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Misbehaviour With Actress Row

Youth Congress leader quits

Pathanamthitta/Kochi: Congress MLA from Kerala, Rahul Mamkootathil, who faces an internal party inquiry over a misbehaviour allegation made by an actress, on Thursday announced his resignation as Kerala Youth Congress president.

He announced this while speaking to reporters at his residence in Adoor in Pathanamthitta district, shortly after Congress leader and Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly V D Satheesan asserted that nobody found guilty would be spared.

The resignation followed protests by the BJP and the CPI(M)'s youth wing, DYFI, after actress Rini Ann George accused "a young leader" of a well-known political party of misbehaviour.

Protesters had been demanding Mamkootathil's resignation as MLA.

Mamkootathil announced his decision only at the end of his press conference.

"At a time when the state government is facing severe protests and allegations, Congress leaders and party workers should not waste their time and



energy on such matters. Hence, I have decided to resign from the post of Youth Congress president. I still believe that I have not committed any illegal act," he said.

The MLA began his remarks by saying he had spoken to the opposition leader, as well as KPCC and AICC leaders, earlier on Thursday.

"They did not demand my resignation. The actress is my friend, and I don't believe the person she mentioned was me. She is my good friend and will remain so. I believe that I have not done anything against the law or the Constitution of the country until now," he said.

Audio clip

When asked about an audio clip released by a Ma-

layalam news channel alleging that he forced a woman to terminate a pregnancy, Mamkootathil replied that in today's era, it was not difficult to create such clips. He asked whether any complaint had been lodged against him in this matter. "I will reply when any complaint is filed. Till now, no such complaint exists."

Earlier, writer Honey Bhaskaran alleged on social media that Mamkootathil had chatted with her on Instagram and later made derogatory remarks about her to others.

On this, he said he had also seen the post but that no evidence was provided. "It was a healthy conversation and I do not wish to disclose the remaining chat. I have done nothing illegal against her, and she has not lodged any complaint till now."

Mamkootathil said he had spoken to Satheesan, who had not informed him of any complaint. "If there is a complaint, I will prove my innocence before the court," he said, adding that he had seen the press conference of the opposition leader, who did not take his name in connection with

the incident.

Asked whether he would file a police complaint against those raising allegations, he said he had no faith in Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's police to conduct a fair investigation, and so he was not planning to do so. He added that similar allegations had been raised when he was chosen as Youth Congress president and while contesting the Palakkad by-election.

After announcing his resignation, Mamkootathil said that if he had made any mistakes, he was ready to face them legally. "Till today, I have not done anything illegal in my conscience. If anyone has any argument about it, they can challenge it legally."

Corrective measure

In response, actress Rini, without naming him, described the move as a corrective measure. She indirectly welcomed the decision while speaking to reporters in Kochi. "It sounds like he is still not bothered about the incident. Such corrective measures should be taken against such people in the party," she said. -PTI

Astronomy and Astrophysics Olympiad

Indian team wins four gold medals

Mumbai: India has secured four gold medals and one silver at the 18th International Olympiad on Astronomy and Astrophysics (IOAA), an official statement said on Thursday.

The Indian contingent was trained under the aegis of the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education (HBCSE), a national centre of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), it said.

The Olympiad was hosted for the first time in India and witnessed the participation of nearly 300 high-school students from 64 countries, including 12 nations competing for the first time.

"Students should continue to explore the frontiers of science with curiosity and commitment," Homi Bhabha National Institute Chancellor Dr Anil Kakodkar said while praising the participants' pursuit of scientific excellence and spirit of international cooperation.

The International Olympiad on Astronomy and Astrophysics, established in 2007, is one of the premier global platforms for high-school students passionate about astronomy and astrophysics. -PTI



Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) and Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar shake hands during their meeting in Moscow, Russia on Thursday.

Pic: APPTI

US Tariffs On India

China 'fully opposes' it: Envoy

New Delhi: China fully opposes the US move of imposing tariffs of up to 50 per cent on India and Washington's threat to increase it, Chinese envoy Xu Feihong said here on Thursday.

In his address at an event here, Feihong also said that tariff and trade "wars" were disrupting the global economic and trade system.

The Chinese envoy's remark assumes significance as it comes amid a thaw in Sino-India ties.

India and China on Tuesday unveiled a series of measures for a "stable, cooperative and forward-looking" relationship that included jointly maintaining peace along the fron-

tier, reopening border trade, promoting investment flows, and resuming direct flight connectivity at the earliest.

The announcements aimed at realising the "full" development potential of the two Asian giants came amid growing estrangement in ties between India and the US over President Donald Trump's policies on trade and tariffs.

India and China listed the measures in a joint document after Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held wide-ranging talks earlier this week with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, besides meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In his address at an event held at the IIC here, the Chinese envoy referred to the tariffs imposed on various countries by Washington.

"The United States imposed tariffs of up to 50 per cent on India, and even threatened to impose more. China fully opposes it," he said.

Speaking about the upcoming SCO Summit in China, Feihong said his country is willing to work with all parties, including India, to hold the summit, featuring friendship, solidarity, and fruitful outcomes.

"Together, we can open a new chapter of a dragon-elephant tango," he asserted. -PTI

Four workers dead, two serious

Mumbai: Four workers were killed and two others hospitalised after inhalation of nitrogen gas that leaked at a pharmaceutical company in Tarapur MIDC in Palghar district on Thursday, officials said.

The incident occurred in the afternoon at Medley Pharma located in the industrial area of Boisar, around 130 km from here, they said.

Chief of Palghar district disaster management cell, Vivekanand Kadam, said that between 2.30 pm and 3 pm, gas leaked from the nitrogen reaction tank at the pharma company, seriously affecting six persons working there.

"The six workers were rushed to a hospital, where four of them died around 6.15 pm," he said.

Two others are currently undergoing treatment in the intensive care unit (ICU) at the hospital, he added.

MSCB Scam

Rohit Pawar released on bond

Mumbai: NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar on Thursday appeared before a special court here in the alleged Maharashtra State Co-operative Bank (MSCB) scam case, and was released upon executing a bond.

The charge sheet filed against him by the Enforcement Directorate is "bogus", his lawyers told the court. Rohit, the grandnephew of NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar, has been questioned by the central agency twice in the case.

He and his close associate and businessman Rajendra Ingwale, also named in the charge sheet, were released after executing 'PR' or personal recognizance bonds of Rs 25,000 each under section 88 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Under the provision, a court can release on a bond an accused, against whom summons has been issued, after he or she appears before it.

