

Cabinet expansion
likely by Saturday

Mumbai: The cabinet expansion of the Devendra Fadnavis-led Maharashtra government is likely to take place by December 14, a senior BJP leader said on Wednesday.
Fadnavis left for Delhi on Wednesday, his office said, adding it was a courtesy visit, the first after becoming the chief minister, as he would be meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Droupadi Murmu and Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar.

cated the revenue portfolio.
Talks are getting delayed because three parties (Mahayuti allies BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP) are involved, the politician said.
"The cabinet expansion is likely by December 14. The allocation of home department to Shiv Sena is ruled out. The Shiv Sena may get urban development, but is unlikely to get revenue," said the leader, who did not wish to be named.
The BJP is expected to keep 21 to 22 ministerial berths, including the CM's post, the leader said, adding that four to five ministerial berths may be kept vacant. Shiv Sena leader and Deputy CM Eknath Shinde was not travelling to the national capital, as per his office.
On December 5, Fadnavis took oath as CM along with Shinde and NCP leader Ajit Pawar as his deputies, after the Mahayuti alliance won 230 of the 288 seats in the state assembly polls.

All eyes on three MLAs
From Shiv Sena, all eyes will be on three MLAs - Dr. Tanaji Sawant, Sanjay Rathod and Sanjay Shirsat - to be inducted in the Cabinet. While Sanjay Rathod's supporters have alleged that there has been a conspiracy to keep him out of the chances of Sawant and Shirsat have improved.
A supporter of Sawant said the heavyweight from Dharashiv is hopeful of his inclusion in the Cabinet. "As Health Minister, Dr. Sawant has spearheaded transformative initiatives, many of which are unprecedented in the state's history. His tenure reflected a commitment to healthcare accessibility, transparency, and community welfare," the supporter said.
On the other hand, Shirsat's supporters call him a challenger of Sanjay Raut, the fiery spokesperson of rival Shiv Sena (UBT). "Sanjay ji has successfully countered the agenda Raut has tried to set. As a spokesperson he has been effective," the supporter said.
Sawant's supporter pointed to his health initiatives for men, women and children. "Free health check-up directly benefited 50 lakh men. Since health is a matter close to (Eknath) Shinde saheb's heart Sawant has little advantage," the supporter said. "His health check-up initiative also helped 4.39 crore women. This is a record," he said.



Former cricketer Sachin Tendulkar speaks during the unveiling of the Indian Street Premier League (ISPL) Season 2 trophy at its auction ceremony in Mumbai on Wednesday. Pic:PTI

NCP lobbying for Cabinet berths

By Correspondent

Mumbai: The NCP chief Ajit Pawar is reaching Delhi on Wednesday night to meet the senior BJP leaders to take a call on portfolio distribution as the cabinet expansion of the Devendra Fadnavis-led Maharashtra government is likely to take place by December 14.
Fadnavis landed in Delhi Wednesday evening. Ajit Pawar didn't accompany him but will join him in the national capital. Significantly, the deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde distanced himself from this Delhi visit. According to sources, Shinde is busy in pacifying some of his MLAs who have become furious

as the uncertainty over their inclusion in the cabinet is looming large.
The CM office has stated that Fadnavis's Delhi visit is a courtesy visit, the first after becoming the chief minister. During his visit he would be meeting President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar.
The sources further said that both Shiv Sena and NCP are demanding certain key portfolios. The Sena is insisting for Home and Revenue which BJP is not ready to leave. Against this backdrop Fadnavis and Pawar are likely to meet Home Minister Amit Shah to take final call on this contentious issue. Talks are

getting delayed because all the three parties, BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP are in no mood to relent from their stance. The cabinet expansion is likely by December 14 and prior to this the BJP leadership wants to clear all the doubts of alliance partners.
The BJP is expected to keep 21 to 22 ministerial berths. At the same time the party has decided to keep four to five ministerial berths vacant. On December 5, Fadnavis took oath as CM along with Shinde and NCP leader Ajit Pawar as his deputies. Nevertheless, since then the discussion on cabinet expansion is continuing as a result both the deputy chief minister's are without any portfolios even after a week's time.

Rs 1.39 cr penalty collected from traffic violators

Alibag: Police in Raigad district have collected Rs 1.39 crore penalty from those allegedly indulging in traffic violations, an official said.
The penalty was collected during the election code of conduct.
Rs 1,39,29,650 were collected in the form of penalty for various traffic violations like not wearing a seat belt while driving a car, not using a helmet while riding a two-wheeler, riding triple seat and driving under the influence of liquor, Traffic branch's police inspector Somnath Lande said.
In Alibag constituency, 3,351 challans were issued and Rs 30,37,950 fine was collected, while in Karjat assembly segment 1,967 challans were issued and Rs 18,00,250 penalty was collected from the traffic violations.

One more held in sarpanch murder case; motive unclear

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar: Police investigating the abduction and murder case of a village head in Beed district have arrested one more individual, an officer said on Wednesday.
Massajog village sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh was abducted from a toll plaza located near Dongaon Phata village around 3 pm on Monday from his car, police said.
Deshmukh's body was found in Daithana area of Kej tehsil.
Deshmukh's cousin Shivraj Deshmukh later

lodged a police complaint alleging that the sarpanch was abducted over a previous enmity with some persons.
Police later arrested two persons-Jayram Chate and Mahesh Kedar- in the abduction-murder case amid protests by angry villagers.
Protesters torched a state transport bus during a road blockade demonstration and clashed with police on Tuesday, an official said.
"Beed Police arrested a third accused in connection with the murder of sar-

panch Santosh Deshmukh," Superintendent of Police Avinash Bargal told reporters in Beed on Wednesday.
He said the investigation is progressing, and appealed to people not to pay attention to rumours.
The third accused is identified as Pratik Ghule, another official said.
Meanwhile, local MLA and NCP leader Prakash Solanke demanded the formation of a Special Investigation Team. "We cannot trust local police. An SIT can unravel the truth behind the murder," he said.

