

THE PERFECT VOICE



Notice to CBI on Indrani's travel plea ... pg 3



Europe's economy under threat after political chaos ... pg 6



Kapil backs Rohit, says doesn't need to prove himself ... pg 10

Mahayuti easily wins trust vote

SENA (UBT) BOYCOTTS GOVERNOR ADDRESS

Mumbai: Five days after assuming office, the Mahayuti alliance government in Maharashtra led by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday comfortably won a confidence vote in the state assembly.

The trust motion, tabled by Shiv Sena MLA Uday Samant and others, was passed by a voice vote on the last day of the three-day special assembly session.

Some opposition members were absent when the trust motion was approved in the assembly. They included Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA Aaditya Thackeray. On December 4, when Governor C P Radhakrishnan handed Fadnavis the letter inviting him to form the government, he had stipulated in the document that the BJP leader must clear the trust motion in the House in 21 days, sources said.

Speaker Rahul Narwekar, elected unopposed for a second straight term earlier in the day, announced that the trust motion has been approved by the newly-constituted House. The BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP



'Mahayuti' coalition has a commanding majority of 230 seats in the 288-member assembly, where the majority mark is 145.

"The confidence motion has been passed with a majority," Narwekar said.

BJP leader Fadnavis was sworn-in as the chief minister for a third time on December 5 at a grand ceremony in Mumbai's Azad Maidan. Eknath Shinde (Shiv Sena) and Ajit Pawar (NCP) took oath as deputy CMs at the ceremony attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The 15th assembly officially began its tenure on

December 7, two weeks after the poll results were announced. With the BJP-led alliance enjoying a super majority in the lower House, the floor test was a mere formality.

Shiv Sena leader and former minister Samant, BJP legislator Sanjay Kute, former minister Dilip Walse Patil (NCP), and independent MLA Ravi Rana tabled the proposal for a confidence motion in the lower House.

With Narwekar's appointment as Speaker, the ruling coalition now enjoys the support of 229 MLAs, including small parties and

independent MLAs. unopposed as the Speaker of the 15th assembly. Opposition alliance Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), which has less than 50 MLAs, did not put up a candidate.

Fadnavis, in his congratulatory speech, highlighted that Narwekar is only the second member of the lower House to be re-elected to the post since the state's formation in 1960.

"Balasaheb Bharde was the only Speaker of the legislative assembly to be re-elected to the post twice since 1960 when Maharashtra was formed. After Bharde, Narwekar is the

second member of the assembly to receive the honour," the chief minister said.

During his first tenure, Narwekar had ruled that the party led by Eknath Shinde was the "real" Shiv Sena after a split in the Udhav Thackeray-led party in 2022. He also held that the faction under Ajit

Pawar was the "real" Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), which was founded by Sharad Pawar.

Making a cursory reference to the verdict on the disputes involving the Shiv Sena and NCP, Fadnavis said, "During his first tenure as Speaker, Narwekar underwent some excruciating tests of his mettle, such as the decisions related to recognising the parties in the House. It was his 'agni-pariksha' (trial by fire). His legal acumen proved invaluable during several debates in the chamber."

In the evening, Governor Radhakrishnan addressed a joint sitting of the legislature where he said Maharashtra has emerged as the No.1 destination among all states in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI).

BJP MLC's uncle killed

Pune: Maharashtra BJP MLC Yogesh Tilekar's uncle was allegedly abducted and killed by unidentified persons in Pune district on Monday, a police official said.

The victim, Satish Wagh (55), was bundled into an SUV near Shewalwadi Chowk in Hadapsar area of Pune city by four to five persons when he was out on a morning walk, prompting police to fan out several teams to trace him. Wagh was found murdered near Yavat on Pune-Solapur Highway in Pune district, around 40 km from the spot he was abducted, a police officer said.



"A team has been sent to the spot to conduct panchanama," said Additional Commissioner of Police Manoj Patil. Earlier in the day, a police official said Tilekar's family didn't receive any call for ransom.

"They didn't raise suspicion on anyone. A manhunt has been launched on the details provided by an eyewitness who saw the car. We are checking CCTV footage of the area as part of the probe," he said.

Police sources said Wagh had interests in farming and also owned a hotel near Shewalwadi.

Sanjay Malhotra new RBI Governor

New Delhi: The government on Monday appointed Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra as 26th Governor of Reserve Bank of India.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet cleared Malhotra's name, who has been appointed as the RBI Governor for three years, starting Wednesday. Malhotra, a 1990 Batch Rajasthan Cadre IAS Officer, will replace Shaktikanta Das, whose tenure ends on Tuesday.

Malhotra, who will be the 26th RBI Governor, is an engineering graduate from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, and has a Master's in Public Policy from Princeton University, US.

In his career of over 33 years, he has worked in multifarious sectors, including power, finance and taxation, information technology, and mines, among others.

Presently, he is the Secretary (Revenue) in the Ministry of Finance.

In his previous assignment, he held the post of Secretary in the Department of Financial Services under the Ministry of Finance.

He has extensive experience in finance and taxation at the state as well as the central government levels. As a part of his present assignment, he plays



an instrumental role in tax policy formulation in respect of direct and indirect taxes.

Das was appointed as the 25th Governor of the RBI on December 12, 2018, after the abrupt exit of Urjit Patel. He was granted an extension after completing three-year terms in office. His extended tenure ends on Tuesday.

Soon after taking charge of the Mint Street office, he provided confidence to the market shaken by the sudden resignation of Patel amid a tussle between the RBI and the government over the issue of surplus transfer.

Shaktikanta Das, who will demit office as the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India on Tuesday, was the key man behind the planning and execution of the demonetisation drive and rollout of the landmark Goods and Services Tax (GST). At the RBI, he steered India's monetary policy response during the challenging period of the pandemic. - PTI

Reservation can't be on basis of religion, says SC

New Delhi: Reservation cannot be on the basis of religion, the Supreme Court observed on Monday while hearing a batch of pleas challenging the Calcutta High Court verdict that struck down the OBC status of several castes in West Bengal granted since 2010.

The pleas, including the one filed by the West Bengal government, challenging the high court's May 22 verdict came up for hearing before a bench of Justices B R Gavai and K V Viswanathan.

"Reservation cannot be on the basis of religion," Justice Gavai observed.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the state government, said, "This is not on the basis of religion. This is on the basis of backwardness."

The high court had struck down the OBC status of several castes in West Bengal granted since 2010, holding as illegal the reservation for them in public sector jobs and state-run educational institutions.

In its verdict, the high court said, "Religion indeed appears to have been the sole criterion for declaring these communities as OBCs."



The high court further said the "selection of 77 classes of Muslims as backwards is an affront to the Muslim community as a whole."

Deciding the petitions challenging the provisions of the state's reservation law of 2012 and reservations granted in 2010, the high court clarified that the services of citizens of the struck-down classes, who were already in service or had availed the benefit of reservation, or succeeded in any selection process of the state, would not be affected by the judgment.

The high court, in total, struck down 77 classes of reservation given between April, 2010 and September, 2010.

It also struck down 37 classes for reservation as OBC given under The West Bengal Backward Classes (Other than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) (Reservation of Vacancies in Services and Posts)

While referring to the high court's verdict, Sibal said the provisions of the Act were struck down.

"So these are very serious issues involved. It affects rights of thousands of students who are aspiring to be admitted to universities, people who are wanting jobs," he said.

Sibal therefore urged the bench for some interim order to be passed and an ex-facie stay on the high court order. The bench also heard submissions of other lawyers, including senior advocate P S Patwalia, who was representing some of the respondents in the matter.

The top court said it would hear the detailed submissions on January 7.

While hearing the matter on August 5, the apex court asked the West Bengal government to provide quantifiable data on social and economic backwardness of fresh castes it had included in the OBC list and their inadequate representation in public sector jobs.

The top court then asked the state to file an affidavit giving details of the consultations, if any, conducted by it and the state's backward classes panel.

Coldest day in nine years

Mumbai: Mumbai recorded its coldest day on Monday since December 24, 2015 with the temperature dipping to 13.7 degrees Celsius, an India Meteorological Department official said.

"On December 24, 2015, the lowest temperature was recorded at 11.4 degrees Celsius. The 13.7 degrees recorded on Monday also broke this season's earlier low of 16.5 degrees Celsius recorded a few days ago. The maximum daytime temperature is likely to hover around 32 degrees Celsius," the IMD official informed.

Gukesh loses to Liren in 12th game

Singapore: Indian challenger D Gukesh lost the 12th game against defending champion Ding Liren of China to allow his opponent bounce back and level the World Chess Championship match on Monday.

The 18-year-old Gukesh was ahead by one point after he notched his second win of the match on Sunday, which came after seven consecutive draws, but Liren's win on Monday brought the things on an even keel.

The two players are now tied at 6 points each with just two games left in the 14-round classical time control format, still shy of 1.5 points in order to win the title.

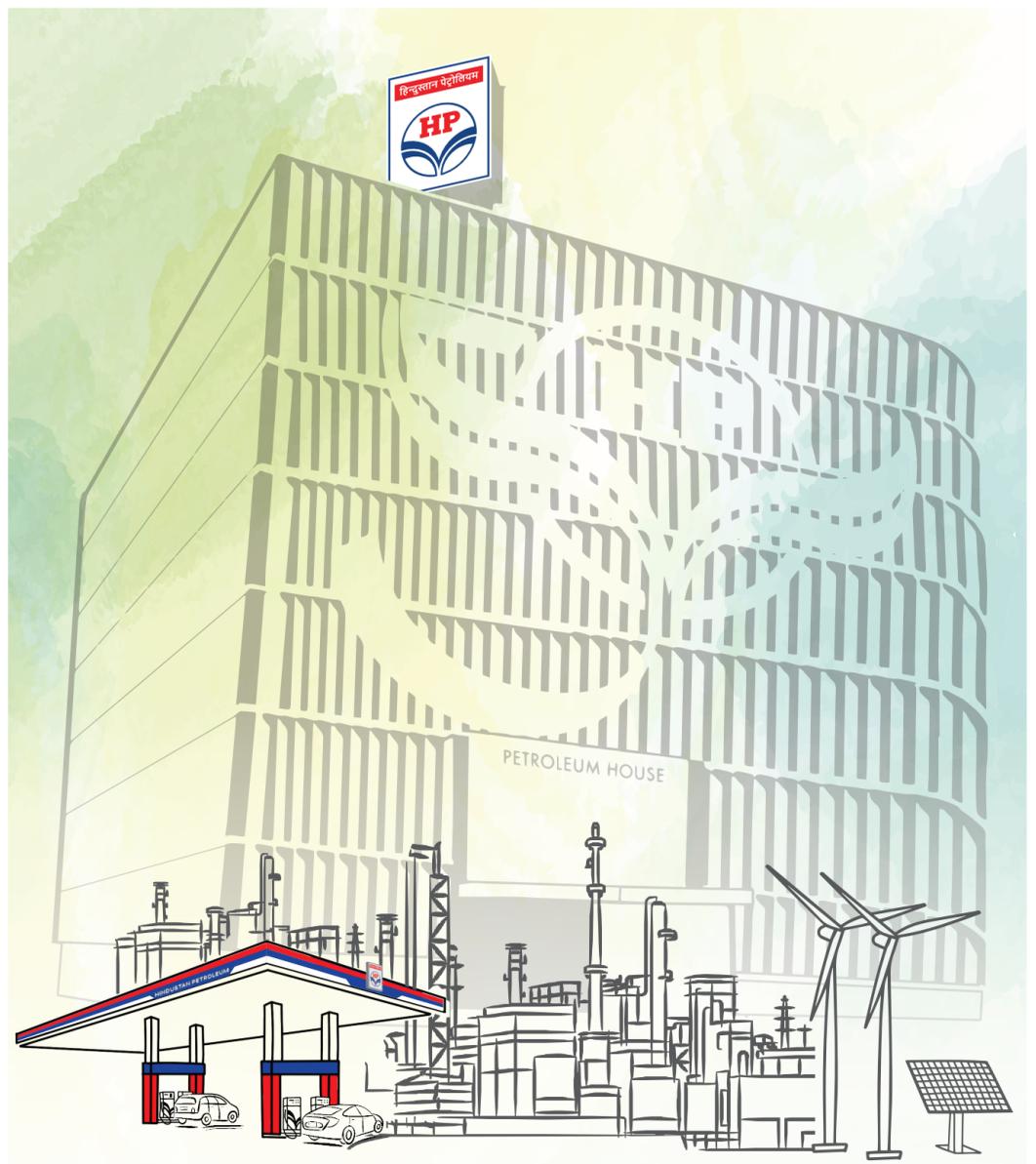
The remaining two games will be played on Wednesday and Thursday, after rest day on Tuesday.

Irrespective of what happens in

the next game on Wednesday, the match will go the distance (14 games) and more likely there will be tiebreaker -- where games are of shorter duration -- to determine the winner.

The 32-year-old Liren had won the opening game before Gukesh emerged victorious in the third game. The second, and the fourth to 10th games were drawn.

In what was the first victory for Liren with his white pieces, Gukesh's preparation did not come as good as the other 11 games that he played here. "In the second half, I had chances in many of the games. Today was obviously a bad game, but I wouldn't draw too much from it. Bad games happen. But if you look at the second half overall, I think we are both playing better than the first half," Gukesh said.



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Maharashtra leads states in attracting FDI

Mumbai: Maharashtra Governor C P Radhakrishnan on Monday said the state has emerged as the number one among all the states in attracting foreign direct investment.



Addressing a joint session of the state legislature in Mumbai, the Governor said Maharashtra contributes more than 14 per cent to the country's GDP.

The state is a preferred destination for FDI, he added.

"In 2023-24, Maharashtra topped in the country in FDI with Rs 1,25,101 crore investment, and has again topped in the country in the first two quarters, from April to September of the year 2024-25 with FDI of Rs 1,13,236 crore, which is more than 90 per cent of last year's total FDI," he said.

The government has set a very ambitious target of making Maharashtra the first state in the country to achieve the target of becoming a USD one trillion economy by the year 2027-28, he said.

The state government has announced a policy of giving anchor industry status to mega projects and hi-tech manufacturing sector like semiconductors, electric vehicles, aerospace and defence, chemicals and polymers, lithium ion batteries, steel and other products, he said.

Approved projects in the last eight months under this policy will attract a total investment of Rs 3.29

lakh crore and will generate direct and indirect employment for 1,18,000 persons, he said.

The state government has announced the Information Technology and Information Technology Supported Services Policy, 2023 and also Green Data Centre Policy, he said.

The policy aims to make Mumbai, the Data Centre Capital of India, the Governor said. As part of this policy, a Green Integrated Data Centre Park will be set up in Mumbai and Navi Mumbai areas, with around Rs one lakh crore investment and will generate 20,000 jobs, he said. PTI

The Governor also said the state government has commenced the recruitment process to fill 1.53 lakh vacant posts to enhance employment opportunities for the youth. Addressing a joint session of the state legislature in Mumbai, the Governor said that till today 78,309 posts have been filled.

The state government has also started the process to fill up 6,931 vacant posts in 17 cadres under the provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Sched-

uled Areas) Act (PESA) on honorarium basis subject to the decision of the Supreme Court, he said.

The state government has tied up with the state of Baden-Wurttemberg in Germany in February, 2024 for supply of 10,000 skilled manpower, he said.