The MSCB money laun-



dering case stemmed from an August 2019 FIR registered by the Mumbai police's Economic Offences Wing, alleging fraudulent sale of SSKs (Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana or cooperative sugar mills) by then officers and directors of MSCB at throwaway prices to their relatives/private persons without following due procedure.

Special judge for MPs/MLAs cases Satyanarayan Navander last month took cognisance of a fresh charge sheet in the case against Rohit Pawar, noting that prima facie he was found to have "knowingly participated in this fraudulent acquisition". The judge also issued summons to the NCP (SP) leader and other accused. -PTI

Pawar, who represents the Karjat-Jamkhed assembly seat in Ahilyanagar district, appeared before the court in response to the summons.

The court asked him to execute a bond without imposing any conditions in view of his compliance with the summons and his reputation, said Advocates Dixita Gohil and Pranjali Agarwal, his lawyers.

The prosecution complaint (charge sheet) was bogus and no case was made out against their client, the lawyers told the court, adding that hence they were reserving the right to challenge it.

The next date of hearing is October 8.

The case

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) in June filed a fresh charge sheet in the case against Pawar, Ingwale as well as Pawar's firm Baramati Agro Limited. -PTI

A Year After Akshay Shinde Case

Schools undergo safety overhaul

By Dr. Abhilash Dawre

Badlapur: It has been a year since the Akshay Shinde case shook Badlapur, raising alarming questions about the safety of schoolchildren. Shinde, who was arrested for the alleged sexual assault of two schoolgirls from a reputed local institution, died in a reported police encounter while being taken for questioning. The incident not only sparked outrage but also forced authorities to rethink child safety measures across schools.

The Education Department and Badlapur Municipal Council rolled out strict security protocols for both government and private schools. The most crucial step has been making Po-



lice Clearance Certificates (PCC) mandatory for every teaching and non-teaching staff member. Schools that fail to comply are given just one week to complete verification, with municipal officials conducting surprise inspections to ensure enforcement.

Alongside staff verification, a strong emphasis has been placed on student safety awareness. Schools now hold workshops and

Classrooms - 1,233 CCTV cameras
School corridors - 512 CCTV cameras
School premises - 431 CCTV cameras
Outside student washrooms - 242 CCTV cameras

in-class sessions teaching children how to remain alert, recognize unsafe situations, and seek timely help. Officials say the aim is to create an environment where students feel both safe and confident.

Currently, the initiative covers 101 private schools and 20 government schools in Badlapur. Parents have welcomed the move. "What happened last year cannot be forgotten, but at least we

can see real action being taken to safeguard our children now," said Poornima Desai, a parent.

Over the past year, the council has carried out inspections, launched awareness drives, and placed compliance with safety rules at the top of its agenda. Authorities believe that combining strict staff verification with empowering students will prevent similar tragedies in the future.

Sharing details with The Perfect Voice, Badlapur municipal Council Education Department Chief Jitendra Gomase revealed the scale of new surveillance measures

This brings the total number of CCTV cameras installed across schools in Badlapur to 2,374.

पुरस्कृत

इकोफ्रेंडली

घरगुती आणि गृहनिर्माण संस्था

गणेशोत्सव स्पर्धा - २०२५

चला साजरा करूया उत्सव बाप्पाचा,
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Ease Of Doing Business

Create separate war room for expedition

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday directed the state administration to create a separate 'War Room' for effective implementation of the 'Ease of Doing Business' policy.

"Hundreds of changes can be made in the state's 'Ease of Doing Business' policy. Dedicated efforts will be needed for that. A separate war room should be created and review of the policy should be done every month," the Chief Minister told the officials as he addressed a meeting of high ranking officials from the state administration to discuss the measures being taken in line with the global import-export policy, especially after the US move to impose tariffs against India.

Fadnavis appealed the officials to convert the "present crisis" arising out of imposition of tariffs by the US into an opportunity and explore alternative markets.

"America has tried to put India in trouble by imposing tariffs on goods imported from India. However, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is taking its steps without fearing the challenges created by America. Find alternative markets and convert the tariffs imposed by America into an opportunity," Fadnavis said.

At the meeting CM Fadnavis also listed some of the improvements made by the government for Ease of



Doing Business. Maharashtra is the first state in the country to issue fire licenses for one year to industries, the Maitri Act 2023 has been passed for streamlining industrial development, and the Maitri Single Window System is being implemented for the electricity connection of industries, he said.

He further added that only two documents are now required for a new electricity connection, while the Building Plan Management System has been implemented for construction by industries.

MILAP portal

In addition, the government has launched the MILAAP (Industrial Land Application and Allotment Portal) portal to obtain plots from Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation.

CM Fadnavis said the government will carry out further improvements in Ease of Doing Business.

"It has proposed to create a land bank to promptly arrange plots for setting up industries, make the plot distribution process trans-

parent and fast, provide arrangements for issuing environmental permits within 60 days, to put on place an enabling an independent mechanism to increase investment at the district level, create 'Dedicated Export Portal' to increase exports and implement a 'One Taluka One Group Development' initiative for the creation of industries through group development," he added.

"Entrepreneurs should be encouraged to set up private industrial parks in the state. Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation should come up with a clear policy to develop such industrial parks outside industrial estates. Priority should be given to small and medium enterprises. There should be a system in place so that entrepreneurs can get the licenses required for their industries promptly. This will bring prosperity to the state through industries and increase employment generation," remarked CM Fadnavis.

"The government is positive for the development of existing industries, along

with new industries. The single window portal for industrial permits should be made more efficient. So that approvals and granting of necessary permits do not take time. A system should be implemented so that no permission is required for agricultural processing or agro-based industries over an area of five hectares in the state," he said.

Fadnavis strongly advocated implementation of reforms which will attract new industries and help develop or expand the existing ones in the state.

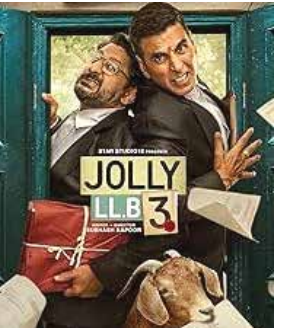
"Industries set up near the city have to obtain various permissions. Arrangements should be made to ensure that the time taken to obtain permissions is reduced to a minimum and that these permissions are obtained easily. The process of calculating the land required for the industry should be expedited. The fines imposed on polluting industries that do not harm the environment should be revised, and it should be ensured that additional fines are not imposed on such units," Fadnavis said.