Ex-cop kills lover, buries body

Nagpur: A dismissed policeman killed a married woman, with whom he was in a relationship, after a heated argument and then buried the body behind an under-construction building in Nagpur.
The accused, Naresh alias Narendra Pandurang Dahule (40), has been arrested in neighbouring Chandrapur district and charged with murder and destruction of evidence.
The accused once worked in the police force, but was dismissed from service. The victim, also aged 40 and a resident of Chimur in Chandrapur district, was married and had a son.
Dahule and the woman, who were classmates during their school years, rekindled their relationship through Facebook in August, the police said.
They soon got into a romantic relationship and decided to elope. However, on November 26, while attempting to carry out their plan, the couple had a heated argument over their future together.
In a fit of rage, Dahule allegedly strangled his lover to death, the police said.
To conceal his crime, the man drove around for hours in a stolen car with the body before disposing it in a septic tank behind an under-construction building in Vela Hari area under Beltarodi station.



People take part in a protest against the atrocities on religious minorities in Bangladesh in Thane on Wednesday. Pic:PTI

Use of phrases like 'vote jihad' under ECI's scanner

By Nikhil Deshmukh

Mumbai: Controversial phrases like "vote jihad" used by some political parties during the election campaign in the recently held Maharashtra assembly polls are under the Election Commission of India (ECI)'s scanner, an official said on Wednesday.
In an exclusive interview to PTI, Maharashtra Additional Chief Electoral Officer Dr Kiran Kulkarni also said that more than 650 cases of poll code violation were registered during the state elections, and the enforcement agencies will make sure that these cases are taken to a logical conclusion.
When asked about 'vote jihad', he said, "The ECI is carefully analysing its implications across legal, linguistic and social domains before taking further action... We should be very cautious with terms like 'vote jihad' because they have serious repercussions."
"This is a new phrase requiring thorough study. There are legal, linguistic, social and religious aspects to consider. ECI officials, including the Chief Electoral Officer and I, are analysing this and we will take an appropriate deci-

sion once all these aspects are reviewed comprehensively," he said.
When asked if such controversial phrases affected the election discourse, Kulkarni cautioned against drawing hasty conclusions.
"It's a long-term process. Words and their references need to be defined and analysed thoroughly. There is no airtight legal framework for new terminology, so we must handle such matters carefully, keeping in mind their consequences," he said.
Elections to the 288-member Maharashtra legislative assembly were held on November 20 and the votes were counted three days later. The election code of conduct came into force in the state on October 15.
Kulkarni said, a total of 659 cases were filed in the state for violation of election code of conduct, significantly higher than the 366 cases registered during the Lok Sabha elections held earlier this year.
"Our investigating agencies did excellent work in the Lok Sabha cases with 300 chargesheets already filed in courts," he said.
On the assembly election cases, he said, "We are following up diligently. Our enforcement agencies

are investigating, and all chargesheets will be filed in courts to make sure these cases reach a logical conclusion."
The timeline for action depends on the judiciary, he said.
"These are criminal cases, so they follow the due process. Courts are serious about election-related offences, and we are requesting expedited resolution," he said.
On hate speech complaints, Kulkarni said these cases are dealt with under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).
"Some complaints were verified as genuine, and cases were filed under relevant legal provisions. However, the model code of conduct is not a law but a consensual guideline supported by various laws," he said.
Kulkarni dismissed allegations of booth capturing during the polls, citing Maharashtra's robust electoral systems.
"Booth capturing has never happened in Maharashtra. With EVMs, it is meaningless because the machines are robust and data is retrievable. There were six reported instances of disruption (during voting), but the polling process was restored within an hour," he said.

Air Force jawan ends life while on duty

Nagpur: An Air Force sergeant allegedly took his own life by shooting himself while on duty here in the early hours of Wednesday, police said.
Javeer Singh (36), who hailed from Bhiwani in Haryana, shot himself in the head with his service weapon around 2 am, said an official of Gittikhadan police station.
The gunshot alerted fellow jawans at the Maintenance Command Center in Vayusena Nagar who discovered him lying in a pool of blood. The body was sent to a government hospital for post-mortem and investigation was underway.

जाहीर नोटीस
तमाग लोकांना माझे अशिल रक्तेडा यादव, प्रियंका यादव, रंजेश यादव ह्यांच्या कडून काळविय्यात येने की गाव मौजे- नाशी, ता- वसई, जि- पालकर येथील सर्व्हे नं. २१९, हिसा नं. ३ हया जमिन मिल्कतीवर बांधण्यात आलेली 'साई दीप अपार्टमेंट', 'साई दीप कॉ. ऑफ. हौ. सोसायटी लि', पोस्ट ऑफिस समोर, वीर सावरकर मार्ग, विकार (पु.) ता-वसई, जि- पालकर - ४०१२०५, हया विल्डींग मधील रूम नं. २०८, दुसरा मजला, क्षेत्र ३२.५३ चौ. मीटर, विल्डींग ही मालमना माझा अशिलाचा मालकीची आहे. पूर्वीचे मुख्य सर सर्व्हेचे कार अर्थात विक्री करार दि. ०७/११/२०१४ ह्या अन्वये माझ्या अशिलाला नोंदणीकृत विकत घेतलेली आहे तसेच पूर्व मालक सुरेश भालदर आंबेकर हयांनी दिनांक ०१/०८/२०१८ रोजी मं. साई राम डेवळवर्से यांच्या दायम्यन केले होते ते अनंतीकृत होते. तरी सरदर मिल्कतीवर कोणताही कोणातही हक्क, हिसाबंच असेल तर तो त्यांनी ही नोटीस प्रसिध्द झाल्यापासून ७ दिवसांच्या आत आम्हांस ऑफिस नं. १०२, पहिलामाळा, कुंती सदन, श्री मंगल कार्यालय हौलाचा खाली, वीर सावरकर मार्ग, विकार- (पु.) ता- वसई, जि- पालकर, या पत्त्यावर लेखी पुराव्यासह कळवावा.

Illegal Rohingya bought land, built house

Pune: A Rohingya man from Myanmar arrested earlier this year for allegedly living in India illegally had bought land in Pune area and built a house for himself and his family, investigation has found.
In July, Pimpri-Chinchwad Police arrested two Rohingya couples for illegal entry and stay in the country.
Probe revealed that one of them, Muzammil Khan (45), had purchased a small plot of land



He and his wife had acquired Aadhaar and PAN cards besides Indian passports.