The state government is implementing the Mukhyamantri Mazi Ladki Bahin Scheme for empowerment of women in the age group of 21 to 65 years in the state, he said. An amount of Rs 1,500 per month is being given to more than 2.34 crore women beneficiaries under this scheme and five monthly instalments from July to November, 2024 have been paid, he said. This scheme will continue, the Governor said.

The status of classical language granted to Marathi language by the Central Government will help in establishment of special centres to study Marathi language in 450 universities, the Governor said.

"More funds will be available from the Central Government for preservation and conservation of Marathi Language," he said. - PTI

Bawankule slams Cong govt

Mumbai: Maharashtra BJP chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule on Monday slammed the Congress government in neighbouring Karnataka for deciding to remove the portrait of Hindutva ideologue VD Savarkar from the Legislative Assembly there.

History will never forgive those who insult the legacy of Savarkar, who had endured immense suffering for the country's independence, Bawankule asserted.

"The decision of the Congress-led government in Karnataka to remove the portrait of Savarkar is highly condemnable and an insult of country's freedom movement," he said on social media platform X.

This was the Congress' attempt to undermine the sacrifices, pain and ideology of Savarkar.

"It directly insults his legacy and the ideals he stood for," Bawankule said, and asked if Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray would remain silent or speak up over this act of his party's ally. Thackeray, who has abandoned Hindutva for political gain, has shown disregard for Savarkar's ideals by aligning with the Congress.

This is why Thackeray's party is being called 'Tipu Sena', Bawankule said.

Tipu Sultan, the 18th-century ruler of Mysuru, who lost his life in a battle against the British in 1799, is a polarising figure who is hailed as a fearless freedom fighter by his supporters, while his detractors condemn him as a zealot who persecuted Hindus.

"Those who insult Savarkar and his legacy, like the Congress and their allies, will never be forgiven by history." - PTI



Maharashtra Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan addresses a joint session of both houses of the State Legislature at Vidhan Bhavan in Mumbai on Monday. Pic:PTI

Narwekar elected Speaker

Mumbai: BJP MLA Rahul Narwekar was on Monday elected unopposed as the Speaker of the 15th Maharashtra Legislative assembly.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, in his congratulatory speech, highlighted that Narwekar is the second member of the lower House to be re-elected to the post since the state's formation in 1960.

"Balasaheb Bharde was the only Speaker of the legislative assembly to be re-elected to the post twice since 1960 when Maharashtra was formed. After Bharde, Narwekar is the second member of the assembly to receive the honour," the chief minister said.

He pointed out that Kundanmal Firodia was the first Speaker of the House to be reappointed,



but it was during the time of Bombay state, and Sayaji L. Silam was elected as the Speaker before the formation of Maharashtra, and he was re-elected after the state came into existence.

Narwekar filed his nomination papers on Sunday and was elected unopposed as the opposition alliance Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) decided not to put up a contest.

The BJP leader, the Speaker in the 14th assembly for two and a half years, was re-elected from the Colaba assembly seat in Mumbai in the November 20 assembly elections.

During his tenure as Maharashtra assembly speaker, Narwekar had ruled that the party led by Eknath Shinde was the legitimate and real Shiv Sena after a split in the Uddhav Thackeray-led party. He also held that the faction under Ajit Pawar was the real Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), which was founded by Sharad Pawar.

While making a cursory reference to the verdict on the disputes involving the Shiv Sena and NCP, Fadnavis said, "During his first tenure as Speaker, Narwekar underwent some excruciating tests of his mettle, such as the decisions related to recognising the parties in the House. It was his 'agnipariksha' (trial by fire). His legal acumen proved invaluable during several debates in the chamber." He further claimed that

Narwekar also faced personal attacks but never held a grudge and maintained his composure.

Fadnavis referred to Narwekar, the son-in-law of former state minister and ex-chairman of the state legislative council Ramraje Nimbalkar, saying, "Alongside his parents, Narwekar must have gained some legislative insights from his in-laws."

The Speaker's election will be followed by a floor test to prove the new government's strength. Governor CP Radhakrishnan will then address the joint session of both Houses of the state legislature.

In the recently concluded Maharashtra assembly elections, the Mahayuti coalition put up a stunning show, winning over 230 of the 288 seats, while the MVA could collectively manage only 46 seats.

Man held for stealing gold crown

Pune: A Mumbai-based man was arrested for allegedly stealing gold ornaments from a Jain temple in Pune's Swargate area, a police official said on Monday.

The official identified the accused as Naresh Jain, a resident of Girgaon in south Mumbai, who has 8-10 criminal cases against his name.

"On November 15, a gold crown and a gold chain were stolen from the idol of a Jain temple. Attempts to steal such ornaments were made at three to four other temples on the same day. A check of the CCTV footage helped us zero in on a man who was moving about as a Jain 'sadhak'," Swargate police station senior inspector Yuvraj Nandare said.

Based on a tip off received by policeman Sahar Kekan, Jain was held from Girgaon and a gold crown and chain worth Rs 4.20 lakh were recovered from him, Nandare said.

"The accused has claimed he committed the theft to tide over a financial crisis. He is also accused of committing 8-10 such crimes in Ghatkopar and Dombivali in Mumbai."

Maharashtra steps up efforts to get UNESCO tag for Lonar lake

Mumbai: The Maharashtra government plans to submit a proposal to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to include the famous Lonar Lake in Buldhana district in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites list, officials have said.

The move aims to elevate the site as a global hub for tourism and research, besides boosting its conservation, they said.

Amravati Divisional Commissioner Nidhi Pandey recently met officials from various departments at Lonar to discuss the proposal.

"This proposal will soon be presented, marking a significant step towards achieving recognition," Pandey told PTI.

Buldhana District Collector Kiran Patil said the proposal is in its final stage.

"We will submit it once it is polished. Unlike other UNESCO sites, Lonar Lake presents a unique mix of several categories. It is a geographical and scientific wonder, formed from a meteor impact," he said.

The official said the lake in Lonar, about 460 km from Mumbai, is home to



several temples, some dating back over 1,200 years.

The proposal highlights the lake's geological importance and the urgent need for conservation efforts, he said.

"We are cataloguing biodiversity, gathering data about the temples, and documenting rare findings from excavations and research on the meteor impact conducted by various scientists," Patil said.

After reaching ASI, the proposal will undergo a detailed review before being submitted to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

A UNESCO tag will ensure that the lake, spread over 113 hectares, has "outstanding universal value".

If accepted, Lonar Lake will become India's 41st UNESCO World Heritage Site, alongside iconic places

like the Ajanta and Ellora Caves, Elephanta Caves, and Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus.

Local activist Gajanan Kharat, who advocates for the lake's conservation, said a few senior bureaucrats are keen on supporting the UNESCO recognition for the impact crater. However, a lot is to be done.

"Despite local appeals, the government has yet to instal signboards along national highways or the Nagpur-Mumbai Samruddhi Expressway. We have been urging their installation on these roads to attract more visitors," he said.

Kharat said the government should encourage investment in the hospitality sector to enhance tourist experiences.

Improved services would draw more visitors, creating job opportunities for

locals, he said.

Collector Patil said the old residential area in Buldhana requires significant upgrades, including basic facilities like a proper bus stand. Steady progress has been made in these areas over the past few years through review meetings, said the official.

"There is another temple in Buldhana called 'Daitya Sudan'. It features beautiful stone construction and artistic designs, making it a significant attraction for tourists primarily visiting Lonar Lake. Some encroachments around the temple have already been cleared, and we are working on repairing and widening the access road for smoother vehicle movement," he said.

Lonar Lake, the world's largest basaltic impact crater, was formed approximately 50,000 years ago by a high-velocity meteor strike. Its saline-alkaline waters and surrounding ecosystem have attracted extensive research from institutions such as the Smithsonian, the United States Geological Survey, and the Geological Society of India.



NCP (Sharad Pawar) party workers protest against the atrocities on religious minorities in Bangladesh, in Nagpur. Pic:PTI

Four booked over spurious medicine

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar: A case has been registered against four persons for allegedly supplying spurious medicine to a government hospital in Maharashtra's Beed district, police said on Monday.

The case was registered on December 5 after the Food and Drug Administration department conducted a detailed probe at the Swami Ramanand Tirth Hospital in Ambajogai, an official said.

Swami Ramanand Teerth Medical College and Hospital is a major hospital in Ambajogai of Beed, where people from nearby districts come for treatment.

During the probe, azithromycin tablets were found to be spurious under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940 and Rules 1945, he said.

Investigations revealed that more than 50 lakh tablets were purchased from four suppliers based out of

Maharashtra and Gujarat, and they have been booked under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita for cheating and dishonestly inducing someone to deliver property, forgery, sale of drugs as a different drug or preparation, the official said.

Talking to reporters, Shankar Dhapate, dean of the Ambajogai Medical College and Hospital, said they have stopped the use of this medicine after it was found to be spurious.

Bomb threat at hotel

Nagpur: Panic gripped a hotel in Ganeshpeth area of Nagpur on Monday morning after it received an e-mail warning of a bomb blast on its premises, which turned out to be a hoax, police said.

An e-mail threatening a bomb blast at Hotel Dwarkamai was received in the morning, following which police were alerted. Police personnel, including a team of the Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad, and Fire Brigade officials rushed to the spot.

Whatsapp account of ADG-rank officer's wife hacked

Mumbai: Unidentified persons were booked for hacking the Whatsapp account of the wife of an additional director general rank IPS officer and seeking money from those on her contact list, an official said on Monday.

The accused created another account using her name, photo and phone number to carry out the crime, the official added.

"On Friday, the 49-year-old woman realised her Whatsapp account had been hacked. She received a message from one of the



contact numbers saved on her mobile phone. The sender asked her to forward a six-digit code via WhatsApp, which she accidentally sent. She soon received more such codes.

She was logged out of her Whatsapp account and attempts to log in again were futile," the official said.

Her IPS officer husband received a message from her hacked account and



then another on his second mobile number in which the sender sought money. The complainant also got calls from some persons on her contact list asking her about the money-seeking message and whether she was facing some kind of problem," the official

informed.

Realising her account had been hacked, she approached Byculla police station and lodged a complaint, he said.

A case was registered for cheating, personation using computer device, identity theft and other offences under sections 66(C) and 66(D) of Information Technology Act and sections 318 (4), 319(2), 62 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita against unidentified persons.

Efforts were on to nab the accused, the official informed. - PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The loyalty of police officers should be with the Constitution. In the initial days of my career, we used to count on our fingers the number of police officers who take money (bribes). Now, we count the number of officers who don't take money on fingers."



Meeran Chadha Borwankar, Former IPS officer

Shinde slams Karnataka for action against MES activists



Mumbai: Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Monday condemned the "suppressive tactics" used by Karnataka police against activists of Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti who were protesting in Belagavi.

Earlier in the day, Karnataka police detained leaders and activists of Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES) who were opposing the winter session of Karnataka legislature being held at Suvarna Vidhan Soudha.

"The stance of the Karnataka government to oppose Marathi speaking people in the border areas (with Maharashtra) is unjust," Shinde said in the state legislative council in Mumbai.

Replying to a question by Leader of Opposition Ambadas Danve, Shinde said the Karnataka Government opposed the meeting organised by MES and detained people's representatives.

A meeting was earlier held with Union minister Amit Shah to find resolution to the long-pending border dispute between the two states, Shinde said.

"There was a positive discussion in that meeting. Despite this, if the Karnataka Government is behaving in such a manner, we condemn it," Shinde said.

The man behind GST, note ban

Mumbai: Shaktikanta Das, who will demit office as the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India on Tuesday, was the key man behind the planning and execution of the demonetisation drive and rollout of the landmark Goods and Services Tax. At the RBI, he steered India's monetary policy response during the challenging period of the pandemic.

Das, 67, a career bureaucrat, was put into the high job of the RBI Governor when Urjit Patel abruptly resigned in December 2018. His second three-year term comes to an end on December 10 and will be replaced by Sanjay Malhotra, Revenue Secretary in the Union Ministry of Finance.

A 1980-batch Tamil Nadu cadre IAS officer, Das, who holds a master's degree in history from Delhi's St Stephen's College and a post-graduate degree in public administration from the University of Birmingham, was economic affairs secretary when the government suddenly scrapped high-value currency notes in November 2016.

While the government justified the move as aiming at curbing black money, corruption, and terrorism financing, many criticized it for the hardship it brought to the common man. Das, however, defended the decision and steered the normalisation drive over the course of the next few weeks.

He also played a key role



when multiple indirect taxes were merged into one GST, which came into effect on July 1, 2017. Das was instrumental in coordinating with the states to ensure the successful implementation of the GST.

As the RBI Governor, he focused on maintaining financial stability, curbing inflation and promoting economic growth. While he took several measures to address the liquidity crunch in the non-banking financial sector and took steps to strengthen the regulatory framework for banks and non-banking financial companies, the highlight of his stint was the central bank's response to dealing with the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The RBI provided various regulatory relaxations to support the economy. Under him, the central bank held benchmark interest rates steady for almost two years in a bid to control inflation. He delivered the final monetary policy of his tenure on December 6.

"In the last few years, we have traversed one of the

most difficult periods in the history of the Indian economy, and perhaps, in the global economy also. It was a period of relentless turbulence and jolts.

"As a country, we can derive satisfaction that the Indian economy has not just navigated this period of trials successfully but also emerged stronger. As we strive together towards making India a developed economy, I recall what I had said in my statement of February 8, 2023, wherein I had quoted Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: '...never lose your faith in the destiny of India,'" Das said while unveiling the monetary policy on December 6.

Soon after taking charge of the Mint Street office, he provided confidence to the market shaken by the sudden resignation of Patel amid a tussle between RBI and the government over the issue of surplus transfer. He not only assuaged the concerns of the market but deftly sorted out issues related to surplus transfer to the government.

Barely a year after Das took charge as the RBI governor, Covid hit the world. As a key economic policy-maker, Das faced challenging times in managing the disruptions caused by the lockdown. He chose to cut the policy repo rate to a historic low of 4 per cent, continuing with the low-interest rate regime for almost two years to help the economy hit by lockdowns.

WHEF at BKC from Friday

Mumbai: World Hindu Economic Forum 2024 will be held this month in the country's financial capital with an aim to encourage the Hindu community to embrace entrepreneurship and influence policy narrative, organisers said on Monday.

The latest edition of the World Hindu Economic Forum will be held at a famous convention centre in the BKC business district starting Friday.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, his Gujarat counterpart Bhupendra Patel, Maharashtra counterpart Devendra Fadnis and Union Minister Piyush Goyal will be among the speakers at the event.

Ravikant Mishra, the secretary of the organising committee said tendencies of being contented at finding a job and blaming the government for not creating sufficient jobs are taking root.

When asked if the Hindu community is less excited about entrepreneurship, he said the youth is less enthused, and hence, it will be an objective to make Hindu job creators.

He also said that the forum, which has been held since 2012, will also come up with policy suggestions and cited the need to promote true innovation by the government rather than the copy-paste jobs that people do under the guise of innovation.

Industry lobby groupings like CII and Ficci represent only a few people and the WHEF will carry the voice of all the Hindu entrepreneurs, Mishra added. There is also a need for the Hindus to influence the narrative, he said, pointing to the World Economic Forum's successes at the global level.

Newbies in the House Part-I

Lioness of Vasai ends Thakur Raj

By Ruddhi Phadke

You can call her a giant killer. Sneha Dubey, who faced the ballot for the first time, defeated Hindendra Thakur, a five-time MLA who lorded over Vasai with an iron fist for decades. Dubey had worked hard under the guidance of her father, but had never contested elections earlier. This time, she took up the challenge to defeat Thakur, popularly called the 'don' of Vasai.