Lawyer objects to 'Jolly LLB 3'

Pune: A Pune court has issued summons to the producer of "Jolly LLB 3" along with its actors Akshay Kumar and Arshad Warsi in response to a petition which claims that the film portrays lawyers and judges in a poor light.

Civil Court Judge J G Pawar on August 18 issued summons to director Subhash Kapoor, 'Arun Bhatia' and Warsi, seeking their replies by October 28.

While Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar's real name is Rajiv Bhatia, the petitioner said it was mistakenly mentioned as 'Arun Bhatia'.



Advocate Wajid Khan, who has filed the suit, said the film's trailer, released recently, maligns the legal system, lawyers and judges.

"We have sought a restraining order against the film's release. The court issued summons to the filmmaker and two actors," Khan told reporters.

Kumar's official name was mentioned as 'Arun Bhatia' in the suit by mistake, and summons was issued in the same name, the lawyer clarified.

"However, while sending the summons by correspondence, we sent it in the name of Akshay Kumar to his address. We are also filing an application in the court to rectify the name," he said.



People look at wooden models of 'Nandi', the sacred bull of Lord Shiva ahead of the 'Pola' festival, in Nagpur on Thursday.

Pic: PTI

More than two lakh Kunbi certificates in Marathwada

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar: More than two lakh Kunbi certificates have been issued in Maharashtra's Marathwada region and there is zero pendency in several places, divisional commissioner Jitendra Papalkar said.

Outfits agitating for quota in jobs and reservations for the Marathas have been demanding that the community be given Kunbi certificates so that they can get benefits provided to Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Kunbis are part of the OBC segment. The state government had formed the Justice Shinde committee to look into the demand.

Addressing reporters after an online meeting of the Justice Shinde committee, Papalkar said, "More than two lakh Kunbi caste certificates have been issued till now. The pendency in many places is also zero now." Justice Shinde visited here and took review from all the district

Six officers as directors of welfare body for Brahmins

Mumbai: The state government has appointed six senior bureaucrats as the first directors of the Parshuram Economic Development Corporation set up to create self-employment and business opportunities for the economically weaker sections of the Brahmin community.

The government has appointed Additional Chief Secretary (Planning) Rajgopal Deora, Principal Secretary (Expenditure) Saurabh Vijay, Additional Chief Secretary (Skill Development and Employment) Manisha Verma, Industries Secretary Anbalagan P, Agriculture Principal Secretary Vikas Chandra Rastogi, and OBC Welfare Secretary Appaso Dhulaj as the first directors of the corporation. A government resolution was issued on August 19 by the state planning department in this regard. The new body has been set up to promote agriculture-related activities, processing, storage, small-scale industries, transport and other enterprises to help uplift the community's economic status. The state also cleared the Memorandum of Association (MoA) and Articles of Association (AoA) for the corporation. As per the AoA, senior officials from the Planning, Finance, Skill Development and Employment, Industries, Agriculture and OBC Welfare departments will serve as ex-officio members of the corporation. The Managing Director of the Parshuram Economic Development Corporation has been authorised to complete all legal formalities required for its registration.

collectors through video conferencing. He also gave instructions to update the

records and revive committees formed for issuing caste certificates."

Bhujbal chairs Kumbh meet



Nashik: Minister and NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal on Thursday chaired a review meeting for Kumbh Mela preparations in Nashik, which reignited the tussle for the post of guardian minister of the district.

Incidentally, state minister and BJP leader Girish Mahajan has already been appointed as minister in charge for K u m b h M e l a preparations.

Talking to reporters, Bhujbal said, as a minister from Nashik, he is "100 per cent" justified in chairing a review meeting.

"I will not give directions but suggestions. Just because I sought a meeting doesn't mean I want to become (Nashik) guardian minister," the state food and civil supplies minister asserted.

Responding to a statement from Mahajan that he will be guardian minister of Nashik, Bhujbal said the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has seven MLAs in the district.

Ganesh Festival

Heavy vehicles banned on Mumbai-Goa Highway



Toll waiver for devotees

In a relief to devotees going to Konkan for this year's Ganeshotsav, Public Works Minister Shivendrasinh Rajeshale has announced toll waiver on toll plazas on Mumbai-Bengaluru National Highway, Mumbai-Goa National Highway, as well as roads under the jurisdiction of the Public Works Department and Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation from August 23 to September 8. This concession will be applicable to all private vehicles and ST buses going to Konkan.

trucks, multi-axle vehicles, trailers, lorries and other heavy vehicles from midnight of August 23 to 11 pm on August 28.

Further curbs will be enforced on August 31 and September 2 from 8 am to 11 pm to facilitate the immersion of Ganesh idols of five and seven days, Gauri Ganapati idols, and the return journeys of devotees, said the statement.

For the immersion of 11-day idols on Anant Chatur-

dashi, the ban will be in place from 8 am on September 6 until 8 pm on September 7.

According to Holkar, during the intervening periods heavy vehicles will be permitted to ply on the highway.

These include from 11 pm of August 28 to 8 am of August 31, from 11 pm of August 31 to 8 am of September 2, and from 11 pm of September 2 to 8 am of September 6. Normal traf-

fic movement for all vehicles will resume after 8 pm on September 7.

Holkar clarified restrictions will not apply to vehicles transporting import-export goods between Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) in Navi Mumbai and Jaigad Port (Ratnagiri district) or those carrying essential commodities such as milk, petrol, diesel, LPG cylinders, medicines, liquid medical oxygen, food grains, vegetables and perishable items.

Vehicles engaged in road widening and repair works on the highway will also be exempted, he stated.

Considering the flow of devotees to Konkan during the festival, police commissioner of Navi Mumbai and district superintendents of police in the coastal region have been empowered to relax the curbs on heavy vehicles as per the prevailing situation. Separate traffic arrangements will be made to ensure uninterrupted movement of cargo from JNPA and Jaigad Port, Holkar added.

Man held for duping octogenarian

Mumbai: A man was arrested for alleged involvement in a racket in which an 81-year-old woman was duped of Rs 7.8 crore using the 'digital arrest' modus operandi, a Mumbai police official said on Thursday.

The accused, 21-year-old Kartik Chaudhary of Malvani in Malad, allegedly provided his bank account to another associate, through which Rs 1.98 lakh was transferred from the victim's account, the official said.

"Chaudhary withdrew the amount and handed it over to another accomplice, whom he had come in contact with through Telegram app. In return, he received a commission," the official said.

