakech (Morocco): At least four Indian women golfers playing at different venues are in a good position to reach the final qualifier at Lalla Aicha Q-School for the Ladies European Tour.

They are Sneha Singh, Vidhatri Urs, Amandeep Drall and Avani Prashanth, while Ridhima Dilawari and Nayanika Sanga can make a last round dash to get into the final qualifier as the Top-23 and ties are likely to make the final stage.

Sneha, winner of the domestic Hero Women's Order of Merit in 2023, is lying second at the Par-73 Noria Golf Club in Marrakech with rounds of 69-73 and trailed leader, Annika Borrelli of South Africa, who carded 69-70, by three shots.

Ridhima (79-77) was T-35, Jasmine Shekar (77-88) was T-55 and Oviya Reddi (80-88) was T-58.

Also well placed to make it to the final qualifier was Vidhatri Urs (68-77), who was tied for the lead after the first round. She slipped in the second but is very much in line to make the final stage at Samanah. Neha Tripathi (80-80) was T-55.

At the Rotana Golf Club, Amandeep (71-73) was even par at the Par-72 course, while Avani (73-72) at 1-over was T-14. Nayanika (77-74) was T-38.

At Palm Ourika India's Shweta Mansingh (73-80) was T-40 and Durga Nittur (73-82) was T-48.

England's Rosie Belsham is in front at Samanah with Finland's Elina Nummenpaa and French amateur Vanessa Bouvet top at Rotana, while Wales' Darcey Harry leads at Palm Golf Ourika.

Meanwhile, American Annika Borrelli is in front at Noria. -PTI

Kohli addresses team, Rohit bats against semi-new, new ball

Brisbane: He used to be the cynosure of all eyes at training sessions during his captaincy days and Virat Kohli was once again the centre of attention as he addressed his teammates here on Thursday.

After the demoralising 10-wicket defeat in the Adelaide day/night game, the visitors needed a bit of inspiration going into the crucial third Test of the series, and the youngsters in the side couldn't have

got a better mentor than 'King' Kohli himself to guide them with his words of wisdom.

The team huddles before the start of the training session has been a constant feature for years now and Kohli used to do a lot of talking during his days in charge.

He did take a back seat once he left captaincy but with skipper Rohit also under immense pressure after four straight defeats,

the senior-most player (in terms of Test debut) had to take the initiative ahead of the match starting here on Saturday.

With vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah by his side, Kohli was seen speaking animatedly to the group and everyone, including Rohit, listened to him with rapt attention.

Rohit faces both new and semi-new ball in nets. Unlike before the pink ball Test, Rohit looked in

far better shape during his net session at the Gabba but question marks remain over whether he would be back to opening the innings or stay put at No. 6, which isn't his preferred slot.

On the day, while KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal once again faced the new ball at the nets, Rohit took on a slightly older Kookaburra at the beginning. Having faced that for some time, he did change nets

with Rahul and also played a brand new red cherry for a while.

The Gabba pitch has a decent grass cover and has always been one of the most traditional Australian wickets with both seam and bounce being on offer. Rohit's susceptibility has been against the moving deliveries more than bounce, and hence, it would be interesting to see if he takes on the challenge head on.

After his session, Rohit and head coach Gautam Gambhir were immersed in a lengthy chat and a from a distance, it looked like they were discussing technique. Gambhir was seen shaping up for some shadow drives, with Rohit watching him intently.

-PTI