Dubey's father Vivek Pandit was a social worker who left Mumbai city to live in Vasai only to work for the upliftment of the rural population there. In 1982, Pandit established the 'Shramajeevi Sanghatana', an organisation with which Dubey worked for several years. Here, she developed the desire to work for society right and subsequently worked with Advasis and even resolved land disputes. Her parents, who are her mentors, were awarded the 1999 Anti-Slavery Award for their outstanding work over 20 years to free and rehabilitate bonded labourers in India. Vivek Pandit was also elected to the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly from Vasai, Maharashtra in the 2009 Maharashtra Legislative Assembly election independent.

Dubey says she's worked hard all her life to eradicate the sinister designs of anti-social elements in Vasai, but was never a politician. Speaking to the Perfect Voice, she says, "My father was supported by all in 2009. I have never been involved in politics, but I am connected with the people of Vasai since my childhood because of my father and his outlook."

Some sections labelled her victory as her revenge against the Thakurs for killing her father-in-law Suresh Dubey, 35 years ago. He was allegedly murdered by Jayendra alias Bhai Thakur. Dubey dismisses these claims, saying, "I was a child when that happened. It is sad that my father-in-law was killed. However, how can I become an MLA to take revenge for a 35-yr-old murder? The two fights are completely different. Coinci-



dently, I got married into Dubey family. Being a daughter-in-law, I support the fight of my family that's currently underway in Supreme Court challenging the 2023 acquittal of the killers. However, I never entered politics to take revenge for that one incident. I must say, Vasai has taken revenge for being trapped into an anti-social web for years. Vasai wants a change, and I will continue to work on the guidelines of my father for building a better Vasai."

Sources said that while the BJP was discussing the seats, Vivek Pandit was initially offered the opportunity to contest for the Vasai seat. However, he declined, preferring to continue his social work. "Fadnavisji has a positive attitude. Immediately he turned to me and expressed his trust in me and I decided to accept."

Dubey has taken a big leap. The road ahead isn't easy. Dubey says that she had no aspirations for any ministerial position and that more than being in a celebratory mode, she is overwhelmed with the responsibility he is bestowed upon by the people of Vasai and that her only focus in future will be to expedite the stalled progress of Vasai.

Notice to CBI on Indrani's travel plea

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday sought the CBI's response on former media executive Indrani Mukerjea's plea challenging a Bombay High Court ruling denying her to travel abroad as she is accused of killing her daughter Sheena Bora.

The travel restriction matter came up to the Supreme Court after a special court on July 19 allowed Mukerjea's plea to visit Spain and the United Kingdom for 10 days over the next three months.

The CBI approached the high court challenging the order passed by the special court. The high court quashed the special court's order on September 27.

Mukerjea moved the apex court challenging this high court order.

A bench of justices M M Sundresh and Aravind Kumar issued a notice to the agency and sought its response on the appeal filed by Mukerjea against the high court order.

In her plea filed through advocate Sana Raees Khan, Mukerjea said she was a British citizen as she sought permission to visit Spain and her home country for "making necessary changes



and amendments and taking care of pending work which cannot be transacted without her personal presence".

She argued the activation of a digital certificate was a must for all relevant work and administration in Spain and her physical presence was mandatory.

In its verdict, the high court noted Mukerjea wanted to travel abroad on the ground that she was a British national and was required to execute documents regarding her bank account and perform other work in Spain and the UK.

While setting aside the special court's order, the high court said if Mukerjea wished to perform these works from India, the statu-

tory authorities back home would extend her the necessary support with the assistance of Embassy of Spain and the UK.

Mukerjea was arrested in August 2015 after the murder of Bora came to light. She was granted bail by the Supreme Court in May 2022. She has denied the allegations.

Bora (24) was allegedly strangled to death in a car by Mukerjea, her then-driver Shyamvar Rai and former husband Sanjeev Khanna in April 2012 in Mumbai. Her body was then burnt in a forest in the neighbouring Raigad district, according to the prosecution.

Bora was Mukerjea's daughter from her previous relationship.

The killing came to light in 2015 when Rai reportedly revealed about it during interrogation by police after his arrest in a separate case registered under the Arms Act.

Mukerjea's ex-husband Peter Mukerjea was also arrested for allegedly being a part of the conspiracy linked to the murder, probed by the CBI.

All the accused are currently out on bail.



Deputy CM Ajit Pawar at Vidhan Bhavan on Monday.

Pic: Bhushan Koyande

BJP Morcha holds protest against Raut

Thane: The BJP's Mahila Morcha held a protest in Thane on Monday against Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut for "derogatory" remarks about women in connection with the Maharashtra government's Ladki Bahin Yojana. Raut had said women's votes were brought by the ruling alliance in the recent assembly polls through the Rs 1500 monthly aid given under the scheme, the protesting leaders claimed. As



part of the protest, an effigy of Raut was hit with slippers and slogans were raised against him.

BJP Mahila Morcha leaders claimed Raut's remarks had insulted the dignity of women.

Man held for sending lewd message

Thane: A 20-year-old man was arrested from Gujarat by Maharashtra police for allegedly sending lewd messages to a teenage girl from Mira Road area in Thane district, an official said on Monday.

An FIR was registered by the Mira-Bhayandar-Vasai-Virar (MBVV) Police after the girl received an obscene message on her Instagram account in the last week of November, an officer said.

Filmmaker Zafar booked for cheating

Mumbai: Film director Ali Abbas Zafar and two others were booked for allegedly duping producer Vashu Bhagnani of Rs 9 crore, a police official said on Monday.

As per the First Information Report registered on Sunday, Zafar and his associates Himanshu Mehre and Ekesh Randive are accused of siphoning off money, the Bandra police station official said.

The case was registered on the directions of the court, the official informed. Zafar, Mehre and Randive have been charged under Indian Penal Code sections 120(b) (criminal conspiracy), 406 (criminal breach of trust), 420 (cheating), 465 (forgery), 471 (fraud), 500 (defamation) and 506 (criminal intimidation).

Bhagnani had moved the Bandra magistrate court seeking a case against Zafar, who directed "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan" starring Akshay Kumar and Tiger Shroff, which released on April 11 this year. It was produced by Bhagnani's Pooja Entertainment.

In the order of December 2, the magistrate held the offences were cognisable and non-bailable, the offi-



cial said.

In his statement to police, Bhagnani claimed the trio had inked a Rs 154 crore agreement for the film, but took Rs 230 crore claiming it had gone over-budget.

Bhagnani claimed the trio made fake invoices and siphoned off Rs 9 crore.

The court noted that the trio lured Bhagnani into paying various amounts from time to time and in breach of contract incurred additional expenses and did not provide any account of these expenses, the official said.

No arrest has been made in the case and further probe is underway, the official added.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I will give opportunity to everyone in the frame of the rules. There won't be injustice to anyone. I will give opportunity to the opponents to speak even if they are less in numbers."



Rahul Narwekar, Speaker, Assembly

Geo-political turmoil may be 'top risk' in 2025

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Three-fourths of global organisations rank geopolitical tensions as a top concern for 2025, underscoring the fragility of a deeply interconnected global landscape, according to a new international survey report released here.

Businesses world over are now confronted with an environment where conflicts are not merely confined to political borders but also impact industries, supply chains and economies, in the survey, "2025

Risk Outlook Report" by International SOS, London and Singapore.

The risks manifest in varied and overlapping ways as in Europe, where the Ukraine-Russia conflict has destabilized energy markets and fractured political alliances with ripples across the continent, and the Middle-East crisis involving Israel are intensifying polarization.

The survey among 802 senior risk professionals in 96 countries found that 75 percent listed political and social unrest as a top haz-

ard, followed by 74 percent citing geopolitical tensions and 73 percent worry about the associated transport risks and disruptions as a key issue.

At least 65 percent of the respondents felt that the risks have increased in the past one year and 69 percent predict its significant impact in the next year, while 78 percent indicated that burnout and stress are likely to considerably hit businesses in 2025.

International SOS' Managing Director for India Neeraj Balani said that as

nations conflict, within and with each other, businesses face security risks to their assets, people and regulatory challenges and an uncertain investment landscape.

"In today's interconnected world, a single cyber incident can trigger widespread operational chaos and affect your workforce, showcasing the pressing need for companies to adopt a holistic approach to risk management. Organisations must develop strong risk assessment frameworks that tackle these in-

tericate challenges head-on to thrive," urged Balani.

International SOS' Medical Director Dr. Vikram Vora, who is Chief Health Officer for India, said the increasingly volatile geopolitical landscape is taking a profound toll on mental health of people with 65 percent of organisations identifying political stress and anxiety as major risks.

The survey found broader wellness risks like: Stress and burnout (78 percent), Impact of Cost-of-Living crisis (75 percent), Mental Health Conditions

(70 percent), Quiet Quitting (52 percent) and Climate Change Anxiety (45 percent), next year.

Only 53 percent organisations feel they are prepared for a Pandemic situation triggered by some new infectious disease. Alongside the mental health challenges, only 53% of organisations feel prepared for a new infectious disease or pandemic, and Vora warns it could transform into a full-blown emergency impacting countries, communities, organisations and individuals.

'Mass Hindu migration from B'desh unlikely'

By Sougata Mukhopadhyay

Kolkata: The current and evolving situation in Bangladesh is unlikely to trigger a fresh round of exodus of minority Hindus into India, Nobel laureate economist Abhijit Banerjee said.

Historically, the academic explained, migration is mainly driven by social networks and economic opportunities, rather than persecution, even in the context of the crisis faced by minorities in Bangladesh.

Speaking exclusively to PTI during his recent visit to the city to participate in a curtain-raiser event of the 16th edition of the Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival, where his latest title 'Chhaunk: On Food, Economics and Society' was launched, Banerjee said he felt India's "explicit political preference for Hindu migrants from Bangla-



desh' is what prompted the population to leave their homeland in the past, rather than the attacks on the community.

"People always leave for another country where they have their families or to a richer nation where the economic opportunities are higher," the Nobel laureate said, "I am not surprised that Hindu Bengalis have left Bangladesh and settled in, say, large pockets of Assam because of India's overt preference for Hindus instead of Muslims."

"I am not saying that per-

secution would, under no circumstances, lead to exodus on a large scale. But it's a presumption I don't agree with. The reasons for mass migration have been widely documented by both economists and sociologists across the globe. Persecution has never been the primary determinant. I would actually like to see some data on that before passing a judgement," he continued.

It is estimated that around 10 million East Bengali refugees had fled to Indian territories on account of conflict during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.

Displacement of Bengalis on both sides of the border had a severe demographic and long-lasting political impact in India during the 1947 partition of Bengal when an estimated 2.2 million Bengali Hindus left then East Pakistan to West Bengal while some 1.9

million Bengali Muslims were forced to cross the border for a reverse exodus.

In the 77 years since Independence, the Hindu population in Bangladesh has dropped from 22 per cent to less than 8 per cent, mainly due to mass exodus and on account of sustained crossing over of refugees, mostly Hindus, during the interim period citing persecution.

Bangladesh shares over 4,000 km of land border with India, more than half of which is with West Bengal and the remaining length running past the four North Eastern states of Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram.

"The scale of migration in 1971 was created because the armed forces of multiple nations were involved. I don't think non-crisis migration can ever reach that scale," the Nobel laureate said. -PTI

Insurgents won't impose dress code

Damascus: Syrian insurgents who toppled President Bashar Assad said they won't impose any religious dress code on women and vowed to guarantee personal freedom for everyone.

The insurgents' General Command said "It is strictly forbidden to interfere with women's dress or impose any request related to their clothing or appearance, including requests for modesty". The command said it affirms that personal freedom is guaranteed to everyone, and that respect for the rights of individuals is the basis for building a civilised nation.

In areas that were controlled by Syrian opposition groups since the civil war erupted in 2011, the vast majority of women dressed modestly, only revealing their faces and hands. Abu Mohammed al-Golani, the militant leader whose forces entered Damascus over the weekend, has renounced longtime ties to al-Qaida and depicted himself as a champion of pluralism and tolerance. -AP



The tranquilized leopard, that was caught by the forest department team being placed in a cage after it left around 10 people injured in multiple attacks, in Farrukhabad on Monday. Pic:PTI

EC to decide on POSH Act

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday disposed of a plea seeking direction to political parties to follow the procedure for protection of women at workplace under the 2013 POSH Act.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Manmohan asked the petitioner to approach the Election Commission of India (ECI) with a representation for the application of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act).

Senior advocate Shobha Gupta, representing PIL petitioner Yogamaya MG, said there were six national parties in the country that did not have a grievance redressal mechanism against sexual harassment in line with the directions of the apex court and the 2013 law.

The PIL arrayed 10 political parties including six national level parties -- BJP, Congress, BSP, CPI(M), National People's Party and AAP. The bench, however, observed political parties were registered under the Representation of Peoples Act and the competent authority under the law

should be ECI, which was not made a party in the petition.

When Justice Surya Kant asked whether people who worked in shops or unorganised sector were also covered under the POSH Act, Gupta said the definition clause of the 2013 law itself covered all aggrieved women and workplaces and the Act covered such entities through local committees.

The bench noted the Kerala High Court previously held that political parties were not bound by the POSH Act and its verdict was not challenged. It disposed of the petition while granting the liberty to the petitioner to approach the judicial fora, in case her grievances were not addressed.

The plea, filed through advocate Deepak Prakash, said it was aimed at ensuring that political parties complied with the POSH Act and provided a safe work environment for women, free of sexual harassment.

"By invoking Article 32, the petitioners seek the court's extraordinary juris-

diction to enforce fundamental rights and ensure that the Respondents (like political parties or relevant authorities) take necessary action," it said.

The plea further submitted that India indeed had a vibrant multi-party system, boasting an impressive 2,764 registered political parties, including six national parties and 57 state parties, according to ECI's latest data.

This number is a testament to the country's diverse and dynamic political landscape, it said.

"This proliferation of political parties demonstrates India's commitment to democratic values and its citizens' enthusiasm for engaging in the political process. With millions of members across these parties, it is clear that politics plays a significant role in Indian society. However, the presence of internal complaints committees (ICCs) to address sexual harassment is inconsistent across these parties," it said.

The PIL further stated an evident gap in ensuring a safe particularly women, participating in political activities.



Tourists participate in paragliding amidst fresh snowfall in Solang valley in Manali district on Monday. Pic:PTI

Lt Gen Dhillon's memoir wins Crossword Award

New Delhi: Former Chinar Corps Commander Lieutenant General (ret'd) KJS Dhillon's memoir 'Kitne Ghazi Aaye Kitne Ghazi Gaye: My Life Story' has won the Crossword Book Award for best non-fiction title in the popular choice category.

Published in 2023, the book takes readers to the behind-the-scenes stories and developments related to the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, the deadly terrorist attack on a CRPF convoy in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district in 2019 that

killed 40 paramilitary troopers, the subsequent Balakot air strikes, and the abrogation of Article 370 and its impact on the socio-political, economic and law and order situation of the region, among others.

The award was presented to Lt Gen Dhillon in Mumbai by journalist and columnist Bachi Karkaria on Sunday. The book is his life story in which the retired army officer recounts fascinating tales about the toughest challenges he encountered, from age three right up to becoming the commander.