"The victim, who is a resident of south Mumbai, had not lodged a complaint in the case. However, police received information about the massive fund transfer through internal inputs and began a probe. After a police team visited the woman's residence, an FIR was lodged against unidentified persons," he said.

The arrest marks a crucial step in curbing the rising cases of digital frauds in the city.

Peace march against threat to Thorat

Sangamner: A peace march was held in Sangamner in Ahilyanagar on Thursday condemning the alleged threat issued to senior Congress leader and former minister Balasaheb Thorat.

A person identified as Sangram Bhandare, a kirtankar, allegedly threatened Thorat by invoking the name of Nathuram Godse, reviled for assassinating Mahatma Gandhi.

The peace march, which began from the Yashodhan office and concluded at New Nagar Road, was led by Thorat and was attended by functionaries of Swabhimani Sangamner Taluka, Sakal Hindu Samaj, Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi, of which the Congress is a part, and other spiritual and political groups.

Speaking at the rally, Thorat said, "Some people are using local representatives as tools to derail the progress of Sangamner. Lawlessness and a climate of fear have increased in the past few months. I urge authorities to take strict action against those disturbing peace. I have always stood for values of humanity and social harmony and have never used

religion as a political tool." If someone commits a wrong, they must be punished, regardless of their affiliations, said Thorat, who lost the 2024 assembly polls to the BJP's Amol Khatal.

Without naming Khatal, the senior Congress leader questioned the newly elected representative's sudden display of religious symbolism. "He never wore a saffron cap before elections. Suddenly wearing it now does not make one a true Hindu," Thorat said in a swipe at Khatal.

Efforts are being made to damage Sangamner's decades-long legacy of cultured politics and developmental work, Thorat asserted.

He also took exception to the use of the term "DNA" by the local representative, saying it was derogatory.

"Such language has no place in our political discourse," Thorat remarked. Targeting Sangram Bhandare, Thorat accused him of disrespecting religious traditions and misleading the public. "He claims he was attacked, but I have video evidence proving otherwise. The Ghulewadi incident was pre-planned," Thorat claimed.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“During the Lokayukta hearing today, after I presented this matter before the Lokayukta, a Deputy Secretary named Pratibha Patil confirmed that there was an outward number indicating that the file was sent to the minister, but the file was not returned after his resignation.”

Anjali Damania, Activist

One in five students rarely feels calm: Report

Mumbai: Students continue to face high levels of emotional distress, limited access to professional support, and growing uncertainty about their future, even as academic pressure remains the leading source of stress, a report said on Thursday.

One in five students rarely experience the feeling of calm, motivation, or excitement, with girls reporting nearly twice the rate of persistent sadness compared to boys, said the 'Student Well-Being Pulse' report prepared by volun-

teer-based, Mumbai-headquartered IC3 Institute.

Over 40 per cent students are unaware of where to access mental health support in school, and nearly half have never received structured career counseling, 'an important factor behind rising anxiety about the future, found the report.

Three in four Grade 12 students do not get the recommended 7-8 hours of sleep on school nights, often due to academic overload and overthinking, it added.



However, the report found that more schools now recognise the value of counseling, and student awareness of support services is steadily increasing.

The Supreme Court has also emphasized the urgent need for comprehensive school-based counseling systems, lending momentum and credibility to this growing movement, it added.

The Student Well-Being Pulse report is based on an extensive survey among 8,542 students across India by the IC3 Institute.

"This is no longer a silent problem. It is a visible and urgent crisis. While more schools are now offering counseling and students are increasingly

aware of where to seek help, almost half of our students still remain unsure, and career anxiety continues to steal their sleep and peace of mind," IC3 Institute founder Ganesh Kohli said.

He said mental health cannot be treated as optional and every school must make counseling and emotional support part of its core infrastructure, while expanding access, broadening programmes, and equipping teachers and staff as trained gatekeepers.

The report further revealed that uncertainty about the future is among the top three stressors for students.

It found that girls are more likely to internalise stress and avoid professional help, while non-binary students report the lowest overall well-being.

-PTI

Change of Name

I have changed my name from OM SATISH KOTGIRE KOTGIRE to OM SATISH KOTGIRE as per documents

MNS Chief Meets CM

Raj tears hair over Mumbai traffic mess

By Quaid Najmi

Mumbai: Belying political hiccups, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray sought to don a new avatar as an urban governance buff, with emphasis on managing the city traffic muddles.

Raj, along with his senior confidante Bala Nandngaonkar dropped in to meet Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis today - fuelling wild speculation - a day after the MNS and his cousin Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) alliance was erased in the BEST Employees Cooperative Credit Society (BEST-ECCS).

After the 45-minute tete-a-tete with the CM, Raj told media-persons that he made a small but focussed presentation to rid the traffic and parking chaos plaguing Mumbai - with the city police brass attending.

Claiming the meeting had nothing to do with polls or partnerships, the MNS supremo declared: "Town planning is my interest... Show me the traf-



fic status and I can predict the future of the country... Every city has rules and these must be followed to the hilt."

"See the situation... Where 50 lived once, 500 are living. People and vehicles have multiplied manifold but not the road infrastructure. Mumbai

has few roads, no organised transport system and no parking facilities. If not checked, the urban living will collapse," said Raj grimly.

In a swipe at the ruling Mahayuti, the MNS said that "we are ignoring basic problems while getting obsessed with pigeons

and elephants" - referring to the ongoing rows over pigeon-feeding in the city and a home for an aged female elephant Mahadevi belonging to a Kolhapur Jain Temple.

Providing solutions, Raj mooted new parking surface and underground parking facilities, clearly demarcating and painting zones with 'Parking' or 'No Parking' signs with detailed maps to prevent illegal dumping of vehicles anywhere.

Advocating steeper fines and harshness on the lines of drunken-driving to hammer in traffic discipline, Raj pointed an accusing finger at two-wheelers which create havoc on roads and cars

Many leaders meet one another as well as with the chief minister, irrespective of whether they are in power or not. Maintaining communication with each other is the tradition of the state. There is no need to give a political angle to this meeting.

Ajit Pawar, Deputy Chief Minister

that disregard road rules. "Earlier this week, there was 400 cms of rain-fall and traffic became a nightmare, roads jammed, haphazard parking and road congestion everywhere. Town planning is a critical aspect for me... Take cities like Mumbai, Thane or Pune which lack proper planning and also traffic discipline," rued Raj.

On the Dharavi revamp project, Raj took a potshot at the Bharatiya Janata Party, saying: "Merely giving away the land to Adani Group will not help. Instead of getting worked up about 'Urban Naxals', address the fundamental urban issues in the city."