He and his wife had acquired Aadhaar and PAN cards besides Indian passports.
They had been living in the area since 2013, police found.
Khan told police he fled Myanmar in 2012 with his family, seeking shelter in a refugee camp in Bangladesh before crossing the border illegally and entering West Bengal.
After arriving in Pune, he worked in a company and later got into supari trade.

The couple acquired Aadhaar and PAN cards from Bhiwandi in Maharashtra.
The land was purchased without legal documentation from a woman named Kamble and there is no record of the transaction in official land records, the police official said.
"Khan had obtained Indian passports for himself, his wife, and two children, and was planning to visit Mecca," the officer added.

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform to the general public that original Share Certificate bearing No.26 of shares of distinctive nos. 126 to 130 held by Mr. Suresh Sakharam Halde having address at Flat No. 305, 3rd floor, Arvind Apartment, Raj Park - II CHS Ltd., Kailwa, Thane, Maharashtra - 400606 is lost/misplaced and hence the application is received by the society for the issue of duplicate share certificate. The society hereby invites claims and objections, if any, for the issue of duplicate share certificate within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice along with relevant proofs and documents supporting the claim in the society office of Raj Park - II CHS Ltd., Kailwa, Thane, Maharashtra - 400606. If no objections are received within above mentioned time, society will be free to issue duplicate share certificate in the manner prescribed in the bye-laws.
Date: 12/12/2024
Place: Kailwa Thane
For and on behalf of Raj Park - II CHS Ltd.
Secretary

NOTICE
Company Name: ACC LIMITED,
Regd. Office: Cement House 121, Maharashtra Karve Road
Mumbai - 400 020, Maharashtra, India
NOTICE is hereby given that the certificate(s) for the undermentioned securities of the Company has/have been lost/misplaced and the holder(s) of the said securities/applicant(s) has/have applied to the Company to issue duplicate certificate(s).
Any person who has a claim in respect of the said securities should lodge such claim with the Company at its Registered office within 15 days from this date, else the Company will proceed to issue duplicate certificate(s) without further intimation.
Table with columns: Name(s) of the Holder(s) and Joint Holder(s), Folio No., Kind of Securities and Face value, No. of Securities, Company Name, Distinctive Number(s), Certificate Number(s).
Row 1: Bhairavi Keshav Nairi Jointly with Leena Keshav Nairi, B0000 19616, Equity Shares of Rs. 10/-, 400, ACC Limited, 6176231 to 6176550 & From 60232611 to 60232690, From 189518 to 189525 & From 01042314 to 01042317.
Name of the Holder(S) Applicant(s): Bhairavi Keshav Nairi (Name After Marriage - Bhairavi Rajdeep Samudrala) & Leena Keshav Nairi
Place: Mumbai Date: 11-12-2024

Elderly man fatally run over by BEST bus

BEST BUS CRASH



The elderly pedestrian came under the rear wheel of the BEST bus and died on the spot, he said. Dnyandeo Jagdale, the driver of the BEST bus

Mumbai: An elderly man died after being run over by a bus operated by the BEST, Mumbai's civic transport body, when a motorcycle hit him near the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) in south Mumbai on Wednesday, officials said.

The driver of the bus was taken into custody for inquiry, they said.

The incident occurred within 48 hours of the horrific bus tragedy in Kurla area of the metropolis in which another bus of the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking fatally knocked down seven persons and injured 42 others on Monday night.

"Around 4.30 pm on Wednesday, a biker hit the senior citizen, aged more than 60 years, in front of Hotel Shivala near the CSMT, due to which the victim fell on the road. Just then, a speeding BEST bus going towards the Electric House in south Mumbai from Anushakti Nagar, ran over him," a police official said.

was taken into custody for inquiry by the officials of the Mata Ramabai Ambedkar Marg police station, he said, adding that a case is being registered in this connection.

The police have launched a search for the motorcyclist, who hit the deceased, the official said. A spokesperson of the BEST said they have received information about the accident.

A senior BEST said that the bus belongs to a wet lease operator, but its driver Jagdale is an employee of the undertaking.

Fadnavis meets Prez, V-P, Union ministers



New Delhi: BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis, who recently took over as the chief minister of Maharashtra, called on President Draupadi Murmu here on Wednesday.

He also called on Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari.

About his meeting with President Murmu, the chief minister said, "Presented her a 'murti' (idol) of Maharashtra's daivat 'Lord Vitthal-Rukmini'."

The vice president's secretariat posted a picture of Fadnavis meeting Dhankhar here. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, in a post on X, said, "Met with the dynamic Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. I'm confident his tenure as the third-time CM will add new momentum to Maharashtra's development journey. Wishing him a very successful tenure ahead."

Fadnavis met Gadkari along with BJP state president Chandrashekhar Bawankule.

Newbies in the House Part-3

Uddhav's Lone Green Warrior

By Ruddhi Phadke

For the first time in 25 years a Muslim leader won an election on a Shiv Sena, and that too a debutant contestant. Shiv Sena (UBT) chose to field Haroon Khan to fight it out for the crucial Versova Assembly seat of Mumbai and, to much of everyone's surprise successfully struck the chord with the voters. In the recently concluded Maharashtra Assembly Elections, Haroon Khan of the Shiv Sena (UBT) emerged victorious defeating Dr. Bharti Lavekar of the BJP with a margin of just 1,600 votes. Giving credit of victory to Chief Uddhav Thackeray Khan said, "All thanks to Uddhavji and Aditya Thackeray that I got this opportunity to serve the people. I believe in secularism and I vow to continue to serve the people of Maharashtra beyond caste and religion."

It's a historic win because after 1999, Haroon Khan is the first Muslim MLA who one on a Shiv Sena ticket. Remember in 1999, Sabbir Shaikh who was close to Balasaheb Thackeray had won the election from the Ambarnath Assembly seat on an undivided Shiv Sena ticket. He was also the Labour Minister during Manohar Joshi's tenure as Chief Minister. He died in 2014 after a prolonged illness and after that election, no Muslim candidate ever contested on a Shiv Sena ticket.

The 62-year-old Khan who has been actively working with Shiv Sena, more so completely loyal to chief Uddhav Thackeray for over 30 years, plunged into an election battle for the first time in his life and emerged successful. What makes us more curious about his profile is that being an SSC pass out, Haroon Khan did not have a strong educational background.