Tourist dies in snow-related accident

Shimla: Himachal Pradesh witnessed its second snowfall of the season which led to the closure of 15 roads, including two National Highways, the State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC) said on Monday.

A tourist from New Delhi, Bhishan Garg (49), died on Sunday night when his vehicle skidded on the icy road and collided with a parked tipper in the Lahaul Spiti district while three others sustained injuries, police said.

The accident occurred when the driver of the ill-fated car tried to overtake the vehicles stranded in traffic as the road was slippery. He lost control, resulting in the car crashing into the tipper.

At least 15 roads, including Atari-Leh National Highway 3 and Firozpur-Shipki La National Highway 5, were blocked for vehicular traffic in Kullu and Lahaul and Spiti districts.

Sixty-two out of 87 roads

closed on Monday morning were opened for vehicles and in the evening, six roads were closed in Kangra; two each in Lahaul and Spiti, Kinnaur and Una; one each in Shimla, Kullu and Chamba districts while 18 transformers were disrupted, the SEOC said.

Shimla, along with the nearby tourist resorts of Kufri, Fagu, Chansel, Narkanda and the Churdhar ranges, as well as several high mountain passes, received the first snowfall of the season on Sunday evening, breaking a ten-week dry spell and bringing cheer to the farmers, apple growers and hoteliers.

Shimla received 2.5 cm of snow, and areas like The Ridge, Mall Road and Jakhu Peak were covered in a light blanket of snow. Snowfall was also recorded in key tourist destinations such as Manali, Kasauli, and Chail since Sunday evening, while Dharamshala experienced

light snow on Monday.

Kanishka from Haryana's Rohtak, who had come to Dharamshala, said, "The weather is beautiful and we were lucky to witness snow. It is for the first time that I have seen snow-clad mountains and the view is beautiful".

While another Tourist Kajal from Delhi said they had not expected snowfall and the mountains looked like a canvas.

High-altitude areas and mountain passes were blanketed in snow, causing minimum temperatures to drop by four to six degrees. The high-altitude tribal areas experienced piercing cold, with minimum temperatures ranging from 12 to 18 degrees below freezing. Tabo recorded a low of minus 12.3 degrees Celsius.

Since Sunday evening, about 800 people stranded in 490 vehicles in Lahaul due to the snowfall have been rescued, according to the Lahaul and Spiti police. -PTI

Villager kills five puppies

Narsinghpur: Five puppies died after a 50-year-old man allegedly stuffed them into a cardboard box and dumped them in the premises of a village panchayat building in Madhya Pradesh's Narsinghpur district, police said on Monday.

An FIR has been registered against the man, Foola Kahar, a resident of Mehraogaon village, they said.

The incident of animal cruelty came to light when village panchayat sarpanch Maya Vishwakarma filed a police complaint. According to the complainant, Kahar allegedly threw five puppies after stuffing them into a cardboard box in the panchayat's premises on Wednesday, resulting in their death, police officer Shivraj Patel told PTI.

"Upon receiving the complaint, we registered a case against the accused under section 325 (mischief by killing or maiming animal) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) on Friday," he added. -PTI

Devotees to get rudraksh, sandalwood saplings

Mahakumbh Nagar: Devotees and seers visiting the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj will be given a sapling of sandalwood and rudraksha along with the special prasad from the iconic Bade Hanuman temple, an official said.

Organised after a gap of every 12 years, the Maha Kumbh will be held in Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26. On the instructions of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Ministry of Forest and Environment has initiated this special campaign aimed at enriching the spiritual and ecological significance of this grand gathering, according to an official statement.

As part of the campaign, devotees and shankaracharyas coming from across the globe will receive a special prasad from the iconic Bade Hanuman Temple (Lete Hue Hanuman Mandir) in Prayagraj, it said.

Along with the mahaprasad, Baghambari



Gaddi Math and the Forest Department will present sandalwood and rudraksha saplings to the devotees and seers in attendance.

Around 45 crore visitors are expected during the congregation this time, according to official estimates.

This gesture underscores the event's commitment towards promoting environmental sustainability while honouring spiritual leaders, the statement said.

The state government has created a new district

11.70 lakh children are out of school

New Delhi: More than 11.70 lakh children have been identified as out-of-school children across the country in first eight months of the financial year 2024-25, the Lok Sabha was informed on Monday.

Replying to a written question in the House, Union Minister of State for Education Jayant Chaudhary also said the maximum number of such children are in Uttar Pradesh.

"Ministry of Education's Department of School Education and Literacy maintains PRABANDH (Project Appraisal, Budgeting, Achievements and Data Handling System) portal on which state and UT provide and update the data relating to Out of School Children," Chaudhary said.

According to the statistics shared by the minister, a total of 11,70,404 children have been identified as out-of-school. The maximum number of out-of-school children are in Uttar Pradesh (7.84 lakh), followed by Jharkhand (over 65,000) and Assam (over 63,000). -PTI

Villagers flee after Volcano eruption

Manila: A plume of hot ash and gases up to three kilometres high forced residents to seek shelter after a volcano in the Philippines erupted on Monday.

There were no immediate reports of casualties in the latest explosion of Mount Kanlaon, on central Negros island, but authorities shut schools and imposed a nighttime curfew after several villages were hit by ashfalls that clouded the visibility of motorists and sparked health

concerns.

"It sounded like a cannon," Mayor Jose Chubasco Cardenas of Canlaon city, which lies southeast of the volcano, told The Associated Press by telephone. "There have been quiet eruptions before, but this was one very loud."

Disaster-response officials raised the danger level around Kanlaon due to "a greater risk of hazardous volcanic activity" and ordered villagers within a six-



kilometre radius of the crater to be evacuated.

About 100 people had fled to emergency shelters in Canlaon by nightfall

after the mid-afternoon volcanic eruption, Cardenas said. The number of displaced people could reach more than 2,000 due

to stronger prospects of more eruption, he added.

The Philippines' Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said the eruption had caused a pyroclastic density current — a superhot stream of ash, debris and rocks that can incinerate anything in its path.

The alert level around Kanlaon is at the third-highest of a five-step warning system, indicating "magmatic eruption has begun that may progress to further explosive

eruptions."

The 2,435-metre (7,988-foot) volcano, one of the country's 24 most-active volcanoes, last erupted in June sending hundreds of villagers to emergency shelters.

Located in the so-called Pacific "Ring of Fire," a region prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, the Philippines is also lashed by about 20 typhoons and storms a year, making one of the world's most disaster-prone. -AP

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Rahul Gandhi is indulging in what he does best — Stand-up comedy! His malicious claims and rants have crumbled under the weight of comprehensive investigation every time."



Dharmendra Pradhan, Union Minister, Education

Parliament disrupted over Adani, Soros

New Delhi: Lok Sabha proceedings were on Monday adjourned for the day after the opposition's protests over allegations of George Soros-Congress link and Adani issue led to repeated disruptions.

When the House met at 11 am after the weekend, the opposition members were on their feet, trying to raise their issues. A visibly agitated Speaker Om Birla asked the MPs to go back to their seats and allow the House to function.

"Question Hour is significant. Allow the House to function properly. But you don't want to allow the House to run. The country wants the House to run. You are disrupting the proceedings of the House," he told the protesting members and adjourned the House till 12 noon.

The noisy protests again forced an adjournment till 2 pm and then till 3 pm, before the proceedings were wrapped for the day.

As soon as the House reconvened at noon, Congress members trooped into the well of the Lok Sabha raising slogans against the government. They were soon joined by Samajwadi Party members.

Congress members were also heard saying that they had submitted notices to move a privilege motion against BJP member Nishikant Dubey for attempts to link Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi and former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi with US-based billionaire George Soros-backed outfits allegedly involved in anti-India activities.

Opposition members raised slogans like "Modi Sarkar down down", "Modi Sarkar shame shame" and "we want justice", as BJP member Sandhya Ray, who



Minister flays actress over hefty remuneration

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala General Education Minister V Sivankutty on Wednesday criticised a popular Malayalam film actress for demanding Rs five lakh as remuneration for choreographing the welcome dance and song of the upcoming state school youth festival.

Without naming the actress, the minister said she demanded a hefty amount for teaching children a 10-minute-long presentation.

The minister was heard speaking during a programme, the voice clip of which was aired by TV channels.

Terming it as "greed" and "arrogance", he said though such people have risen to fame through youth festivals, they forget their roots.

"She demanded Rs five lakh... what an arrogance! The main issue is that there is no decrease in their greed despite they have reached such position," he said.

Sivankutty further said the department decided to exclude the particular actress and opt for dedicated artists for the same.

"I am not saying the name of the actress... If I do so, it will become a big news on the media," he added.

The minister also recalled the gesture of well-known actor Fahad Fazil when he was invited to the Onam celebrations last year.

He said the actor, who came by flight, attended the event without any remuneration and reached on time.

The state youth festival, which would see the participation of thousands of children, is scheduled to be held in January next year.

was in the chair, took up tabling of parliamentary papers.

Opposition members from the TMC and RJD were seen standing in the aisle or near their seats in support of the protest. TMC members, including Saugatha Roy, Kalyan Banerjee and Mahua Moitra, were sitting on their seats.

SP member Dharmendra Yadav also raised the issue of farmers. He was heard saying "Pure desh ka kisan pareshan hai".

Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi was present in the House during the protests.

After the parliamentary papers were tabled in the House, Ray informed the House that notices given by Congress leaders were under consideration by Birla.

As the protests continued, the Chair adjourned the proceedings till 2 pm but the scenes were no different when the House met

The Rajya Sabha was adjourned for the day on Monday amid uproar over the BJP accusing top Congress leaders of colluding with billionaire investor George Soros to destabilise the country, with Chairman Jagdeep Thakkar cautioning that "functioning of the deep state affects us more perniciously than the Covid disease". Amid uproar by treasury and opposition benches when the Upper House re-assembled at 3 pm after three adjournments earlier in the day, Chairman Thakkar informed that a meeting was held in his chamber between the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition. "The purpose of that meeting was to

Rajya Sabha adjourned for the day

ensure that the House runs smoothly. Both sides had a frank discussion and they signalled two things. One, that integrity, and sovereignty of the nation are sacred for us. We cannot allow any forces within the country or outside to sacrifice our unity, our integrity and our sovereignty," Thakkar said, adding that the leaders have agreed to meet in his chamber again at 10:30 am on Tuesday. The Chairman then appealed to all members to carefully consider the oath of the Constitution they have taken to ensure the integrity of the

nation on a priority basis. "Any challenge to the unity and integrity of the nation from within or outside requires all of us to offer a united challenge... It is a challenge to our very existence. We as a nation are committed to fighting the sinister forces, the forces that are inimical to India... a deep state that is evolving is required to be neutralised by all of us," he said. Thakkar further appealed to members to share the sentiments of the 1.4 billion people at large who are extremely concerned that all divisive forces, all forces that are pernicious

to the concept of Bharat, all forces that have a sinister design to run down our democracy, to bring down our progress, to impede our economic upsurge have to be defeated by us. He said the sentiment shared by the people has to emanate from the House, and at this critical moment when the country is facing such challenges, it must send a united voice so that these forces are defeated. The Chairman cautioned that we cannot afford to overlook such evil designs, asserting that the "functioning of the deep state affects us more perniciously than the Covid disease", before adjourning the Upper House for the day.

'We have lollipop while you occupy our land': Mamata

Kolkata: Taking a dig at a section of Bangladeshi politicians, who said the country has legitimate claims over Bengal, Bihar and Odisha, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday wondered whether Indians "would have lollipop" when external forces would try to occupy Indian lands.

While addressing the West Bengal Assembly, Banerjee, without naming anyone, condemned the circulation of certain fake videos on this side of the border and blamed a certain political party for attempting to stoke tensions in the state.

The chief minister condemned the persecution of minorities in Bangladesh, calling it unacceptable.

Banerjee strongly rejected provocative statements from across the border, including a Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader who said that Bangladesh has claims over Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha, and a viral video featuring Bangladesh Army veterans suggesting the country could occupy West Bengal within days, remarking, "You will

occupy Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha, and we will have lollipops? Don't even think that."

"No one has the guts to take our lands, don't even think about it," she said.

Mocking some Bangladeshi leaders, who have made provocative statements recently, she said, "Stay calm and healthy and have peace of mind."

She also cautioned those seeking to politicise the situation in India, saying that such actions would harm West Bengal and its people.

"Those thinking of politicising this must remember that it will hurt our state too, and your friends, sisters, and brothers in Bangladesh," she said.

"A certain political party is responsible for the circulation of fake videos to stoke fire. I appeal to everyone to stay away from such misinformation. We are not in favour of any one group, we care for everyone here," she said.

Banerjee urged restraint, saying, "We should not make unnecessary statements that may threaten the situation here." -PTI



The first flight being accorded a ceremonial water cannon salute upon its landing at Noida International Airport amid the ongoing trials at Jewar in Gautam Buddha Nagar, Uttar Pradesh on Monday. Pic: PTI

Bomb threat mail to around 40 Delhi schools

New Delhi: Around 40 schools in Delhi received a bomb threat mail Monday morning with the sender demanding USD 30,000, a police official said.

The threat was sent in a single e-mail marked to the city's prominent schools including DPS RK Puram; GD Goenka, Paschim Vihar; The British School, Chanakyapuri; The Mother's International, Aurobindo Marg; Modern School, Mandi House; DPS Vasant Kunj; Delhi Police Public School, Safdarjung; DPS East of Kailash and Salwan Public Schools.

Most schools that received the threat suspended their classes and sent students back home.

A Delhi Fire Services (DFS) official said they re-



ceived the first alerts about the bomb threats from DPS RK Puram (7.06 am) and GD Goenka Paschim Vihar (6.15 am).

He said bomb detection teams, fire officials, local police and dog squads responded immediately and conducted searches at the schools.

The bombs are small and hidden very well. It will not cause very much damage to the building, but many people will be injured when the bombs detonate," the email read. While taking his daughter back from the school, Harish, one of the parents, told PTI Videos, "I received a message about an emergency from the school. This is the failure of the government as the schools are getting such threats regularly."

In May, more than 200 schools, hospitals and other important government installations in the city received a similar kind of bomb threat but the case is yet to be solved as the mail was sent using Virtual Private Network (VPN).

"I planted multiple bombs inside the building.

functioned properly for only two days. On Thursday, BJP member Nishikant Dubey sought to draw some linkages between a foreign investor and a section of opposition leaders and claimed an international

Manipur violence: SC asks for details on arson

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday directed the Manipur government to provide details in a sealed cover on the dwelling units and properties burnt either fully or partially, and encroached upon during the ethnic violence in the state.

The top court asked the state government to spell out details of its actions taken against the culprits and the encroachers.

top court had ordered the setting up of a committee of three former women high court judges to oversee relief and rehabilitation of victims and compensation to them besides asking former Maharashtra police chief Dattatray Padsalgikar to monitor the probe in criminal cases.

More than 160 people have been killed and several hundred injured since



A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar fixed the plea for hearing in the week commencing January 20. In August last year, the

ethnic violence first broke out in the state on May 3, 2023 when a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised to protest against the Meitei community's demand for ST status.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"It's Sonia Gandhi's birthday today. We congratulate her on her birthday...FDL-AP is funded by George Soros. Most humbly, we ask her why she accepted the position of the Congress-Soros friendship?"