People stage a protest in solidarity with the people of Palestine in Mumbai on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

Mithi River Desilting Scam

Contractor held for making fake MoUs

Mumbai: A 50-year-old contractor has been arrested in connection with the Rs 65-crore Mithi river desilting scam for allegedly creating fake MoUs and receiving Rs 26.92 crore through bogus bills, an official said on Thursday.

One of the MoUs presented by the accused, Shershing Rathod, had the "signature" of a dead person, the official said.

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the city police took Rathod into custody on Wednesday after his role in the alleged irregularities came to the fore.

Rathod, who was nabbed from Borivali in the western suburbs, will be produced before the court later in the day, the official said.

This is the third arrest in the alleged scam. Earlier, EOW had arrested middleman Ketan Kadam and

Jai Joshi in connection with the case.

Police said Rathod had obtained a contract from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) in 2021-22 to remove silt from Mithi.

He created Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with the land owners to dispose of the silt. However, the documents were found to be fake. Rathod allegedly even created fake signatures to show a deceased person as a landlord, the official said.

Besides, he signed an MoU with middleman Kadam to lease slit pusher machines and multipurpose amphibious pontoon machines of Matprop company and submitted the document to the BMC to bag the contract.

Rathod also submitted a list of dumpers to the BMC, claiming that the vehicles were used to ferry

silt from Mithi. However, he collected debris from various places and transported it, passing off the material as silt from the river, said the official, who probed the case.

Despite not removing the sediment, the accused submitted fake bills and received Rs 29.62 crore from the BMC by fraud, the official said.

Earlier, the agency had also questioned Bollywood actor Dino Morea and his brother over the Mithi desilting matter.

The Mumbai police had in May registered a case against 13 people, including contractors and civic officials, for an alleged Rs 65.54 crore scam in the tenders awarded from 2017-2023 for the desilting of Mithi, which flows through Mumbai and acts as a stormwater drainage channel for the metro city. -PTI

Celebi withdraws plea in HC against revocation

Mumbai: The subsidiary of Turkiye-based airport ground handling services major Celebi on Thursday withdrew its plea in the Bombay High Court against revocation of its security clearance by Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) in the aftermath of Operation Sindoor.

A bench of Justices B P Colabawalla and Firdosh Pooniwalla allowed the same and disposed of the plea.

The Bombay HC had been deferring hearing of the plea awaiting a verdict on an identical plea before Delhi HC, which was dismissed last month.

On July 7, the Delhi HC dismissed a writ petition by another Celebi subsidiary seeking suspension and annulment of the security clearance cancellation.

Celebi's counsel Chetan Kapadia on Thursday told Bombay HC bench that the firm seeks to withdraw its plea, which the court accepted.

The petition had sought suspension and annulment of the administrative decision of security clearance



cancellation granted by Bureau of Civil Aviation Security under the Ministry of Civil Aviation of India.

The HC had last month also vacated its earlier interim order restraining Mumbai International Airport Limited (MIAL) from finalising tenders for ground and bridge handling services post termination of Celebi's contract.

A single bench had then said the interim protection granted in May cannot be continued in view of the judgment passed by the Delhi High Court in July dismissing the petition filed by Celebi against similar contract termination

of the Delhi airport and revocation of security clearance.

Amid the backlash in India over Turkiye's support to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor, India's aviation security regulator BCAS revoked the security clearance of Celebi Airport Services India on grounds related to national security with immediate effect.

The company had moved the High Court against revocation of its security clearance and subsequent termination of its contract with MIAL.

Celebi holds 59 per cent capital of Celebi Nas Airport Services India Private Limited.

Monorail stopped for 12 minutes

Mumbai: A Monorail train came to a halt for 12 minutes at Acharya Atre Chowk station in the city on Thursday morning, with officials stating that it was halted for offloading passengers and not because of any technical issue.

The incident followed Tuesday's crisis situation when two Monorail trains on elevated tracks stalled and the Fire Brigade had to be called in to rescue hundreds of passengers.

A train bound for Sant Gadgebaba Chowk station was stopped at Acharya Atre Chowk station for 12 minutes from 9.28 am onwards on Thursday, said Swati Lokhande, spokesperson of the Maha Mumbai Metro Railway Corporation Limited.

It was not 'stuck' due to any technical snag, she said. "As per the new Standard Operating Procedure introduced a day before, the train was stopped for offloading people as the load had increased to 107 metric tons instead of 104 metric tons," Lokhande said. As many passengers were reluctant to get down, it took some time, she added.

Capacity building programme for women's commissions

Mumbai: The National Commission for Women (NCW) in association with Maharashtra State Women Commission will be organizing a two-day 'Capacity Building and Training Programme' for state women commissions (SWCs) from Friday, an official said.

Addressing a press conference, NCW chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar said the programme, titled 'Shakti Samvad', will bring together chairpersons, members, and senior officers of SWCs from across India with the objective of enhancing their institutional capacity to more effectively safeguard women's rights, ensure their welfare, and drive gender equality.

"Women commissions are the first responders for women in distress, and their role is crucial in ensuring the vision of gender equality reaches every corner of India. This programme will empower SWCs with sharper tools, deeper knowledge, and stronger strategies," she said.

The two day event will be inaugurated by Chief



Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who will also launch a book published by NCW on the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) at the Workplace.

The programme has been structured to address a wide spectrum of policy, legal, social, and technological issues that directly impact women, Rahatkar said.

Panel discussion on challenges and opportunities before SWCs, futuristic challenges such as Artificial Intelligence and Cyber Security etc are some of the highlights of the two day event.

Other sessions will reflect on the legacy of the 15 women framers of the Indian Constitution, explore issues of menopause and mental well being, and underscore the social and economic importance of unpaid care work under the theme 'Care Matters'.

Participants will also be oriented on the new legal frameworks, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, with focus on women's perspectives.

NCW has also introduced its newly formed Advisory Committee, comprising eminent personalities from diverse fields, she said.

They will advise the commission in designing strategic interventions for women's empowerment.

The two-day program will conclude with a collective strategy session to chart the way forward for stronger collaboration between State Women Commissions and NCW, reinforcing their role as key stakeholders in advancing women's rights and welfare across India.

The last such meeting was held in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh in April this year.

HC to watch film based on Yogi

Mumbai: The Bombay High Court on Thursday said it would watch a film purportedly based on the life of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath after the Censor board refused to certify it.