However, he connected well with the Muslim voters of the high-profile seat of Versova that is home to nearly 1,10,000 voters. Although sources pointed out that All-India-Ulema Board had demanded the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi give tickets to candidates from minority community in the Maharashtra Assem-



Haroon Khan

bly Elections, speaking to 'The Perfect Voice', Haroon Khan expressed that all religions were equal for him and the fact that he is the head of a Sarvajanik Gane-shotsav Madal was a proof of his secular ideology.

No doubt Khan tried his best to strike a chord with the Hindu voters for his participation in Ganesh festival and installation of mandirs and Ganesh Mandals in Mumbai. Recently before the Assembly elections, amid preparations, Haroon Khan had visited a temple on November 17 and offered prayers and water to the Shivaling.

Reports said that the priest had also applied tilak on his forehead. After the visit, he had interacted with the temple visitors. It is believed that Haroon Khan performs aarti every year for Lord Ganesha during the festivities and also recites various sanskrit shlokas. While pleasing the non-Muslim voters, at the same time sources point out that Uddhav Thackeray, whose fate largely depended on Muslim voters, viewed Khan as the most ideal contender in a bid to strongly resist the election strategy of AIMIM and BJP.

Uddhav's trust on Haroon Khan is justified for another reason which is his loyalty which made him stand strong in support of Uddhav Thackeray for decades, even after Eknath Shinde blew the bugle of rebellion. Yes, Khan has made it to the Assembly, however, it remains to be seen if he manages to sail through the hard road ahead.

DRI recovers 12.5 kg gold; six held

Mumbai: The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence on Wednesday arrested six persons, including three individuals working at the food court inside the Mumbai airport, and recovered gold worth nearly Rs 10 crore from them, an official said.

The food court staffers would collect gold from international flyers linked to a syndicate, take it out of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport here and hand over the precious metal to others, the DRI official said.

Acting on inputs, DRI officials intercepted two such consignments of smuggled gold when they were being delivered outside the airport and apprehended three food court employees and as many receivers, he said.

The DRI officials seized 24 oval-shaped balls of gold dust in wax form packed in eight pouches. Altogether, 12.5 kg of gold valued at Rs 9.95 crore was recovered, he said.

After interrogation, all six persons were arrested under the Customs Act, he

said. In a statement, DRI said it busted a "big gold smuggling syndicate" with the arrest of the six persons and the recovery of the yellow metal.

Over the past two days, the DRI Mumbai has seized nearly 36 kg of smuggled gold, it added.

rickshaws seized for traffic violation

In a special drive, city police has taken action against 2,099 auto rickshaw drivers for violation of traffic rules and seized 426 rickshaws, an official said on Wednesday. The drive was launched on November 29 after receiving repeated complaints about auto rickshaw drivers refusing fare or driving rashly, he said.

Penalty was also imposed for driving without a permit or fitness certificate, parking in no-parking space, and the action would continue, the official said.

People can call helpline numbers 100, 103 and 112 if they have any grievance about auto rickshaw drivers, he said.

Sena likely to drop few ministers

Mumbai: The ruling Shiv Sena in Maharashtra may not give another chance to three leaders in the new state cabinet even as they were ministers in the previous government in view of complaints about their performance and inaccessibility, a party leader said.

The party is likely to induct fresh faces in their place.

An aide of Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and party MLA said several legislators raised concern regarding certain ministers. They said the three former ministers - one each from Konkan, western Maharashtra and Marathwada - were inaccessible even to the party MLAs.

"We have raised this issue with the deputy CM (Shinde) and demanded that they should not be inducted in the new cabinet. These ministers did not even meet their own party MLAs," the aide said.

This development reflects the churn within the Shiv Sena which has 57 MLAs.

In a related development, Shinde's office said he has not gone to Delhi to hold talks on cabinet expansion.



Modi asks Kareena why children not brought

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who interacted with the Kapoor's family ahead of Raj Kapoor's birth centenary, has said he was looking forward to meeting Kareena Kapoor Khan and Saif Ali Khan's two children Taimur and Jeh.

The Kapoor family, including actors Ranbir Kapoor, Riddhima Kapoor Sahni, and Neetu Kapoor, met the prime minister on Tuesday and invited the prime minister for the Raj Kapoor Film Festival.

December 14, 2024 marks the 100th birth anniversary of Raj Kapoor, an actor, editor, a director, and a producer, known for classics such as "Aag", "Awara", "Barsaat", "Shree 420", and

"Bobby".

During the interaction, Saif told Modi that he is the first prime minister he has met in his life.

"You are the first Prime Minister that I have met... Your energy is so good and you work so hard. I want to congratulate you in whatever you do. Thank you for opening your doors and for being accessible to us," he said.

PM Modi then told the actor that he had met Saif's father, Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi, and was now hoping to meet the next generation.

"I have met your father and I thought today I will get to meet the third generation as well. But you didn't bring them (par aap laye

nahi)," he quipped.

After the meeting with the PM, Saif said it was a warm feeling to interact with the "head of our nation".

"He said something good about Raj Kapoor and his soft power globally and how proud people are in Eastern Europe and Russia and Central Europe. He suggested that we should make a documentary on that to keep his memory alive," he said.

Kareena Kapoor Khan said it was her dream to interact with the Prime Minister. "I'm so happy that on the occasion of my grandfather's 100th birthday, we got that chance. He has so much positive energy and he is truly a global leader," she added.

Electrician loses Rs 10 lakh in task completion cyber fraud

Mumbai: A 27-year-old electrician lost Rs 10 lakh in the online "task completion" fraud as he was lured into sending money under the pretext of getting higher returns, Mumbai Police said on Wednesday.

The victim, employed with the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority, received a call from a woman in October who offered him a part-time job, a police official said.

The woman forwarded a WhatsApp link to the victim and asked him to complete online tasks like assigning ratings to reviews and liking videos on social media.

"To gain the victim's trust, the fraudsters initially sent him Rs 200 on successful completion of a given task. He was subsequently added to a Telegram group," the official said.

The victim was promised that he would receive higher returns after he sent small amounts as "fees" for completing the tasks, he said.

Convinced by the offer, he started sending money



to bank account numbers provided in the WhatsApp group, the official said.