Sudhanshu Trivedi, Spokesperson, BJP

Rahul takes dig at PM, Adani with mock 'interview'

New Delhi: Leaders of some INDIA bloc parties on Monday protested in Parliament complex over the Adani row, with Rahul Gandhi conducting a mock 'interview' with Congress members wearing masks of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and industrialist Gautam Adani.

Standing outside the Makar Dwar of Parliament, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge along with MPs of other opposi-

tion parties raised slogans of "Modi, Adani ek hain" and "we want justice".

After sloganeering, Rahul Gandhi conducted the mock 'interview' with Congress members wearing masks of Modi and Adani.

Gandhi asked the party member sporting mask of Adani why Parliament was not being allowed to function to which the Congress MP (posing as Adani) said "we'll have to ask Amit bhai...that man is missing".

Asked by Gandhi about the relationship between



the two, the Congress MP said, "We are together".

The Congress leader sporting mask of Adani also said, "He does whatever I say and want... be it

airport or anything else."

On why Modi was silent, the Congress MP posing as Adani said, "this man is in tension these days", evoking laughter around.

Asked what was his next plan and what he proposed to buy now, the Congress MP wearing the Adani mask said, "we have not decided yet. We have a meeting this evening."

The Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party and Aam Aadmi Party were not part of the protest.

However, Samajwadi Party leader Ram Gopal Yadav said nothing much should be read into the absence of some leaders and asserted "all is well" in the opposition bloc.

MPs of the Left, DMK,

Shiv Sena (UBT), RJD and NCP were among those who raised slogans and demanded a discussion and a probe into the Adani Group.

The protest took place in front of the steps of Parliament's Makar Dwar and not on the steps leading to it following an advisory by the Lok Sabha Secretariat not to protest on the steps.

The opposition protests on the Adani issue have been taking place inside Parliament complex ever since the start of the winter session.

-PTI

Europe's economy under threat after political chaos

Brussels: Even before the French and German governments collapsed, Europe's economy had enough difficulties. Tepid growth and lagging competitiveness versus the US and China. An auto industry that's struggling. Where to find billions for defense against Russia? And now Donald Trump threatening tariffs.

Solutions will be harder to find while the two countries that make up almost half of the eurozone economy remain stuck in political paralysis well into 2025.

Where once there was the so-called French-German axis to push Europe ahead, now there's a vacuum. French Prime Minister Michel Barnier resigned Thursday after losing a vote of confidence, and while President Emmanuel Macron will appoint a successor, the new head of government will lack a majority. Elections are not constitutionally permitted until at least June.

Germany's coalition led by Social Democratic Chancellor Olaf Scholz with the Greens and pro-business Free Democrats fractured in November, triggering an early election on Feb. 23. Talks to form a new government could last into April.

At least Germany's likely new chancellor, conservative opposition leader Friedrich Merz, appears open to loosening constitutional restrictions on borrowing to enable pro-growth spending and investment, said Mujtaba Rahman, managing director Europe at Eurasia Group.

France, however, could be facing "complete paralysis on the economic question," Rahman said. "It's highly unlikely they're going to get a political equilibrium that has a mandate to implement a credible fiscal course correction."

"And that's obviously a problem for Europe because it means the great potential of the European economy is not what it otherwise should be, because you don't have



France and Germany firing on all cylinders," he said.

Then there's Europe's lagging business environment, dissected by former European Central Bank head Mario Draghi in a report that contains recommendations such as common borrowing to support public investment; EU-wide industrial policy; and integrating financial markets to help startups raise capital. Yet "nothing can move in Europe without Franco-German alignment," Rahman said.

Meanwhile, Europe's auto industry has sought a review of tough EU emissions standards in 2025 instead of 2026, saying slackening demand for electric cars means they won't be able to avoid heavy fines and that the money would be better used to develop new electric vehicles.

Anne-Laure Delatte, a French economist and head of research at the National Center for Scientific Research, said financial markets remain cautious but are not overly alarmed by France's political instability. But economic weakness in France and Germany could have broader implications for the European Union.

"This could either weaken Europe's position globally or shift power and influence to other European countries like the Netherlands or Spain, which are performing well at the moment."

France is expected to see growth of 1.1% this year and 0.8% next

year, while Germany's economy is expected to shrink 0.1% this year, the second consecutive year of contraction, and rebound modestly with 0.7% next year. Germany faces headwinds from a shortage of skilled labor, excessive bureaucracy and higher energy prices, and efforts to address those issues have been stalled by squabbling in Scholz's coalition.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, head of the EU's executive arm, is equipped with serious powers, especially on trade, a key EU authority delegated to Brussels by member countries. But there's only so much von der Leyen can do without political backing from the two biggest member countries, whose national budgets are bigger than the EU's.

The most urgent matter may be how to respond to US President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office Jan 20. European officials are trying to defuse a potential trade conflict involving new US tariffs or import taxes on European goods that would seriously ding the continent's export-focused economy.

Europe could decide not to retaliate to any US tariffs, thus avoiding a mutually destructive tit-for-tat cycle. The bloc could also commit to buying US liquefied natural gas to mollify Trump, or spend billions more on defense for Ukraine to answer his complaint that European countries don't meet

NATO commitments on defense spending.

Europe is seeing only modest growth as consumers pummeled by inflation remain cautious about spending. The economy is expected to expand 0.8% this year and 1.3% next year for the 20 EU member countries that use the euro currency, according to the European Commission.

While the direct impact on growth is small, the political logjam means Europe is missing an important opportunity to engage Trump, said Holger Schmieding, chief economist at Berenberg Bank.

"It would be ideal if Europe — at the moment when Trump is not yet in office — would prepare a big offer for Trump, such as: We spend significantly more on defense, if on trade and on Ukraine you don't disappoint us. This is unfortunately not happening. The risk is that Trump on trade might be tougher on us than otherwise because Germany and France are missing in action."

Von der Leyen can offer to get countries to purchase more U.S. natural gas and remind Trump that the EU could retaliate, but "the offer that Europe can make to Trump is small, rather than a big offer where there would be German and French money behind it."

The EU commission estimates that as much as 500 billion euros (\$528 billion) will be needed over the next decade to help meet the bloc's security needs. Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius has indicated common defense bonds could raise that enormous sum. But moving ahead without Germany, the bloc's biggest member, is hard to imagine.

The big issues such as defense and competitiveness "require the fiscal and parliamentary resources of the biggest member states and the question is whether Germany and France are in a position to enable that at the European level."



Decorative items being displayed for sale at a market ahead of Christmas in Navi Mumbai on Monday.

Pic: PTI

Missile frigate inducted into Indian Navy

New Delhi: Indian Navy's Russian-manufactured guided missile frigate INS Tushil was commissioned into the force at Russia's coastal city of Kaliningrad on Monday.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi and several other senior Indian officials were present at the commissioning ceremony.

INS Tushil is expected to significantly bolster the Indian Navy's operational capability in the Indian Ocean, a region that has witnessed increasing forays by China's PLA Navy in the last few years.

The warship has been constructed in Russia as part of an over USD 2.5-billion deal that New Delhi had inked with Moscow in 2016 for four stealth frigates for the Indian Navy.

Under the deal, two ships were to be built in Russia, while the other two were to be manufactured in India. In his remarks at the cer-

emony, Singh described the commissioning of the warship as a proud testament to India's growing maritime strength and significant milestone in long-standing ties with Russia.

"The ship is a big proof of the collaborative process of Russian and Indian industries. It exemplifies India's journey towards technological excellence through jointmanship," he said.

Singh said India and Russia will enter a "new era" of cooperation by taking advantage of each other's expertise in areas such as artificial intelligence, cyber security, space exploration and counter-terrorism.

The ship's construction was closely monitored by an Indian team of specialists from the 'Warship Overseeing Team' stationed at Kaliningrad.

The 3,900-tonne ship with a length of 125 metres packs a lethal punch and is an impressive blend of Russian and Indian cutting

edge technologies and best practices in warship construction.

The ship's new design provides it with enhanced stealth features and better stability characteristics, officials said.

With the collaboration of Indian naval specialists and Severnovo Design Bureau, the indigenous content of the ship has been enhanced to an impressive 26 per cent, the officials said.

The major Indian defence firms involved in the project were BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited, Bharat Electronics Limited, Keltron, Nova Integrated Systems from Tata, Elcome Marine, Johnson Controls India and others.

INS Tushil is an upgraded Krivak III class frigate of Project 1135.6. The warship is the result of the continuous toil of hundreds of shipyard workers along with multiple Russian and Indian Original Equipment Makers (OEMs), said one of the officials cited above.

AI to purchase 100 more Airbus

Mumbai: Private carrier Air India on Monday announced placing an order to purchase 100 more Airbus aircraft, comprising 10 wide-body A350 and 90 narrow-body A320 family aircraft including A321neo. These 100 new aircraft are in addition to the orders of 470 aircraft that Air India had placed with Airbus and Boeing last year, Air India said in a statement.

The airline also announced it has tied up with Airbus for component and maintenance support for its A350 fleet.

The latest order takes the total number of aircraft that Air India ordered with Airbus from 250 to 350. The order placed in 2023 for 250 planes comprised 40 A350 and 210 A320 family aircraft.

Air India in February 2023 announced that it would place an order for 470 aircraft, with an additional 370 options. This was confirmed in June 2023, with the order comprising 40 Airbus A350s, 20 Boeing 787s and 10 Boeing 777-9s wide-body aircraft, as well as 210 Airbus A320/321 Neos and 190 Boeing 737 MAX single-aisle aircraft.

However, in December last

year, the airline rejigged this order with 140 neo planes and 70 A320neo, as against the earlier order of 140 A320neo and 70 A321 neo aircraft.

Besides, it also reshuffled its A350 order with 20 A350-900s and 20 A350-1000s as against six A350-900 and 34 A350-1000s ordered in February 2023.

"With India's passenger growth outpacing the rest of the world, its significantly improving infrastructure and an aspirational young population increasingly going global, we see a clear case for Air India to expand its future fleet beyond the firm orders of the 470 aircraft placed last year," said Natarajan Chandrasekaran, Chairman, Tata Sons and Air India.

These additional 100 Airbus aircraft will help position Air India on the path to "greater growth" and contribute to our mission of building Air India into a world-class airline that connects India to every corner of the world, he said.

With the order for 100 additional aircraft, Air India currently has a total of 344 new aircraft incoming from Airbus, having received six A350s so far, it said.



Shota Imanaga, a Japanese pitcher of the Chicago Cubs (left) and Rahm Emanuel, U.S. Ambassador to Japan, shake hands with a promotional mockup of a Global Entry card during a news conference at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo on Monday.

Pic: AP/PTI

'Das shoes too big to fill'

Mumbai: Shaktikanta Das was a giant blessed with a set of strengths required to lead an important institution like the Reserve Bank, a former colleague said on Monday.

Speaking after the appointment of Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra as the 26th Governor of the RBI, the colleague reminisced about his time working under Das.

"Das was a giant, he leaves too big shoes to fill," the high-ranking official

said, preferring not to be named.

The official said Das offered space to juniors and pushed them to think out of the box to arrive at innovative solutions by offering the right kind of flexibility.

The biggest virtue in Das was his ability to speak to all stakeholders on an issue, including those internally within the RBI and also outside in the industry before arriving at a solution to a problem, the former colleague said.

"He knew how to manage conflicting expectations and it was because of this ability that the fiscal and the monetary policies worked in tandem," the former colleague said.

When asked about the reason for Das not getting an extension at the RBI, the official said that he was at the helm for six years, and has already been the second longest-serving RBI Governor, the official said. -PTI

Work yet to start at 25 GW hydro projects

New Delhi: Around 26 hydroelectric and 5 pumped storage projects totalling 25,234 MW capacity are yet to be taken up for construction in the country, Parliament was informed on Monday.

According to a written reply to Rajya Sabha on Monday, setting up power generation plants in the country is a delicensed activity but if the capital expenditure exceeds Rs 1,000 crore, then the project requires the concurrence from Central Electricity Authority (CEA) under Electricity Act 2003.

"Accordingly, 26 HEPs with aggregate installed capacity of 19,214 MW and 5 PSPs with aggregate installed capacity of 6020 MW in the country have been concurred by CEA

which are yet to be taken up for construction," Minister of State for Power and New & Renewable Energy Shripad Naik said in the written reply. In a separate reply, the minister said till date, works amounting to Rs 4,281 crore have been sanctioned for electrification of 9,49,548 households including Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) under PM-JANMAN.

Pirated videos on educational content rise

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Over 5,000 pirated videos on various educational and skill development content, 1,000 to over 10,000 members are available on social media platforms resulting in a loss of about Rs 2,000 crore in India, said a study by VdoCipher is a global leader in secure video streaming solutions.

Over the past six months, the company has blocked 120,000 piracy sessions and over 13,000 unique IPs, identified over 1,100 hackers, and detected and blocked over 700 websites/apps with advanced piracy attempts and also initiated legal action against more than 20 pirates, the statement said.

The study highlighted the dominance of educational content in video consumption, making up for 25 percent of the total usage, followed by Technology (18 percent) and Media & Entertainment (15 percent).

Smaller segments include Financial Services (14 percent), Healthcare (9 percent), and Professional Services (5 percent). Within academic content, competitive exam



preparation leads at 40 percent, followed by programming and data Science at 20 percent. K-12 and Higher Education each make up 10 percent, highlighting the diversity in educational demands, according to the study.

The study also revealed challenges in sustaining enthusiasm for online education. Only 26.4 percent people believed online learning is better than offline education, a significant drop from 47.8 percent in 2022. Satisfaction levels have similarly declined, with only 38.3 percent benefiting more from online learning in 2024, down from 55.2 percent two years earlier. Group study participation online also fell significantly, with 29.5 percent engaging in online study sessions in 2024, compared to 55.2 percent in 2022.

Indians lead Global South in adapting to AI

Dubai: With a majority of Indian professional actively seeking opportunities to upskill, the country has emerged as the global leader in technological adaptation, according to a report.

More than 70 per cent of Indian professionals are actively seeking opportunities to upskill, said the report released by the Riyadh (Saudi Arabia)-based Global Labor Market Conference (GLMC).

The report highlights the dynamic nature of India's job market, where artificial intelligence, machine learning,

and automation are becoming integral.

"While global trust in governments to support upskilling remains low at 20 per cent, Indian respondents (31 per cent) and those in Saudi Arabia (35 per cent) demonstrated significantly higher confidence in their governments.

"In contrast, countries like the USA (15 per cent) and UK (12 per cent) reported markedly lower trust levels. Indian respondents also expressed 49 per cent trust in businesses, further emphasizing the private



sector's role in workforce development," the report claims.

The report by GLMC, a forum for workforce development and labour market insights, also highlighted how rapidly evolving technologies are reshaping global employment.

The report underscores India's pivotal role in the Global South's response to artificial intelligence and automation, showcasing the country's workers as frontrunners in skill development and technological adaptation.

The report also said the urgency to reskill due to technological advancements is a shared concern among Indian

workers, with 55 per cent fearing that their skills could become partially or fully obsolete within the next five years.

"This places India in line with the global trend, where similar concerns are expressed by 61 per cent in Brazil and 60 per cent in China, compared to lower levels in developed markets such as the UK (44 per cent) and Australia (43 per cent)," it said.

GLMC will host the second edition of its annual meeting in Riyadh on January 29-30, 2025. -PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The track segment is growing faster and (also) has a larger premium play with the customers yet to figure out the right applications of tracks in construction and mining, which means there is a lot of scope for higher penetration in the track segment.