The film, inspired by the book "The Monk who became Chief Minister", hit a roadblock after the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) refused to certify it while raising several objections including non-submission of a No Objection Certificate from the UP CM's office.

A bench of Justices Ravati Mohite Dere and Neela Gokhale on Thursday said it would decide the filmmakers' plea after watching the film. The court directed them to submit a copy of the film, clearly marking the scenes or portions to which the CBFC has taken objection.

The next hearing will be held on August 25.

A copy of the book on which the film is based has already been submitted to the court. Advocates Ravi Kadam, Satatya Anand and Nikhil Aradhe, appearing for the filmmakers, had argued that the HC can decide their petition.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"We don't need an astrologer to tell us BJP will be the number one party in Thane district. We are already strong in Navi Mumbai, Mira Bhayander, Kalyan Dombivali, Ulhasnagar, Palghar, Vasai Virar municipal corporations as well as Thane and Palghar ZP."

Ganesh Naik, Minister, Forest



Mumbai gets relief from heavy showers

Mumbai: After reeling under heavy downpour for the past few days, Mumbai-kars on Thursday heaved a sigh of relief, with parts of the city seeing sunlight after almost a week.

Things began returning to normal, with schools and college remaining open on Thursday. There were also no advisories about train or flight disruptions.

Water has receded from train tracks and parts of Mumbai airport.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) pre-

dicted 'cloudy sky with moderate rain' till August 25.

Rainfall has reduced significantly in the metropolis since Wednesday, with no overnight showers reported, an official said.

On Wednesday, IMD's Mumbai unit sounded a 'yellow alert' for the city, forecasting moderate rainfall.

The IMD uses a colour-coded system—green, yellow, orange, and red—to warn citizens about the severity of upcoming weather. This system helps

people prepare and plan ahead for rain, thunderstorms, and other hazards.

A yellow alert indicates potentially adverse weather that could cause minor disruptions.

Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis said, "The overall rain situation in Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra is pretty much under control, though some areas were still witnessing heavy rainfall."

A few commuters complained about some delays



in suburban services on Central Railway and Western Railway. The buses of

Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking are operating normally, said an official.

The BMC said on Wednesday that suburban train services on the central, western and harbour lines, along with BEST bus operations, were running smoothly.

The intensity of rains began to ease on Wednesday, putting life back on track, days after heavy rains battered the financial capital, submerging roads, rail tracks and leading to

flight and train disruptions.

Local train services on the Central Railway's Harbour line (CSMT-Panvel route) resumed from 3 am on Wednesday after 15 hours of disruption, bringing relief for commuters, while schools and colleges opened after a rain-enforced holiday.

On Tuesday evening, 782 passengers were rescued after two overcrowded Monorail trains on elevated tracks got stuck between stations in Mumbai on a day of torrential rains.

Parliament passes bill to ban online money games

New Delhi: Parliament on Thursday passed a bill to ban all forms of online money games and promote eSports and online social gaming, with the Rajya Sabha approving it without debate amid din.

Piloting The Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, 2025 in the Upper House, Minister of Electronics and IT Ashwini Vaishnaw said the legislation will promote two-thirds of the online gaming segment.

The bill, he said, will ban online money games, which have become a big problem for society, especially middle-class youth.

The bill was approved by the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

"There is addiction. The family's savings are lost. It is estimated that 45 crore people have fallen victim to it. More than Rs 20,000 crore of our middle-class families' hard-earned money has been destroyed," Vaishnaw said.

The minister said the World Health Organization has declared it a gaming disorder.

"The International Classification of Diseases, ICD-11, has declared it a gaming disorder. Online money gaming has become a public health risk -- psychological disorders, compulsive behaviour, withdrawal symptoms, violent behaviour...are being caused by this," he added.

The bill also seeks to prohibit advertisements



related to online money games, as well as bars banks and financial institutions from facilitating or transferring funds for any of such games.

The minister said that to stop this problem, measures have been taken in the past, including a self-regulation mechanism, but the menace of online money games continued to rise.

Vaishnaw said the trail of money spent in online games has also been seen aiding money laundering and terror activities.

Vaishnaw said the Opposition's non-participation in the discussion over the bill reflects that they are only interested in their political objectives and not interested in talking about the welfare of youth and middle-class families. The bill was approved by the Upper House after rejecting amendments moved by Opposition members.

Online money games are played by depositing money in expectation of winning monetary and other rewards.

The bill proposes that any person offering an online money gaming service in violation of the stipulated provisions will face imprisonment of up to three years or a fine that may extend to Rs 1 crore or both.

The provisions also stipulate imprisonment of up to two years and or a fine of up to Rs 50 lakh, or both, for those indulging in advertisements in contravention of rules.

Several online real money gaming platforms masquerade themselves as a "game of skills" to differentiate themselves from gambling or betting.

The bill ends the scope of online money gaming players from skirting the ban in the pretext of being a skill-based game platform.

RS adopts motion to nominate 10 members to joint panel

The Rajya Sabha on Thursday adopted a motion to nominate 10 members to the Joint Committee of

both Houses which will scrutinise the three bills for the removal of prime minister, chief ministers, and ministers on arrest for 30 consecutive days on serious charges, amid vociferous protests by the Opposition.

The Upper House adopted a motion to concur with the recommendation of the Lok Sabha in joining the 31-member Joint Committee to look into these bills. 21 members will be from the Lok Sabha.

The motion to send members to the Joint Committee was adopted by the Upper House with voice vote, amid stiff opposition and protests by the Opposition, which also tore copies of the draft legislation and strongly protested in the Well of the House against the move.

As Deputy Chairman Harivansh called Home Minister Amit Shah for moving the motion to concur the recommendation of the Lok Sabha to refer the bills to Joint Committee and nominate the members, Opposition benches were on their feet and were shouting slogans.

They also raised slogans against the Home Minister and TMC members and some members of the Congress trooped into the Well holding placards against Shah. Later, some Opposition members including Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge tore a copy of the motion in the House.

Lok Sabha lost 84 hrs

New Delhi: Parliament's Monsoon session, which concluded on Thursday, saw frequent disruptions that overshadowed legislative business, with the House losing over 84 hours to forced adjournments, the highest in the 18th Lok Sabha.

The month-long session that started on July 21 had 21 sittings with 37 hours and 7 minutes of effective business, according to the Lok Sabha secretariat.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said that all parties had decided at the beginning of the session that discussions would be held for 120 hours in this session.

"The Business Advisory Committee also agreed to this. But due to continuous deadlock and planned disruptions, we could barely work for 37 hours in this session," he underlined.