"He ended up sending Rs 10 lakh since October but failed to get promised returns. Whenever he used to call the phone number of the woman, he failed to get any reply," he said.

The victim realised that he was conned and approached the BKC police station, leading to the registration of a case against unidentified persons under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Information Technology Act.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"If development is their (MVA) priority, with both the central and state governments controlled by the BJP-led alliance, they may consider their political future carefully."

Pravin Darekar, Leader, BJP



Pandey records statement in extortion case

Thane: Former DGP Sanjay Pandey recorded his statement on Wednesday in connection with an extortion case registered against him and six others in Thane, a crime branch official said.

Pandey visited the crime branch office in Wagle Estate area in the morning, the official said, adding that the former top cop left after three hours.

"Pandey was in the Crime Branch office for three hours during which his statement was recorded," a crime branch official said.

The case was registered at the Thane Nagar police station on August 26, 2024, on a complaint lodged by Mumbai-based businessman Sanjay Punamiya, against whom two FIRs had been registered during the MVA government's tenure when Pandey was first the DGP and then the Mumbai police commissioner.

In the complaint, Punamiya claimed to have faced "significant troubles" at the hands of the accused between May 2021 and June 30, 2024.



Besides the retired DGP, the FIR has named ex-ACP Sardar Patil, Inspector

Manohar Patil, advocate Shekar Jagtap, builder Shyamsunder Agrawal and two others - Subham Agrawal, and Sharad Agrawal - as accused.

According to the complaint, the accused were unlawfully involved in the investigation into a 2016 crime case registered with the Thane Nagar police.

They also threatened the complainant and other businessmen with false cases, extorted money and prepared fabricated documents, while (one of them)

posing as a Special Public Prosecutor to mislead courts, it said.

The FIR lists charges under multiple sections of the old IPC, including extortion, criminal conspiracy and false evidence, criminal intimidation, personating a public servant, giving false statements and obstruction of justice, assault, forgery and using forged documents, among others.

The Crime Branch has not arrested any person so far.

EDITORIAL

Heritage Wrangles

In a historic ruling, the Kalyan District and Sessions Court dismissed a long-standing 48-year-old dispute over the Durgadi Fort, declaring it as a Hindu site hosting a Durga Mata temple rather than a mosque. The case underscores an enduring struggle over India's heritage sites, where religious identity and historical claims intersect with Waqf Board assertions.

Durgadi Fort, steeped in history from the era of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, has witnessed contention since 1971 when the Thane District Collector designated it as a temple site. In subsequent decades, claims emerged from the Majlish-e-Mushavreen Majid Trust asserting that the fort was a mosque and a Waqf Board property. Allegations of unauthorized construction, including the painting of religious symbols, deepened the controversy. The court, however, dismissed these claims, leaning on evidence like temple platforms and idol placements, reinforcing its verdict.

Across India, Waqf Boards claim ownership of numerous heritage sites, including forts and temples, often invoking their historical use as places of Muslim worship. The high-handedness of Waqf Boards in asserting claims has drawn criticism for framing these sites in terms of Islamic endowments.

Portions of Ajmer's Taragarh Fort, once a symbol of Rajput valour under the Chauhans, now serves as a site managed by the Waqf Board, primarily due to its association with the Dargah of Hazrat Miran Syed Hussain. Similarly, parts of Hyderabad's Golkonda Fort have seen overlapping claims of ownership and disputes regarding the right to perform religious activities. In such cases, the Waqf Board has been accused of taking an assertive stance, often sidelining the broader historical significance of these sites.

The issue is further complicated by historical distortions propagated by some Marxist historians in post-Independent India, who, have sought to downplay or whitewash instances of iconoclasm by Muslim invaders despite explicit accounts in contemporary Muslim chronicles detailing such actions. By framing these events as politically or economically motivated rather than religiously driven, their narratives obscure the historical context of contested sites.

Critics argue that Waqf Boards often exploit legal and bureaucratic loopholes to extend their jurisdiction. Under the Waqf Act of 1995, any property designated as Waqf cannot easily be contested, placing the burden of proof on claimants who oppose such designations. This legal advantage has been leveraged to secure control over properties often without comprehensive historical scrutiny.

The case of Durgadi Fort is a timely reminder of the stakes involved in managing India's heritage. The challenge lies not just in resolving disputes but in creating a framework that respects the multiplicity of India's past while resisting the high-handedness of any single authority, Waqf or otherwise. In the end, these monuments must serve as bridges to history, not barriers between communities.



By
Shoumojit Banerjee

AGE OF EXTREMES
Syria's New Struggle for Identity



Syria's enduring tragedy, marked by the brutal grip of the Assad family for more than five decades, entered a new phase late last month when Damascus fell to advancing rebel forces, signalling the collapse of a regime propped up by fear, repression and external support. Former president Bashar al-Assad's precipitate flight from the country has brought Syria to an ominous crossroads with foreign powers like Turkey, Israel and the United States jockeying for influence in the region.

The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011 with the promise of reform and democratic aspirations, has parallels with the collapse of empires throughout history, from ancient Rome to the Ottoman Empire: what begins as a crumbling centre of power becomes a battleground for foreign interests eager to assert their dominance.

The Assad family's rule began in 1970 when Hafez al-Assad seized power, turning Syria into an autocracy. Through the Mukhabarat, the regime controlled the population and stoked sectarian divisions to maintain fragile stability. By forging alliances with Russia and Iran, Assad positioned Syria as a bastion against Western influence and a key

player in regional geopolitics.

But the seeds of the regime's demise were sown during the Arab Spring of 2011. As the conflict spiralled into a full-scale civil war, Syria fractured into a patchwork of territories controlled by various factions, including Kurdish groups, Islamist militias, Turkish-backed rebels, and even ISIS. By 2018, Syria's territorial integrity was no more than an illusion, with each faction pursuing its vision of the country's future.

The war has transformed Syria into a proxy battleground, with foreign powers becoming deeply entangled in its internal affairs. Turkey, for instance, embarked on a series of military incursions, beginning with Operation Euphrates Shield in 2016, aimed at curbing Kurdish separatism. The Turkish government under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has long regarded Syrian Kurdish forces, particularly the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) as an extension of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), which has waged an insurgency within Turkey for decades. Ankara's intervention has a dual purpose of eliminating Kurdish autonomy in northern Syria and bolstering Erdoğan's nationalist credentials. Over

time, Turkey's military presence has expanded, allowing it to exert influence over Syria's territorial disputes and the flow of refugees, positioning itself as a key player in any post-Assad settlement.