Arnab Banerjee, Managing Director and CEO, CEAT

Syria at crossroads: What lies ahead?

Who could have predicted that after nearly 14 years of civil war and five years of stalemate, the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria would collapse in just a week? With Assad's departure, the pressing question now is what lies ahead for Syria's immediate future. Syria now has a new force in power: HTS and its leadership, spearheaded by the militant leader Abu Mohammad al-Jolani. They will face immediate challenges and four key priorities:

Consolidating power

The new leadership will now try to ensure there are no armed groups capable of contesting their rule, particularly remnants of the old Assad regime and smaller factions that were not part of the opposition forces.

“The sudden collapse of the Syrian government under Bashar Assad is a ‘fundamental act of justice’ after decades of repression, but it was ‘a moment of risk and uncertainty’ for the Middle East.”

Joe Biden, President, US

FOUR FACTORS TO WATCH FOR TO AVOID ANOTHER WAR



Critically, they will also need to discuss how power will be shared among the coalition of opposition groups. Al-Jolani is likely to become the founding president of the new Syria, but how the rest of the power will be distributed remains uncertain.

It seems the opposition was not prepared to take over the country so quickly, and they may not have a power-sharing agreement.

This will need to be negotiated and worked out quickly.

The new government will likely recognise the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and the territories it controls as an autonomous region within Syria. An independent Kurdish state, however, will be strongly opposed by Turkey, the main external backer of the opposition.

Yet, history seems to be moving in favour of the Kurds. There is now the eventual possibility of an independent Kurdish state, potentially combining northern Iraq and north-eastern Syria into a single entity.

International recognition

Syria is a very complex and diverse place. As such, the new government can



only be sustained if it gains international recognition.

The key players in this process are Turkey, the European Union, the United States and Israel (through the US). It is likely all of these entities will recognise the new government on the condition it forms a moderate administration, refrains from fighting the Kurdish YPG, and does not support Hezbollah or Hamas.

Given their unexpected success in toppling Assad so quickly, the opposition is likely to accept these conditions in exchange for aid and recognition.

Forming a new government

The question on everyone's mind is what kind of political order the opposition forces will now establish. HTS and many of the groups in its coalition are

Sunni Muslims, with HTS having origins linked to al-Qaeda. However, HTS broke away from the terror organisation in 2016 and shifted its focus exclusively to Syria as an opposition movement.

Nevertheless, we should not expect a democratic secular rule. The new government is also unlikely to resemble the ultra-conservative theocratic rule of the Taliban.

In his recent interview with CNN, al-Jolani made two key points. He indicated he and other leaders in the group have evolved in their outlook and Islamic understanding with age, suggesting the extreme views from their youth have moderated over time. He also emphasised the opposition would be tolerant of the freedoms and rights of religious and ethnic minority groups.

Syrian premier says govt still functioning

Syria's prime minister said Monday that most Cabinet ministers are still working from offices in Damascus after rebels entered the capital over the weekend and overthrew President Bashar Assad. Streams of refugees crossed in from neighbouring countries, hoping for a more peaceful future.

But there were already signs of the difficulties ahead for the rebel alliance now in control of much of the country, which is led by a former senior al-Qaida militant who severed ties with the extremist group years ago and has promised representative government and religious tolerance.

Israel said it is carrying out airstrikes on suspected chemical weapons sites and long-range rockets to keep them from falling into the hands of extremists. Israel has also seized a buffer zone inside Syria after Syrian troops withdrew.

In a separate development, the Kremlin said Russia has granted political asylum to Assad, a decision taken by President Vladimir Putin. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment on Assad's specific whereabouts and said Putin was not planning to meet with him.

In northern Syria, Turkey said allied opposition forces seized the town of Manbij from Kurdish-led forces backed by the United States, a reminder that even after Assad's departure to Russia the country remains split among armed groups that have fought in the past. Damascus was quiet on Monday, with life slowly returning to normal while most shops and public institutions were closed. In public squares, some people were still celebrating.

Civilian traffic resumed but there was no public transport, leaving some to hitchhike. Long lines formed in front of bakeries and other food stores.

There was little sign of any security presence, and Associated Press reporters saw a few SUVs on the side of a main boulevard that appeared to have been broken into, with their windows shattered and their doors open. In some areas, small groups of armed men were stationed in the streets.

The specifics of how this will manifest remain unclear. The expectation is HTS will form a conservative government in which Islam plays a dominant role in shaping social policies and lawmaking.

On the economic and foreign policy fronts, the country's new leaders are likely to be pragmatic, open to alliances with the regional and global powers that have supported them.

Rebuilding the country and maintaining unity

This is needed to prevent another civil war from erupting — this time among the winners.

A recent statement from HTS's Political Affairs Department said the new Syria will focus on construction, progress and reconciliation.

The new government aims to create positive conditions for displaced Syrians to return to their country, establish constructive relations with neighbouring countries and prioritise rebuilding the economy.

Syria and the broader Middle East have entered a new phase in their modern history. Time will tell how things will unfold, but one thing is certain: it will never be the same.

-The Conversation/AP

Concern for safety of minorities in B'desh

Dhaka: India on Monday expressed concerns over the safety of minorities in Bangladesh and its desire for a "positive, constructive and mutually beneficial" relationship with the neighbour as Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri held high-level talks with his counterpart in Dhaka.

In the first high-level visit by an Indian official since August 5 when prime minister Sheikh Hasina was ousted and fled to India, Misri said he had a "frank, candid and constructive exchange of views" with Foreign Secretary Mohammad Jashim Uddin here.

"I conveyed our concerns, including those related to the safety and welfare of minorities. We also discussed some regrettable incidents of attacks on cultural, religious and diplomatic properties," Misri told reporters.

"I emphasized that India desires a positive, constructive and mutually beneficial relationship with Bangladesh," he said.

Misri said their talks allowed both sides to take stock of bilateral relations.

"We have always seen in the past, and we continue to see in the future, this

relationship as people-centric, and people-oriented relationship, one that has the benefit of all the people, as its central motivational force," he said.

The close ties between India and Bangladesh came under severe strain after Hasina was forced to leave the country in the face of a massive anti-government protest in August. Nobel Peace laureate Mohammad Yunus came to power days after Hasina fled to India.

The relations deteriorated further in recent weeks over attacks on Hindus and the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das.

Analysts speculated that recent incidents, including the arrest of the Hindu monk in Bangladesh, the alleged harassment of the minority community and attacks on Hindu temples in Bangladesh, and the attack on the Bangladesh mission in Agartala are likely to figure in the FS-level talks.

Interim government head Yunus earlier said India might not have liked the "revolution" ousting a "fascist regime. Members of his interim Cabinet said Indian media was largely exaggerating the harassment of minorities.



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer meets Director General Yousef Alobaidli as he visits the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi. Pic:AP/PTI

Indonesia floods: 10 dead, two missing

Sukabumi (Indonesia), Dec 9 (AP) Indonesian rescuers recovered 10 bodies that were swept away in flash floods or buried under tons of mud and rocks that hit hilly villages on the country's main island of Java, officials said Monday. Two people are still missing.

Torrential rains since last week have caused rivers to burst their banks, tearing through more than 170 villages in Sukabumi district of West Java province, as mud, rocks and

trees tumbled down mountainside hamlets, said Lt Col Yudi Hariyanto, who heads a rescue command post in Sukabumi.

Landslides, flash floods and strong winds devastated 172 villages and forced more than 3,000 people to flee to temporary government shelters, Hariyanto said. Authorities have warned nearly 1,000 people to evacuate as more than 400 houses are threatened by extreme weather.

The disasters also de-

stroyed 31 bridges, 81 roads and 539 hectares of rice fields, while 1,170 houses were flooded up to the roof. Extreme weather has also damaged more than 3,300 other houses and buildings.

Rescue workers on Monday pulled out 10 bodies in the worst-hit villages of Tegalebuleud, Simpnanan and Ciemas, including three children, and rescuers are searching for two villagers who are reportedly still missing.

Indian-American family alleges racist abuse

By Yoshita Singh

New York: An Indian-American family subjected to racial harassment last month plans to press charges against the woman who hurled abuses at them, emphasising the need for accountability and speaking out against hate.

The incident took place in November when renowned photographer Pervez Taufiq, 50, was travelling with his wife and three kids from Mexico to Los Angeles in a bus. A fellow female passenger went on a racist diatribe against the family while it was onboard the United Airlines shuttle bus.

Taufiq posted a video online of his family's ordeal that shows the woman racially abusing them, using expletives and making derogatory gestures at them. "Your family is from India, you have no respect. You have no rules," the woman says.

At one point when Taufiq says he is an American, the woman hurls back, using an expletive, "You are not American... You are from... India."

"Our thought process is we need to take her and



hold her accountable in the court of law. United, unfortunately, was not able to help us with anything," Taufiq told PTI in an interview on Sunday.

He said there has been no sense of accountability or introspection forthcoming from the woman.

As the video of the incident went viral, Taufiq said he is grateful for the outpouring of support that he and his family have received on and off social media.

"We have had calls and text messages from people in China, France, UK, Australia, all over the world who have seen this video... and have reached out to say, 'we just want you to know we're with you.' That is the most touching thing that could ever

happen," he said. Taufiq, whose work constantly takes him to destinations across the world, recalled that on a United flight over the weekend from New York to his home in Boston, one of the airline's staff members recognised him, stopped him and said 'Is it okay if I give you a hug?' "And gave me the tightest hug ever, and said, 'we just want you to know that we really stand by you, and we are so sorry that happened.' To me that speaks to the humanity" in people.

"There are, of course, going to be a minority of people who are hateful, who want to spread division. But I think they're the minority, really. And there are more of us than of them," he said.

-PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"It must be pointed out that there is no such thing as a defence ministry in Taiwan. Taiwan is part of China, and the Taiwan issue is China's internal affairs. China will firmly safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity."



Mao Ning, Spokesperson, Foreign Ministry, China

Empress hails decision to award survivors

Tokyo: Japanese Empress Masako said the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Nihon Hidankyo, an organisation of survivors of the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was a key event of this year that impressed and reminded her of the importance of global peace efforts.

Masako, the wife of Emperor Naruhito, said she thought of the pain and suffering of the survivors and struggles of those who have longed for the nuclear disarmament

effort. She "felt anew the importance for the people of the world to strive for mutual understanding and work together in order to build a peaceful world," Masako said in a statement released by the Imperial Household Agency for her 61st birthday Monday.

Her comment comes one day before a group of 30 atomic bombing survivors will attend Tuesday's Nobel prize award ceremony in Oslo.

Hidankyo was awarded for its decadeslong

activism against nuclear weapons. The 30 survivors, known as hibakusha, see the prize and the international attention as a last chance to get their message to younger generations.

Terumi Tanaka, a 91-year-old survivor of the Nagasaki bombing who will speak at the award ceremony, told reporters after arriving in Oslo that

he planned to talk about the survivors' campaign and their demand that nuclear weapons must be abolished.

He has said he feels hibakushas' sufferings are not fully understood and that he hoped to raise awareness about the need to join hands to achieve a world without nuclear weapons.

The first US atomic bombing

killed 140,000 people in the city of Hiroshima. A second on Nagasaki on Aug 9, 1945, killed another 70,000. Japan surrendered on Aug 15, ending World War II and its nearly half-century aggression in Asia.

The war was fought in the name of Emperor Hirohito, grandfather of Naruhito.

Masako, a Harvard-educated former diplomat, has been struggling with adjustment disorder since 2003, soon after giving birth to Princess Aiko, the only child between her and

Naruhito, following intense pressure to bear a male heir for the monarchy. She has made a number of public appearances this year, but palace doctors say she needs time to recover after major events or a busy schedule.

The 1947 Imperial House Law, which largely preserves conservative prewar family values, allows only males to take up the throne and forces the female royals who marry outside the family to give up their royal status and disconnect.



EDITORIAL

Leadership Tussles

The fragile unity of the INDIA bloc, a ragbag coalition of opposition parties formed to counter the BJP's dominance, is beginning to fray under the weight of competing ambitions. The latest rupture comes from Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal's formidable Chief Minister, whose pointed remarks have rekindled speculation about her desire to lead the alliance.

Banerjee's assertion that the INDIA bloc requires more robust leadership has sparked both support and dissent among allies. Trinamool Congress loyalists have amplified calls for her leadership. TMC leaders have lauded her as the "most suitable" candidate, while Sharad Pawar described her as a capable leader.

This manoeuvring occurs at a precarious moment for the INDIA bloc. Congress, widely seen as its anchor, is reeling from poor performances in recent state elections in Haryana and, more notably, Maharashtra. The Congress' abysmal performance has placed its leadership in a vulnerable position, opening the door for Banerjee to challenge its dominance within the alliance. Rahul Gandhi's failure to lead his party in these states has encouraged Banerjee to firmly stake claim to the INDIA bloc's leadership.

Samajwadi Party leaders, too, have openly questioned Congress's electoral competence. Yet, others within the INDIA bloc remain wary of Banerjee's claim. Besides the Congress, CPI(M) and RJD leaders have struck a cautious tone, emphasizing the need for consensus within the bloc. Behind Banerjee's rhetoric lies a strategic calculus. Her party's dominance in West Bengal and her repeated victories against the BJP have cemented her position as a stalwart of opposition politics. But her bold claims may also serve another purpose: deflecting attention from internal challenges within her own party, including a brewing succession struggle involving her nephew, Abhishek Banerjee.

Either way, leadership rivalries risk undermining the INDIA coalition's stated objective which is to unseat the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Opposition bloc's internal dynamics have always revealed an uneasy paradox with disparate political egos jockeying for influence within the coalition. A prime example being the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Congress, both key members of the bloc, who are now publicly clashing over Delhi's political future ahead of the 2025 Assembly polls in the national capital.

While Banerjee's overtures to lead from Kolkata reflect both her regional clout and her ambitions, her pitch underscores a deeper malaise within the INDIA bloc: a lack of clarity over its purpose beyond opposing the BJP. If the alliance cannot resolve its leadership question amicably, it risks becoming a footnote in the near future rather than an opposition force to reckon with.

The INDIA bloc's leaders must decide whether their alliance is a pragmatic electoral arrangement or a serious political front capable of governing. Leadership contests are inevitable, but without cohesion, they will remain India's 'opposition' only in name, not in effect.

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

India and Russia: Resilient Allies in a Changing Global Landscape



By
Dr. Manisha Shrimali

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union forged strong ties with India, epitomized by the 1971 Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation, which laid the foundation for decades of collaboration in defence, technology and economics. The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not mark the end of this relationship but rather, it initiated a new phase, with both nations reaffirming their commitment to strategic cooperation.

In early 2025, Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to visit India at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with the Kremlin confirming the visit. The visit comes at a critical time for India as it navigates the complexities of its relationships with both the West and Russia, balancing its growing defence ties with the U.S. and its historical ties with Moscow. This diplomatic engagement, from ceremonial, is part of the reciprocal annual exchanges that have become the cornerstone of India-

As Russia faces increasing sanctions and diplomatic isolation, its partnership with India emerges as an essential element of its strategy to diversify its alliances, particularly in the Global South.

Russia relations. The ties between the two countries have evolved significantly over the years, with Modi and Putin meeting regularly at major international events and bilateral summits, reinforcing their shared vision of cooperation in defence, energy and trade.

Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov has emphasized the frequent communications between the two leaders, noting their direct meetings and phone calls every few months. In July, Modi travelled to Moscow for the 22nd India-Russia Summit, where both leaders addressed global security, climate change, and economic realignments. Later, in October, Modi attended the BRICS summit in Kazan, further solidifying India's role in shaping a diverse geopolitical landscape.

India's growing role in global forums like BRICS, the SCO, and the G20 aligns with Russia's desire for greater influence in global governance, making their bilateral relationship all the more crucial in reshaping the future of international diplomacy.

At this juncture, India-Russia relations remain among the most enduring bilateral partnerships in modern geopolitics. Rooted in mutual respect and strategic collaboration, the partnership continues to address both traditional and emerging challenges in global affairs. Putin's 2025 visit is particularly significant, as the world grapples with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, and the resurgence of power struggles. For Russia, this visit signals a determination to deepen ties with India, a key partner in the Global South, especially as Moscow faces growing isolation from the West due to its ongoing war in Ukraine.

For India, the visit presents an opportunity to assert its non-aligned foreign policy and advance its interests as a leader within global forums such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the G20. India has long managed a delicate balancing act in its foreign relations, strengthening its



strategic partnership with the United States while maintaining robust ties with Russia, particularly in defence and energy security. However, the evolving proximity between Russia and China, amid Western sanctions, poses a challenge for India, given its ongoing border tensions with China. Furthermore, India's expanding defence relationship with the U.S., exemplified by initiatives like the QUAD, remains a growing concern for Moscow. Despite the strength of their political and defence ties, bilateral trade and investment between India and Russia have been underwhelming, which limits the economic potential of their partnership.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has created diplomatic challenges for India, which has sought to balance its historical ties with Moscow while navigating its evolving relations with the West. India remains one of the largest importers of Russian defence equipment, including advanced systems like the S-400 missile defence system and nuclear-powered submarines. Joint military exercises, such as the INDRA series, further underscore the strong defence collaboration between the two nations.

Energy cooperation is another cornerstone of the India-Russia partnership. Russia has emerged as India's top crude oil supplier in the wake of sanctions on Moscow, which have reshaped global energy markets. India is also reliant on Russian nuclear fuel, with pro-

jects like the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant symbolizing their ongoing collaboration.

Despite these strong sectors, trade relations remain relatively low, and both nations have been exploring mechanisms to enhance economic exchange, including a potential rupee-rouble exchange system designed to bypass the dominance of the U.S. dollar.

Looking forward, there are significant opportunities for collaboration in technology and space exploration, particularly through joint initiatives like India's Gaganyaan mission with Russian assistance. Additionally, projects like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) could boost regional connectivity and trade, opening new avenues for cooperation.

At the heart of India and Russia's foreign policy lies a shared history of mutual respect and a strategic vision for navigating global dynamics. Despite the challenges posed by changing geopolitical landscapes, the resilience of this relationship remains strong, anchored in their ability to adapt to emerging opportunities and global shifts. As both nations continue to navigate an increasingly complex global order, their bilateral relations will undoubtedly remain a critical pillar in their respective foreign policies.

(The author is an educationalist. Views personal.)

GLOBAL WATCH

Back to the Future

Ghana's political pendulum has swung back decisively to John Dramani Mahama. In a tightly contested election, the former president staged a remarkable comeback, defeating Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP). Mahama's triumph comes amid widespread economic discontent, as voters across West Africa increasingly oust incumbents in search of change.

Mahama, who governed Ghana from 2012 to 2016, inherits a nation grappling with its worst economic crisis in a generation. High inflation, a depreciating cedi and a \$3 billion IMF bailout following a debt default have left Ghanaians disillusioned with the NPP's stewardship. Mahama framed Bawumia's candidacy as an extension of the policies that led to this malaise.

The backdrop to this victory is as much a testament to Ghana's enduring democratic resilience as it is to its economic frustrations. The NPP's willingness to concede, even before the official announcement of results, reflects a maturity rare in a region plagued by coups and political unrest. Bawumia's concession speech, in which he urged for calm and emphasized the importance of Ghana's democratic image to global investors, reinforced the country's reputation as a beacon of stability in West Africa.

Ghana's modern political history has often been one of pendulum swings. After gaining independence in 1957 under the iconic leadership

As former Ghanaian president John Dramani Mahama makes a political comeback, voters in the economically battered West African nation demand a fresh start.



of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana struggled through decades of coups and military regimes. Stability returned in 1992 with the adoption of a multiparty system, ushering in an era of political competition largely dominated by two parties: the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the NPP.

Mahama's initial tenure in office followed the death of President John Atta Mills in 2012. Elected in his own right later that year, his administration faced accusations of corruption and inefficiency, leading to his defeat by Nana Akufo-Addo in 2016. However, Mahama's return marks a reversal of fortunes, prompted by the NPP's failure to address the economic grievances of Ghanaians.

He now faces the daunting task of delivering on his promises to reset Ghana's economy and restore public confidence. His administration will need to balance fiscal discipline required under the IMF bailout with tangible measures to alleviate the cost-of-living crisis. The political goodwill Mahama enjoys today will evaporate quickly if he fails to deliver results.

West Africa, a region battered by insurgencies, economic instability and creeping authoritarianism, has witnessed a string of electoral upsets. Voters from Nigeria to Sierra

Leone have shown a willingness to reject incumbents who fail to meet their expectations. Ghana's peaceful transition of power serves as a reminder of the potential for democracy to endure in even the most challenging circumstances.

Ghana's election also serves as a bellwether for Africa's democratic health at a time when military juntas are on the rise in the Sahel and scepticism of electoral processes grows. Mahama's ability to lead a divided parliament will test not just his political acumen but also Ghana's democratic institutions. Delivering on his promises to the youth will require bold reforms and transparent governance.

Ghana's reliance on its vast cocoa and gold reserves is under threat from fluctuating global markets, and public impatience for results will not wait for IMF technocrats. A seasoned politician, Mahama will be aware of the stakes. Ghana's reputation as a regional model of democracy is on the line, as is his political legacy.

Mahama's return offers a moment of hope in Ghana and a test case for whether democracy can deliver in times of crisis. Ghanaians have offered their former president a second chance; the world will be watching to see if he can seize it.

STATES WATCH

A Persistent Threat

In an alarming resurgence of the Maoist spectre in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, extremists strangled a 40-year-old woman, accusing her of being a police informer since 2017 and abandoned her body on a hill near Laded village.

This is the second incident of murder in less than a week and comes close on the heels of the killings of two former village sarpanches in Bijapur, underscoring that despite the government's concerted efforts to eradicate extremism, the Naxalite threat in Chhattisgarh remains resilient as ever.

This year alone, over 60 people have been killed by Naxalites in the state's Bastar division, including nine BJP workers between January 2022 and April 2023.

The Naxalite insurgency, which began in West Bengal's Naxalbari village in 1967, has endured decades of state crackdowns and developmental schemes aimed at undermining its appeal. Initially a rebellion against feudal landlords, the movement grew into an organized guerrilla force, exploiting socioeconomic inequities in central and eastern India. Chhattisgarh emerged as a focal point in the early 2000s, with the movement embedding itself in the dense forests of Bastar, where tribal grievances against displacement and neglect became fertile ground for recruitment.

The state's response has been multifaceted, blending military

operations with development initiatives. Recent counter-insurgency measures in Chhattisgarh have included the establishment of around 190 security camps in Maoist strongholds. These camps, set up across Chhattisgarh's

dense jungles, have disrupted

developmental programs in underserved areas. The encounter last week in Mulugu district, which resulted in the deaths of seven Maoists, was only the second such incident in a decade indicating a near-total pacification of the region.

The state's efforts to integrate former insurgents into mainstream society have set a benchmark for others. Chhattisgarh, however, remains a different beast, with its vast and inaccessible terrain complicating the replication of Telangana's model.

Despite Amit Shah's declaration that the LWE threat will be neutralized by 2026, the resurgence of violence suggests that Maoist strongholds are far from dismantled. In 2024 alone, 207 Maoists have been killed in Chhattisgarh, the highest since 2009, but such numbers obscure the insurgents' ability to regroup.

The persistence of Naxalism in Chhattisgarh underscores the deeper issues at play. Structural inequities, land rights disputes and the displacement of tribal populations due to mining projects remain sufficiently unaddressed.

The Bastar region's rugged terrain and sparse population make it a logistical challenge for the state. It is precisely this inaccessibility that Maoists exploit. Breaking this cycle requires not just military might but also an unwavering commitment to win the trust of the local populace.

While enhanced security measures, such as the deployment of specialized forces and inter-state coordination, are critical, they must be complemented by robust developmental efforts. Extending public goods and services and ensuring tribal autonomy are essential to neutralizing the insurgency's ideological appeal.

India's aspiration to end LWE by 2026 is ambitious but achievable. Telangana's success proves that targeted, sustained efforts can yield results.



CHHATTISGARH



KALEIDOSCOPE

1. Models walk the ramp during the Couture Runway Week in Gurugram.
2. Bollywood actor Malaika Arora poses for pictures during an event hosted by Fashion Entrepreneur Fund in collaboration with Dharmatic Entertainment in Mumbai.
3. The Suryakiran Aerobatic Team of the Indian Air Force performs during Praja Palana celebrations marking Telangana Congress government's one year in power in Hyderabad.
4. Visitors during the 30th Kolkata International Film Festival at Nandan in Kolkata.
5. Odissi dancer Madhulita Mohapatra and her troupe perform at Changampuzha Maholsavam 2024 in Kochi.

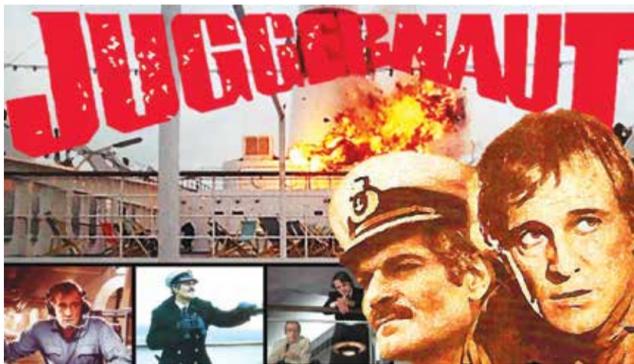
All Pictures PTI, AP

CINEMA STORIES

A Ticking Time Bomb in a Broken Britain: Juggernaut at 50



By Shoumojit Banerjee



Yes, this is the film where the climactic choice boils down to cutting the red wire or the blue one. Fifty years ago, director Richard Lester's *Juggernaut* (1974) sailed into cinemas, only to be unjustly categorized alongside Hollywood's glossier, cacophonous disaster films. Unlike its more bombastic counterparts, the 'veddy British' *Juggernaut* eschews grandiosity for something altogether more profound - a miniature study of a crumbling, multicultural Britain under siege from within that has an eerie resonance today.

The plot is deceptively simple: The aptly-named luxury liner *Britannic*, with 1,200 passengers on board, is threatened by a number of booby-trapped bombs planted by an embittered former British military bomb-disposal expert, who, calling himself 'Juggernaut' demands a half-million pounds in ransom within a few hours else he will blow the ship to kingdom come.

Within this taut conceit, Lester crafts a microcosm of 1970s Britain, teetering on the brink of socio-political collapse and grappling with an identity frayed by multicultural tensions.

As the crew and passengers become floating hostages, forced to endure a night they will always remember, an elite bomb disposal unit races against time to dismantle the bombs. Meanwhile, the authorities' frantic search for the saboteur veers into predictable territory, with suspects ranging from Arab nationals to Irish terrorists.

The drama unfolds not in a glossy Hollywood fantasia of heroism but in a grim, overcast milieu. At the center of this pressure-cooker narrative is Richard Harris, delivering what is arguably the finest performance of his

career. As Anthony Fallon, the bomb disposal expert tasked with saving 1,200 lives aboard the *Britannic*, Harris inhabits the role with a brooding intensity, muttering philosophical musings while engaging in a job of almost incomprehensible peril.

"What are 1,200 lives in the grand scheme of things?" he barks at one point, the question less an abstraction than a grim meditation on the randomness of survival and the frailty of human systems. Harris's weariness mirrors that of a nation, burdened by crises both internal and external, and his performance is the film's brooding heart.

Lester's direction is surgical. The tension never relents; every frame tightens the screws and ensures the film remains taut and claustrophobic while every scene infused with a pervasive dread. This is a film of cold greys and sterile whites with Omar Sharif's subdued captain steering the ship not only through literal peril but also the existential void of a leader powerless to protect his domain.

Deliberately shorn of his *Doctor Zhivago* and *Funny Girl* charm, Sharif is introspective, even seedy, as a man stripped of his usual magnetism and charm - a hollow echo of Britain's colonial past.

The rest of the cast is a who's who of British acting greats. Anthony Hopkins is the harried detective racing to prevent disaster; Lester regular Roy Kinnear provides comic relief, though even his moments feel tinged with melancholy. Ian Holm adds a jittery en-

ergy, while David Hemmings and Lester stalwart Roy Kinnear inject fleeting moments of levity.

But *Juggernaut* remains Harris's show. His portrayal of Fallon elevates the film from a suspenseful thriller to a poignant meditation on human frailty and resilience, his stoicism underlining the futility of heroics in an age of entropy.

The ending, when it arrives, is a masterstroke. The bomb is defused, Fallon does a quiet jig proclaiming himself the "Champion." There is a hollowness to this victory, as if the film itself doubts the utility of such triumphs. The ship sails on, but to what?

If *The Godfather II* and *The Conversation* plumbed the depths of American disillusionment, *Juggernaut* did the same for Britain, with a defused bomb standing in for a nation left to quietly smoulder.

Lester, known for his anarchic touch in films like *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), *Petulia* (1968) and *The Three Musketeers* (1974), proves adept at ratcheting up tension. Harris' Oscar-nominated turn in *This Sporting Life* is usually cited by critics as his greatest. For my money, I rate this even better.

Juggernaut is far more than a high-wire thriller. It is a lament for a crumbling Britain and a vital work of 1970s cinema, standing shoulder to shoulder with the decade's best. If anything, its quiet power, much like Fallon's, deserves to be championed!

-PTI

EXPLAINER

Who Are the Syrian Opposition Fighters? What Now?

Syria's government appears to have fallen after opposition fighters said they entered Damascus following a stunning advance.

Syrian Prime Minister Mohammed Ghazi Jalali said the government was ready to "extend its hand" to the opposition and hand over its functions to a transitional government.

"I am in my house and I have not left, and this is because of my belonging to this country," Jalali said in a video statement. He said he would go to his office to continue work in the morning and called on Syrian citizens not to deface public property.

A Syrian opposition war monitor, Rami Abdurrahman, said Assad left the country on a flight from Damascus early Sunday. Jalali did not address reports of Assad's departure. Opposition fighters entered Syria's capital in a swiftly developing crisis that has taken much of the world by surprise. Syria's army has abandoned key cities with little resistance. Who are these opposition fighters? If they take control of Damascus after seizing some of Syria's largest cities, what then?

Here is a look at the stunning reversal of fortune for Assad and the government in just the past 10 days, and what might lie ahead as Syria's 13-year civil war reignites.

Possible rifts ahead

The HTS and Syrian National Army have been allies at times and rivals at times, and their aims might diverge.

The Turkish-backed militias also have an interest in creating a buffer zone near the Turkish border to keep away Kurdish militants at odds with Ankara. Turkey has been a main backer of the fighters seeking to overthrow Assad but more recently has urged reconciliation, and Turkish officials have strongly rejected claims of any involvement in the current offensive.