Despite the disruptions, the government managed to introduce 14 Bills and secure passage of 12 key legislation, including the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, 2025, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2025, and the National Sports Governance Bill, 2025.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju told reporters after the conclusion of the session that it was successful and fruitful for the country and the government, but unsuccessful and harmful for the Opposition.

Among the Bills introduced were the three seeking the removal of the prime minister, chief ministers and ministers arrested for 30 days on serious criminal charges, which were introduced on Wednesday by Home Minister Amit Shah.



Members of Nomadic community during a protest over the report of Justice HN Nagamohan Das Commission on internal reservation for Scheduled Castes in Karnataka on Thursday.

Pic: PTI

Kishtwar Cloudburst Search intensifies to trace 33

Chisoti (JK): The multi-agency search operation to trace 33 missing persons in cloudburst-hit Kishtwar district in Jammu and Kashmir entered the eighth day on Thursday, officials said.

The death toll in the natural calamity that struck the last motorable village en route to the Machail Mata temple on August 14 during the yatra stands at 65, including three CISF personnel and one Special Police Officer (SPO) of J-K Police. Over 100 people were injured.

"The search operation by multiple agencies has been intensified to trace 33 missing persons. Operations are underway at the most affected sites by separate teams," a senior official told PTI.

The focus of the operation has been laid at three locations -- the major impact site near a langar (community kitchen), the area where houses were washed away, and the Bhuat nallah in Gulabgarh-Paddar areas.

Joint teams of police, Army, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), CISF, Border Roads Organisation (BRO), civil administration, and local volunteers are engaged in the rescue efforts at these sites.

A team comprising NDRF, SDRF, and police personnel is conducting a search operation along the entire 22-km stretch of the stream from Chisoti to Gulabgarh, following the recovery of two bodies downstream over the past two days, the official said.

Specialised heavy-duty trucks have been deployed in the Chisoti to assist in rescue operations. Authorities are using such vehicles to ensure swift evacuation and provide relief in the affected areas, they said.

The rescue teams from the 13th Battalion of NDRF are actively carrying out search operations along the river-nallah bed, work-

ing tirelessly to locate and retrieve missing persons.

They are also removing large boulders and debris to ensure a thorough and safe search. Heavy machinery, including earth movers and sniffer dogs, are being used to sift through the debris.

The officials said while the death toll stands at 65, some body parts of the missing people have been recovered, and the DNA identification process has begun.

Senior IAS and IPS officials, deputed on the directions of Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, are supervising the operation on the ground.

The flash floods triggered by the cloudburst left a trail of destruction, flattening a makeshift market and a langar site for the annual Machail Mata yatra, damaging 16 houses and government buildings, three temples, four water mills, a 30-metre-long bridge, besides over a dozen vehicles.

Jinping attends 60th anniversary of TAR

By K J M Varma

Beijing: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday attended the 60th founding anniversary celebrations of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) at the Potala Palace square in Tibet's provincial capital Lhasa.

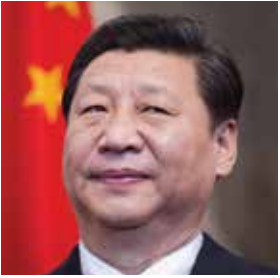
Xi joined around 20,000 local officials and people from several ethnic groups and walks of life in the celebration, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Potala Palace was the traditional winter residence of the Dalai Lamas - Tibetan spiritual leaders - and served as the centre of political and spiritual authority in Tibet for centuries.

The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) was officially established by China in 1965 after it annexed the region in 1950. China calls Tibet Xizang.

The Dalai Lama, along with a large group of Tibetans fled to India in 1959 and has lived in Himachal Pradesh's Dharamshala ever since.

The monk celebrated his 90th birthday last month during which he said his



successor will be chosen by Gaden Phodrang Trust founded by him in 2015.

China has rejected the Dalai Lama's succession, insisting that any future heir must receive its seal of approval.

Xi arrived in Lhasa on Wednesday, his second visit to Tibet since he came to power in 2012. The visit makes him the only Chinese President to have visited Tibet twice.

In his address to local officials after his arrival, Xi stressed the importance of upholding the leadership of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) over work related to Tibet.

Without referring to the Dalai Lama, Xi emphasised the need to promote two-way exchanges between Tibet and other parts of China to guide Tibetan Buddhism in adapting it-

self to socialist society.

Since he came to power, Xi has advocated the sinicisation of all religions including Buddhism and Islam.

Last month, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning spoke to the media about the sinicisation of religions being advocated by the CPC.

"Sinicisation of religion is not about restricting religious practice; rather, all religions must adapt to the social, cultural and historical context of the country. Tibetan Buddhism in China is a prime example of a religion that has integrated Chinese characteristics, exemplifying the process of sinicisation," she said.

China's governance of Tibet has historically raised concerns in the Himalayan region and the world, with human rights groups highlighting restrictions on Tibetan Buddhism and cultural practices, Tibetan language, limitations on religious activities, and stricter security measures which intensified after unrest in 2008.

China denies these accusations.



Divers monitor one of the ancient artifacts, unknown headless statue, as it is lifted out of the water in Abu Qir Bay at the Mediterranean city of Alexandria in Egypt on Thursday.

Pic: PTI

FBI's most wanted arrested in India

New York: A woman on the FBI's '10 Most Wanted Fugitive' list was arrested in India on charges of killing her six-year-old son, according to officials.

The arrest of Cindy Rodriguez Singh, 40, was the fourth "Top 10 Most Wanted" capture in seven months, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Kash Patel said.

He credited law enforcement partners in Texas, the US Justice Department, and authorities in India for their coordination leading

to Singh's arrest, who was wanted on state charges of killing her son.

She fled the US in 2023 to evade prosecution.

The FBI had offered a reward of up to USD 250,000 for information that could lead to her arrest.

Fox News reported that Singh was arrested in India by the FBI, in coordination with Indian authorities and INTERPOL. She has been transported to the US and will be turned over to Texas authorities, it said. In March 2023, authori-

ties in Texas conducted a welfare check for Singh's special needs son Noel Rodriguez-Alvarez, who had not been seen since October 2022. Singh allegedly lied about his whereabouts, indicating that the child was in Mexico with his biological father and had been there since November 2022.

Two days later, she boarded a flight to India with her husband - the boy's Indian-origin stepfather - and six other juvenile children and never returned.

Astronaut Nair likens Shubhanshu to 'Ram'

New Delhi: Astronaut Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair on Thursday likened Shubhanshu Shukla's return to India after a successful space mission to the festival of Diwali, which is celebrated to mark Lord Ram's return to Ayodhya.