For Israel, the proximity of Iranian forces to its northern border has long been a cause for concern, especially given Syria's strategic role in Iran's 'Axis of Resistance' linking Hezbollah in Lebanon and Palestinian factions. As Assad's grip weakened, Israel intensified its airstrikes on Iranian military infrastructure in Syria. With Assad's fall, Israel now has the opportunity to deepen its interventions, aiming to further limit Iran's footprint in the country.

The United States has played a key role in northeastern Syria, supporting Kurdish-led forces in the fight against ISIS. This alignment, driven by counterterrorism goals and support for Kurdish autonomy, has strained ties with Turkey. The Biden administration now faces the challenge of balancing Kurdish control, managing Turkish aggression, and limiting Iranian influence in the region.

Syria's post-Assad future, like ancient Rome, is now a theatre for competing foreign

powers, each seeking to carve out a piece of the disintegrating state.

At the forefront of this future may be Abu Mohammad al-Julani, the leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a group with roots in al-Qaeda. Julani, who controls much of Syria's northwest, has attempted to project himself as a pragmatic statesman, reaching out to religious minorities to garner broader support. But his group's history and past affiliations complicate any reconciliation.

As in the modern historical past, the struggle for Syria's post-Assad future will unfold not just on the battlefield, but in diplomatic corridors as well. In a sense, the roots of Syria's modern conflict (as with the broader Middle Eastern turmoil) stretch back to the early 20th century. The 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, a secret deal between Britain and France to divide the Ottoman Empire's territories, set the stage for many of the region's current conflicts. The arbitrary borders drawn ignored the Middle East's complex ethnic and sectarian makeup.

In 1920, the French mandate over Syria was met with resistance, particularly from the Druze, a distinct religious and ethnic minority in southern Syria. The Druze, with their stronghold in the Jabal al-Druze, became a key symbol of resistance to French rule with their 1925 Great Syrian Revolt, which was eventually suppressed by the French.

The French mandate in Syria, established after World War I, was marked by the challenge of managing the region's diverse sectarian and ethnic groups. France's divide-and-rule policies deepened sectarian rifts, a legacy that continues to shape Syria's internal divisions. Meanwhile, post-WW I war decisions by Paris, London, and a rising America—most notably Wilson's rejection of a more balanced approach—laid the groundwork for future tensions.

The artificial borders drawn after the Ottoman Empire's collapse, compounded by foreign interventions, have left Syria vulnerable to ongoing power struggles. As the country emerges from Assad's shadow, the forces that have shaped its past—colonialism, sectarianism and foreign interference—remain as potent as ever.

EDUCATION MATTERS

A New Era in Education



By
Dr. Manisha Shrimali

The Central Board of Secondary Education is planning to soon introduce the 'Open Book Exams' for students from Grades 9 to 12. CBS' consideration of the 'Open Book Exams' aligns with India's 2020, National Education Policy, which emphasises on competency-based education and experiential learning. The current education policy aims to foster a deep understanding of the subjects and hopes to reduce the pressure of memorisation, which often leads to superficial learning. By introducing 'Open Book Exams', the CBSE therefore aims to make the assessment process more reflective of a student's true understanding of the subject. These exams are designed to evaluate critical thinking, analytical skills and the ability to apply concepts to real-world scenarios, making students more aligned with 21st-century educational needs.

This transition will have a huge impact on the Indian education system as it will see a transformation from the traditional exams that emphasised rote memorisation to students referring to their textbooks or other resource material during the test. It will therefore redefine how assessments are conducted and pave the way for a more conceptual and application-based learning framework. The one question that is often raised by the teaching and learning community together is that whether the Indian schools are equipped for this transition. This change would be resisted by parents, teachers and students who are accustomed to traditional assessments as such a shift may not be practical within the existing educational framework for Grades 9 to

12. This is because schools in many parts of India lack the infrastructure and resources to support such an implementation. Uneven access to teacher training, resource availability and technological tools would make such a system challenging to adopt universally.

Another major challenge faced during the assessment is that students would heavily rely on their resources or textbooks which could lead to overemphasis on searching the answers rather than understanding and synthesising the knowledge acquired. In India, not all students have equal access to high-quality textbooks, study materials or digital resources. This disparity therefore will widen the achievement gap, especially in underprivileged regions, making Open Book Exams inequitable for a diverse student population. In the era of online learning, the ability to access and use e-resources effectively is uneven, further exacerbating inequities. For students, it may reduce the stress of exams while encouraging a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Due to the competitive nature of board exams in India emphasis on high scores and rank-based evaluations. In such an environment these exams may be viewed as less rigorous, leading to skepticism among students, parents and educators. However, critics argue that if not implemented carefully the Open Book Exams could create disparities. On the other hand access to quality resources and training for teachers. This is because, the students that belong to this age group are still to develop the cognitive skills that are required to analyse and synthesise the information effectively. Further, this age group lacks the maturity to approach an Open Book Exam as in order to make it meaningful, it requires both rigour and discipline on the part of the students. This shift if implemented will demand a reset of teaching methodologies. Today's teachers will need to focus on skills like problem-solving, interactive discussions and varied case studies

rather than just delivering monologues as their lectures. At this stage, neither teachers nor students are prepared to take this assessment. Without proper training and gradual implementation, such exams may fail to achieve their intended outcomes. Indian students who are used to memorising answers and reproducing them during exams, would struggle in an Open Book Exam with their ability to quickly locate and interpret relevant information within a limited time frame is crucial, a skill which has not been developed among our students. Indian exams are usually structured around predictable patterns and allow students to prepare specific answers.