Whether the HTS and the Syrian National Army will work to-



gether if they succeed in overthrowing Assad or turn on each other again is a major question.

Others take advantage

While the flash offensive against Syria's government began in the north, armed opposition groups have also mobilised elsewhere.

The southern areas of Sweida and Daraa have both been taken locally. Sweida is the heartland of Syria's Druze religious minority and had been the site of regular anti-government protests even after Assad seemingly consolidated his control over the area.

Daraa is a Sunni Muslim area that was widely seen as the cradle of the uprising against Assad's rule that erupted in 2011. Daraa was recaptured by Syrian government troops in 2018, but rebels remained in some areas. In recent years, Daraa was in a state of uneasy quiet under a Russian-mediated ceasefire deal.

And much of Syria's east is controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-led group backed by the United States that in the past has clashed with most other armed groups in the country. Syria's government now has control of only three of 14 provincial capitals: Damascus, Latakia and Tartus.

What's next?

A commander with the insurgents, Hassan Abdul-Ghani, post-

ed on the Telegram messaging app that opposition forces have started carrying out the "final stage" of their offensive by encircling Damascus.

And Syrian troops withdrew Saturday from much of the central city of Homs, Syria's third largest, according to a pro-government outlet and the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. If that city is captured, the link would be cut between Damascus, Assad's seat of power, and the coastal region where he enjoys wide support.

"Homs to the coastal cities will be a very huge red line politically and socially. Politically, if this line is crossed, then we are talking about the end of the entire Syria, the one that we knew in the past," said a Damascus resident, Anas Joudeh.

Assad appears to be largely on his own as allies Russia and Iran are distracted by other conflicts and the Lebanon-based Hezbollah has been weakened by its war with Israel, now under a fragile ceasefire.

The UN special envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, seeks urgent talks in Geneva to ensure an "orderly political transition," saying the situation is changing by the minute. He met with foreign ministers and senior diplomats from eight key countries including Saudi Arabia, Russia, Egypt, Turkey and Iran on the sidelines of the Doha Summit.

-AP

Kapil backs Rohit, says doesn't need to prove himself

New Delhi: Let's not doubt Rohit Sharma's ability to bounce back', retorted the legendary Kapil Dev, who also felt that under-fire India skipper doesn't need to prove himself at this stage of his career.

Rohit, who managed scores of 3 and 6 in the the Adelaide pink-ball Test after dropping down the batting order, is being criticized by fans and former players for being subdued.

India lost the game by 10 wickets in just two and a half days.

"He doesn't have to prove himself. He has done this for many, many years, so let's not doubt somebody. I won't doubt him. I hope his form comes back, that's important," Kapil said during the launch of the Vishwa Samudra Open, a PGTI event set to begin at the Delhi Golf Club on Tuesday.

Rohit had missed the opening Test due to the birth of his second child.

Despite scoring most of his runs as an opener, the 37-year-old dropped down to the number six position, offering the top spot to KL Rahul, who played a pivotal role in the Perth win.

"With one or two performances, if you doubt someone's captaincy, I mean, just six months back when he won the T20 World Cup, you wouldn't have asked me this question. Let it go, knowing his ability and talent, he will come back. They will come back strongly."



Asked if it was a mistake to include young Harshit Rana in the second Test, Kapil said: "I am a nobody. How can I judge? There are people up there who have the responsibility to decide who should be in the team." "We shouldn't talk. My former colleagues are sitting there, and I hope they will do a good job."

In Rohit's absence, vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah



had led India to a 295-run in Perth.

Asked if Bumrah is shaping up well to take over the reins from Rohit, Kapil said: "I think it is too early to talk about that. With one performance, you can't say he is the best, and with one bad performance, you can't say he doesn't deserve it."

"Let a player play a lot of cricket, take on a lot of captaincy. Ups and downs will

come, and then you judge a person by how he reacts in difficult times, not in good times. In good times, we don't have to judge. When he is down and out..."

Virat Kohli, who also looked subdued coming into the five-Test series in Australia, managed to hit his first hundred in 18 months in Perth. However, the star batter failed in the second Test with scores of 7 and 11 in his two innings.

"Like Virat Kohli, he is one of the best cricketers in our country. If you put the four top batsmen, he will be there. If he is going through a rough time, it is only up to him how fast he can bounce back," Kapil said. -PTI



Bournemouth's Dango Ouattara celebrates scoring his side's second goal during the English Premier League soccer match between Ipswich Town and Bournemouth at Portman Road in Ipswich, England on Sunday. Pic: PTI

Against Red Kookaburra Rohit might be better at No. 6

By Kushan Sarkar

New Delhi: He is being encouraged to return to opening by the talking heads of Indian cricket but Rohit Sharma may just avoid being swayed by the proverbial outside noise and stick to the number six slot for at least the third Test against Australia in Brisbane starting this weekend.

Rohit, who was on paternity break during the opening Test and scored 3 and 6 on his return during the 'Pink Ball' game, is facing calls for his return to the top in the batting order in place of KL Rahul, who too had an indifferent game in

Adelaide after his heroics in Perth.

If one looks at Rohit's statistics in SENA (South Africa, England, New Zealand and Australia), across all batting positions in 46 completed innings, he averages a shade less than 30 while in 20 innings as opener, he scores at 37.8 thanks largely to the successful English summer of 2021.

When PTI spoke to a BCCI Level 3 coach, who has previously worked at the National Cricket Academy, on technical aspects of the swashbuckler's game, he dissected Rohit's technique to explain why opening might not be a

good option for the Indian captain at the moment.

"Rohit Sharma has had very limited footwork all his career, even when he was in his prime. Obviously, at 37 and half years, the reflexes have slowed down and he is picking the length a trifle late," the qualified batting coach told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

"The same Rohit will look very different in the IPL where you might still find him scoring a 35-ball-70 for Mumbai Indians with opposition having at least a couple of mid-130s domestic bowler," he added.

He then gave his reasons for why Rohit will be better

off playing at No. 6 at the Gabba.

"To be fair, if your stride is shorter and reflexes on the wane, the Pink Kookaburra will make it even more difficult for you to survive. I think KL had said before the game that it comes a lot quicker than Red Kookaburra and it skids off the surface."

"With his current footwork, the Red Kookaburra would again dart around and seam at the Gabba if he opens. If he comes in at No. 6, there is every chance that it will be either old or semi-old Kookaburra with suppressed seam and it won't do much."

More than us, he has to support himself: Kapil on Kampli

Kapil Dev on Monday urged former India batter Vinod Kampli to address his health issues, saying he needs to make efforts to overcome the crisis.

Kampli, 52, has been struggling with alcohol-related and other health issues. He recently appeared frail during a public event, held in memory of legendary coach Ramakant Achrekar.

He was seen refusing to let go of his childhood friend Sachin Tendulkar.

Expressing sadness over Kampli's condition, Kapil emphasised the need for self-help alongside external support.

"We should all try to support him. But more than us, he has to support himself. We can't look after anybody if that person can't look after himself," Kapil said.

"All the cricketers feel very sad about what we have seen. I wish his closest friends can try to get him some help, to look after himself, to go back to rehab. People do get this illness, but you have to get back to rehab."

Kampli, a former left-handed batter, has battled numerous health challenges over the years. In 2012, he underwent angioplasty to treat blocked arteries, followed by a heart attack in 2013. His struggles with alcohol addiction have led him to multiple stints in rehabilitation, significantly affecting his overall health and well-being.

Kampli boasts an impressive cricketing career, having represented India in 104 ODIs and 17 Tests, where he amassed 2,477 and 1,084 runs, respectively.

Notably, during his school days, he forged an iconic unbroken partnership of 664 runs with Tendulkar in a school-level cricket match.

Hyderabad Strikers wins third TPL title

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Hyderabad Strikers have emerged champions of the Tennis Premier League Season 6. In the final, they prevailed victorious over Yash Mumbai Eagles 51-44 to lift the title for the third time.

The Final saw Yash Mumbai Eagles and Hyderabad Strikers going all out in a bid to lift the title. Hyderabad Strikers opened the match on the strong foot as Harriet Dart won the Women's Singles game against Zeynep Sonmez of Yash Mumbai Eagles with a score of 14-11. Karan Singh pulled things back level for Yash Mumbai Eagles after

winning the Men's Singles 14-11 over Benjamin Lock of Hyderabad Strikers.

Hyderabad Strikers dominated the crucial Mixed Doubles game as the duo of Harriet Dart and Vishnu Vardhan prevailed 16-9 over Zeynep Sonmez and Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan of Yash Mumbai Eagles to place their side in a comfortable position heading into the final game of the fixture.

In the Men's Doubles category, Karan Singh and Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan tried but couldn't cut down the deficit. Vishnu Vardhan and Benjamin Lock of Hyderabad Strikers ended the game 10-10.



Australia's Alex de Minaur plays France's Gael Monfils in the UTS London 2024 Grand Final at the Copper Box Arena, London on Sunday. Pic: PTI

Sitwala, Razmi to clash for billiards supremacy

By Correspondent

Mumbai: World billiards champion Dhruv Sitwala and Rayaana Razmi in contrasting fashion won their respective semi-final matches in the Senior Men's billiards tournament of the Malabar Hill Club Maharashtra State Billiards & Snooker Championships 2024.

The left-handed Sitwala, who is also the Indian National billiards champion dropped just one frame (first frame) before coasting to a 4-1 victory against Vishal Madan in the 150-up best-of-7-frame encounter.

In the second semi-final,

Razmi who had earlier won the senior snooker title, ground out a fighting 4-3 win against the highly experienced Siddharth Parikh to set up a title clash with Sitwala.

Sitwala constructed two successive century breaks to win the 110 (2nd frame) and 104 (4th) and a couple of substantial runs and completed a 149-150, 151-28, 151-26, 151-16, and 150-127 frame scores success. Madan started with breaks of 68 and 61 in winning the opening frame.

The second semi-final witnessed a fascinating battle for supremacy before the younger and composed

Razmi won the deciding seventh frame to clinch a satisfying 152-45, 23-150, 20-152, 150-71, 151-46, 6-150, and 150-73. Razmi started with a 147 in the first frame and followed it with a 119 in the fifth, while Parikh cracked an unfinished 152 breaking the best in the tournament and a 113 in the sixth to level the match scores.

Results - Senior billiards: Dhruv Sitwala beat Vishal Madan 4-1 (149-150(68,61), 151(110)-28, 151(90)-26, 151(104)-16, 150-127). Rayaana Razmi beat Siddharth Parikh 4-3 (152(147)-45, 23-150(74), 20-152(152), 150(59,46)-71, 151(119)-46, 6-150(113), 150(56)-73).

Sumit aims to reach top 50

By Correspondent

Mumbai: India's Tennis star Sumit Nagal has been one of the stand-out players in the Tennis Premier League Season 6. Nagal has been playing for Gujarat Panthers in the Men's Singles and Doubles Categories.

Nagal is elated with the energy in his team's camp. "It's a lovely environment. Everyone's very nice and is always there for us. I have enjoyed playing for Gujarat



Panthers in these two seasons."

Gujarat Panthers faced Rajasthan Rangers on matchday one of the league in which Nagal played Indian Tennis veteran Rohan Bopanna in the Men's Dou-

bles Category and lost the tie.

"It is not easy to play someone (Bopanna) who has won a slam. At the end of the day, it's fun to be out here and play against such experienced players."

While sharing his experience playing the Tennis Premier League (TPL), Nagal stated, "It's been great. If you just look at the quality of players this year. You can already see there's a big difference from before."

India win in deaf cricket

New Delhi: The Indian deaf cricket team recorded a 5-0 win over Sri Lanka in a bilateral one-day series held here from December 2 to 8.

The Indian squad was led by Virendra Singh and included 15 players from across the country. Sri Lanka were led by Gimadu Malakam. The Indian team won the fifth and final ODI by 13 runs. Having posted 289 in 49.5 overs in the first innings, India restricted Sri Lanka to 276 all-out.

Sharma, Batra grab opening day honours

By Correspondent

Mumbai: The fancied Delhi pair of Asha Sharma and Puja Batra grabbed the opening day honours taking pole position in the Amla Ruia Women Pairs competition of the 66th Ashok Ruia Memorial National Bridge Championship being played at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Sports Complex, Balewadi, Pune.

Sharma and Batra, who recently won the women's pairs title in the Prime Se-

curities Bridge Championship in Mumbai, maintained their impressive form. With a total of 107.29 IM points, they finished at the top of qualifying league.

The mixed pairing of veteran Vasanti Shah (Mumbai) and Gopika Tandan (Delhi) finished in second place with 95.83 IM points followed by Alka M. Kshirsagar (Pune) and Bharati Dey (Kolkata) 90.63 IM points in third position.

Earlier, Amla Ruia, wife

of late Ashok Ruia, a doyen of Indian bridge, inaugurated the event in the presence of dignitaries and the participating women players.

Later along with partner Meenal Thakur she participated in the event and they qualified for the final league.

A total of 40 women pairs competed in 5 rounds of 10 boards each. The top 18 pairs have qualified to play an all-play-all round-robin format. Top Indian women

players from across India are vying for the crown.

This event will be followed by Mixed Pairs, Senior Teams, Gold and Silver Open Teams, and Match Points Pairs contest.

Results - Qualifying League (top-10): 1. Asha Sharma/Puja Batra - 107.29 points, 2. Vasanti Shah/Gopika Tandan - 95.83, 3. Alka M. Kshirsagar/Bharati Dey - 90.63, 4. Ekta Chadha/Bina Malhotra - 80.21, 5. Sheetal Bansal/Sarika Mittal - 80.00.

Youngest Indian to beat a chess Grandmaster

Bhubaneswar: Nine-year-old Delhi boy Aarit Kapil has become the youngest Indian to beat a chess Grandmaster as he emerged victorious against Raset Ziatdinov of United States in the ninth and penultimate round of the KIIT International open tournament here.

At 9 years, 2 months and 18 days, Aarit is the youngest Indian and third in the world to beat a GM under the classical time control.

The youngest player in the world to beat a GM is Indian-origin Singapore boy Ashwath Kaushik who won against Jacek Stupa of Poland when he was just 8 years and six months old earlier this year.

Ziatdinov, 66, is certainly past his prime if the game was any indication. As is usually the case when an experienced GM plays against a youngster, Ziatdinov did many things right positionally to get the upper hand



thanks to his better pawn structure.

To Aarit's credit, he fought on after standing slightly worse with his white pieces. It was a long-drawn endgame wherein Ziatdinov made the final mistake and lost a knight on Sunday.

The resulting position just needed decent calculation and the young lad from Delhi had no troubles whatsoever in converting his advantage in to a well-

deserved win. The game lasted 63 moves.

While the victory places Aarit among the elite young talents, it remains to be seen how he performs in upcoming tournaments. The next challenge awaits him in form of under-13 national championship to be held at Durgapur later this month, followed by his own age group event, the under-9 nationals in Pune.

Meanwhile, Grandmaster Bo-

ris Savchenko of Russia won the KIIT tournament, settling for a draw with India's Sayantan Das in the final round. Savchenko scored 8.5 points out of a possible 10.

The top three youngest players to beat a Grandmaster:

1. Ashwath Kaushik (Singapore) - 8 years 2 months
2. Leonid Ivanovic (Serbia) - 8 years 11 months
3. Aarit Kapil - 9 years 2 months