The implementation of such exams demands unpredictability in questions, requiring students to think on their feet, a major shift that many students find challenging. With resources openly available, the temptation to misuse the Open Book Exam increases. Students might collaborate with peers or access unauthorised materials during the test, undermining the integrity of the examination process. The potential introduction of Open Book Exams marks a significant shift in India's educational system. While the Indian government feels that this is a progressive approach that could prepare students for higher education and workforce it forgets to realise that challenges remain as students still need to prepare for competitive exams worldwide and currently Indian teachers particularly lack the expertise or resources to create and grade such nuanced assessments consistently. It is thus evident that as India inches closer to embracing a more dynamic and inclusive education system, the government should definitely focus on not just revamping the assessment but also concentrate on creating better resources for students and teachers that would in the long run help create a more skillful population ready to survive the current changes.

(The writer is an educationalist.)

STATES WATCH

A Border That Never Heals

For decades, the Belgaum border dispute has simmered at the heart of a divisive regional struggle between Karnataka and Maharashtra. The latest flare-up after Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray's controversial call to make the contested district a Union Territory, has once again brought this unresolved issue to the forefront. Karnataka Chief Minister and Congressman Siddaramaiah's swift dismissal of Thackeray's proposal as 'childish' underscores the political fault lines that continue to divide the neighbouring states.

Belgaum has long been a bone of contention due to its sizable Marathi-speaking population and historical ties to the erstwhile Bombay Presidency. Maharashtra has laid claim to the region since the reorganization of states in 1957, arguing that the area should be part of its territory because of its linguistic majority. Meanwhile, Karnataka has staunchly upheld the findings of the Mahajan Commission Report, which in 1967 concluded that Belgaum and other border regions would remain part of Karnataka. Yet, this decision has failed to quell the passions of the Marathi-speaking residents, and the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES), a local political group, has repeatedly demanded the integration of these areas with Maharashtra.

The dispute reached a new high last week when the Karnataka government, led by Siddaramaiah, denied permission for the MES to

hold a conference in Belgaum, leading to protests from activists and political leaders alike.

This ban, which included detaining several MES leaders, prompted furious reactions from Maharashtra's political elite, including Deputy Chief



KARNATAKA

Minister Eknath Shinde, who accused the Karnataka government of repressing the Maratha community. Thackeray even wrote to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis urging the central government to step in and grant Union Territory status to Belgaum, citing "injustice" against the Marathi-speaking people of the region.

Not to be outdone, the opposition in Maharashtra, too, particularly the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT), jumped into the fray, slamming the Congress government in Karnataka with Thackeray scion Aaditya Thackeray calling for Belgaum to be declared a Union Territory. The

fact that the Congress and the Sena (UBT) are allies in Maharashtra did not stop the latter from taking an aggressive stance over the border issue—a matter particularly close to the heart of undivided Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray.

The demand generally reflects the frustrations of a significant segment of Maharashtra's political class, which sees the Marathi-speaking communities in Belgaum as being subjected to neglect and discrimination by the Karnataka government.

The Karnataka government, for its part, views the dispute as a closed chapter. Last month, H. K. Patil, Karnataka's Tourism Minister and a former chairman of the border disputes committee, bluntly stated that for his state, the issue was settled. He claimed that Maharashtra's politicians merely wield the border dispute as a political weapon and that such demands were in no way reflective of any genuine claim over Belgaum.

While the MES continues to push for the merger of Marathi-speaking villages into Maharashtra, the Karnataka government maintains that the region's status is non-negotiable. The construction of the Suvarna Vidhan Soudha, Karnataka's second legislative complex, in the district has been a way of bluntly communicating this point to Maharashtra.

Historically, this dispute has been a political flashpoint that exacerbates ethnic and linguistic tensions. For Maharashtra, it represents an unfulfilled historical claim. Attempts to resolve the issue through dialogue have repeatedly stalled, and with the matter now in the hands of the Supreme Court, there is little indication that a quick resolution is forthcoming.

While both Karnataka and Maharashtra continue to posture over the issue, the real cost is the rising animosity between communities that share more commonalities than differences.



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KALEIDOSCOPE

1. A contingent of the 'Prantiya Rakshak Dal' marches past during its foundation day celebrations in Dehradun.
2. Members of a collective of senior citizens watch a performance during 'Vayojanolsavam', a festival for elderly citizens, in Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday.
3. Demonstrators hold banners demanding the imprisonment of Brazilian former President Jair Bolsonaro during a protest in defense of democracy in Sao Paulo on Tuesday.
4. A nomadic shepherd from Rajasthan leads his herd of sheep during a cold winter morning in Gurugram.
5. The sun sets behind a group of trees burned by the Franklin Fire in Malibu.

All Pictures PTI, AP

FORENSIC MATTERS

Combating Food Adulteration: The Power of Food Forensics



By

Dr. Keshav Kumar and Bimrisha Boruah

Food forensics, a specialised branch of forensic science, plays a pivotal role in verifying the authenticity, quality, and origin of food products. Its importance in upholding food production standards, preventing adulteration, and protecting consumer health has become essential. With globalisation and increasingly complex supply chains, food forensics has emerged as a critical tool in combating food fraud, fostering a sense of security and trust for consumers.

Adulterated food and deceptive labelling pose serious risks to consumer health, but cutting-edge technology is being leveraged to uncover and prevent these threats.

In India, food adulteration is a widespread issue, with common products like milk, spices, tea, and honey often mixed with harmful substances. Adulterants such as water, detergent, urea in milk, brick powder in red chilli powder, and synthetic dyes in sweets pose serious health risks to consumers. The presence of these adulterants can lead to digestive issues, liver damage, and even more severe health complications. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has been instrumental in implementing regulations to counter these issues. For instance, in 2018-2019, FSSAI's enforcement reports revealed that out of 106,459 food samples tested, 3.7% were deemed unsafe, 15.8% were substandard, and 9% had labelling issues. Recently, food forensics has specialised further in detecting fraudulent practices like false labeling and contamination by banned substances. A landmark moment for food forensics was the 2013 discovery of undeclared horse meat in beef products in Europe, which highlighted the field's significance. In India, food forensics has proven invaluable in high-profile cases, such as the recent "Laddu row" controversy at Sri Venkateswara Swamy

Temple in Tirumala. Allegations of "animal fat" in the laddus led to public anxiety, prompting the Supreme Court of India to order a thorough investigation. A Special Investigation Team (SIT), comprising officials from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Andhra Pradesh Police, and FSSAI, was tasked with the inquiry. Initial forensic tests from FSSAI showed inconsistencies in laddu samples; however, further analyses confirmed the absence of animal fat. This case, along with others involving adulterated milk and mislabeled ghee, underscores the role of food forensics in strengthening consumer protection laws in India. FSSAI's Milk Safety and Quality Survey in 2018 indicated that 7% of milk samples contained contaminants such as antibiotics and pesticides, while 41% failed to meet quality standards. The Supreme Court's response in the Tirupati Laddu case reaffirms the importance of forensic evidence in food safety, recognising it as crucial to consumer confidence. It also advocated for stringent penalties against perpetrators of food adulteration, especially when public health is compromised. Recent advancements in Next-Generation Sequencing (NGS) enable rapid identification of species in food products, helping to detect undeclared or unauthorised ingredients. Stable Isotope Ratio Analysis (SIRA) aids in tracing food origins, and

verifying claims like "locally sourced" or "organic." Moreover, blockchain technology has emerged as a promising tool, allowing each step of the food production process to be securely documented from raw material sourcing to final delivery. India is still exploring blockchain to counter food adulteration and authenticate food labels. Food forensics has become essential in the effort to combat food adulteration, helping to protect both consumer health and cultural practices. The Food Forensic Division at the Directorate of Forensic Sciences (DFS) Gujarat plays a pivotal role in analysing and verifying food safety, authenticity, and quality. Similarly, the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU) offers advanced research and training in food forensics, leveraging cutting-edge techniques to detect food adulteration and fraud, ensuring consumer safety, and upholding legal standards. Moreover, increased public awareness, strengthened regulations, and consistent application of forensic practices are crucial to safeguarding consumer interests and promoting food safety across a wide range of products.

(Dr. Kumar is a retired IPS officer and forensic advisor to the Assam government. Boruah is a Forensic Psychologist Alumni, NFSU, Gandhinagar. Views personal.)

EXPLAINER

What is Russia's new hypersonic Oreshnik missile?

The silent black-and-white surveillance camera video of the Russian missile attack in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro was brief but chilling: Six huge fireballs pierced the darkness and slammed into the ground at astonishing speed.

Within hours of the Nov 21 attack on the military facility, Russian President Vladimir Putin took the rare step of speaking on national TV to boast about the new, hypersonic missile. He warned the West that its next use could be against Ukraine's NATO allies who allowed Kyiv to use their longer-range missiles to strike inside Russia.

Putin said the missile was called the "Oreshnik" — Russian for "hazelnut tree."

A look at the weapon, how it fits into Moscow's battle plan and what political message Russia wants to send by using it:

What's the Oreshnik?

A satisfied smile played across Putin's face as he described how the Oreshnik streaks to its target at 10 times the speed of sound, or Mach 10, "like a meteorite," and claimed it was immune to any missile defense system. Ukrainian military officials said it reached Mach 11.

Gen. Sergei Karakayev, head of Russia's Strategic Missile Forces, said the Oreshnik could carry nuclear or conventional warheads and has a range to reach any European target.

The Pentagon said the Oreshnik was an experimental type of intermediate-range ballistic missile, or IRBM, based on Russia's RS-26 Rubezh intercontinental ballistic missile, or ICBM. The attack marked the first time such a weapon was used in a war.

Intermediate-range missiles can fly between 500 to 5,500 kilometers (310 to 3,400 miles). Such weapons were banned under a Soviet-era treaty that Washington and Moscow abandoned in 2019.

Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate said the missile had six warheads, each carrying six sub-



munitions. Its payload of independently targetable warheads, like a cluster of hazelnuts growing on a tree, could be the inspiration for the missile's name.

What are other missiles?

Russia has used an assortment of missiles to pummel Ukraine since the start of its invasion in February 2022, but none had the range and power of Oreshnik.

They included subsonic long-range cruise missiles that carry about 500 kilograms (1,100 pounds) of explosives, enough to inflict a significant damage to Ukrainian power plants and other key infrastructure. The winged, jet-propelled cruise missiles have a range of up to 2,500 kilometers (1,550 miles), able to reach all of Ukraine.

Russia also used swarms of inexpensive, Iranian-designed drones that carry only about 50 kilograms (110 pounds) of explosives. The slow-flying drones are relatively easy to intercept, but Russia used dozens of them at a time to overwhelm Ukrainian defenses and divert attention from simultaneously launched cruise missiles.

For some priority targets, Russia has used faster and harder-hitting missiles, including the ground-launched Iskander short-range ballistic missile with a range of 500 kilometers (310 miles).

What is message?

Putin described the Oreshnik as a response to the U.S. and U.K. allowing Ukraine to use their longer-range weapons to strike Russian territory, a move he said gave "elements of a global character" to the conflict.

"We believe that we have the right to use our weapons against military facilities of the countries that allow to use their weapons against our facilities," he said.

Russian state media extolled the Oreshnik, claiming it will take just 11 minutes to reach an air base in Poland and 17 minutes to reach NATO's headquarters in Brussels. T-shirts have appeared with images of Putin and the Oreshnik, and he was told at a briefing that a couple planned to name their daughter after the missile.

Military expert Mathieu Boulégué of Chatham House in Britain said that while the Oreshnik isn't a game-changer on the battlefield, "in terms of psychological warfare, it works great" in serving the Kremlin's goal to scare a Western audience.

The Nov 21 attack came two days after Putin signed a revised version of Russia's nuclear doctrine, which lowered the threshold for using nuclear weapons. The doctrine allows for a potential nuclear response by Moscow even to a conventional attack on Russia by any nation that is supported by a nuclear power.

The use of the Oreshnik was an expression of Moscow's anger at the use of longer-range Western missiles and a signal to Ukraine and President-elect Donald Trump that Russia was going to pursue its goals, regardless of the support for Kyiv, said James J. Townsend, senior fellow at the Center for New American Security.

Putin's warning about potential strikes on NATO assets follows calls by Russian hawks for such attacks to force Ukraine's allies to back down.

Unlike other Russian conventional weapons with a shorter range, Oreshnik offers the capability to launch a powerful, conventional strike anywhere in Europe, giving the Kremlin a new instrument of escalation without tapping its nuclear arsenal. There will be no way to know whether Oreshnik carries a nuclear or a conventional warhead before it hits the target. -AP