Group Captain Nair, who was the backup astronaut for Shukla for the Axiom-4 mission, also likened himself to Laxman, the younger brother of Lord Ram.

"A few months from now, we will celebrate Di-

wali. That's the time when Shri Ram entered Ayodhya. We are here right now with Ram that is Shux, and I can call myself Laxman. It feels like Diwali today, and all our countrymen are here to receive us," Nair said at a press conference here.

Shukla, who had the call-sign 'Shux' during the Axiom-4 mission, and Nair returned to India earlier this week after nearly a year-long stay in the US, during which they trained for the mission to the International Space Station (ISS).



"Remember, I am elder to Shux. But I would love to be Laxman to this Ram every day. Ram and Laxman got a lot of help from

the Vanar Sena, that is our fantastic ISRO team. Thank you, Hanuman and the team," Nair said, referring to ISRO Chairman V

Narayanan and other scientists.

Nair also made light of questions on whether he felt that he should have travelled on the Axiom-4 mission instead of Shukla.

"I am an Indian Air Force fighter pilot. So, we learn something as a fighter pilot. It's not just important to lead. It's very important to be a good wingman," Nair said.

"The reason that a person is able to drop his missile is because 'his six' is taken

care of," Nair said, referring to the term used in the armed forces to have someone's back.

"It is even more important that you have made a very great contribution to make sure that what he has done has been part of your efforts also. More importantly, I say with full conviction that the reason we are ahead of the rest of the world is because we have got this consciousness," said Nair, who is among the four astronaut-designates short-listed for the Gaganyaan mission. -PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Border trade between India and China through Lipulekh pass had commenced in 1954 and has been going on for decades.

As regards territorial claims, our position remains that such claims are neither justified nor based on historical facts and evidence."

Randhir Jaiswal, Spokesperson, External Affairs Ministry



Ramalingam Murder Case

NIA searches nine locations, arrests another accused

New Delhi: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has searched nine locations in Tamil Nadu and arrested one more accused in connection with the 2019 Ramalingam murder case linked with the banned Popular Front of India (PFI) terror outfit, an official statement issued on Thursday said.

NIA teams searched these nine locations in two districts in the state Wednesday morning to trace absconding proclaimed offenders in the case, relating to the brutal killing of Ramalingam, aimed at spreading fear and communal hatred among the people, it said.

During the searches, the NIA arrested Imthathullah, proprietor of Ambur Biryani Hotels, Kodaikanal, for “knowingly and voluntarily harbouring” absconding proclaimed offenders in his hotel outlets from 2021 onwards, the statement said.

Ramalingam, a Pattali-MakkalKatchi (PMK) party worker, was hacked to death on February 5, 2019 in PakuvinayakamThoppu, Thanjavur, allegedly by members and office bearers of the PFI.

The agency filed a chargesheet in August 2019 against 18 accused before a special NIA court in Poomalallee, Chennai. Of them, six had been declared absconders. One of the absconders, Rahman



Sadiq, was arrested in 2021, while Abdul Majeed and Shahul were traced to Poombarai in Kodaikanal last year. In November 2024, the NIA also arrested another harbourer, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who was named as the 19th accused in the case.

Incriminating documents and digital devices etc, were also seized during the searches conducted in Dindugal and Tenkasi districts, the probe agency said in the statement.

Of the three proclaimed offenders allegedly harboured by Imthathullah, two, identified as Abdul Majeed and Shahul Hameed, were arrested by the NIA on January 25 this

year, while the third proclaimed offender Mohammed Ali Jinnah is still absconding, it said.

The NIA, which took over the investigation from the Tamil Nadu Police in March 2019, had chargesheeted 18 accused before a court in Chennai in August 2019. Of these, six were absconders.

In 2021, NIA arrested one of the six absconders, identified as Rahman Sadiq.

In November 2024, the agency successfully traced Abdul Majeed and Shahul to Poombarai area in Kodaikanal, Dindigul district, and arrested an alleged harbourer, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who was named as

the 19th accused in the case.

There are two accused with almost similar names -- Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Mohammed Ali Jinnah -- involved in the case and one of them has been arrested and the other remains absconding, officials said.

The NIA has announced a reward of Rs 5 lakh each for information about the other Mohammed Ali Jinnah and two other absconding proclaimed offenders - Burhanudeen and Nafeel Hasan -- all belonging to the Thanjavur district and formerly office bearers of PFI, according to the statement.

-PTI

Sudarshan Reddy files nomination for VP polls

New Delhi: Opposition's vice-presidential candidate B Sudarshan Reddy on Thursday filed his nomination papers for the elections to the second highest office, and asserted the contest is not just about one individual, but about reaffirming the idea of India where Parliament functions with integrity, dissent is respected and institutions serve people with independence.

The former Supreme Court judge filed his nomination in the presence of top Opposition leaders, including Congress' Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar, SP leader Ramgopal Yadav, DMK's Tiruchi Siva, TMC's Satabdi Roy, Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Sanjay Raut, CPI(M)'s John Brittas among others.

In a statement after filing nomination, Reddy vowed that if elected, he would discharge the role of vice president with impartiality, dignity, and a steadfast commitment to dialogue and decorum.

"Today, I had the honour of filing my nomination papers for the office of the vice president of India as a joint candidate of the Opposition parties. I did so with a deep sense of humility, responsibility, and unwavering commitment to the values enshrined in our Constitution," Reddy said in a statement.

"This election is not merely about one individual. It is about reaffirming the idea of India as envisaged by our founders -- an India where Parliament functions with integrity, where dissent is respected."

-PTI



Animal lovers protest against the SC order directing authorities in Delhi-NCR to start relocating stray dogs from streets to shelters, at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Thursday.

Pic: PTI

Haryana Teacher Death Cremation held after CBI probe announcement

Chandigarh: The last rites of a 19-year-old teacher, whose death will be probed by the CBI, were held in Bhiwani on Thursday.

Manisha's body was found in a field in Bhiwani on August 13. She had gone missing on August 11 after leaving the school, purportedly to enquire about admission at a nursing college.

On Thursday, the Haryana government extended the suspension of mobile internet, bulk SMS (excluding banking and mobile recharge) and all dongle services provided on mobile networks except voice calls in the Bhiwani district for 24 hours from 11 am.

On Wednesday, Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini had said that based

on the demand of the woman teacher's family, the government would hand over the probe into her death to the CBI.

After a third autopsy was conducted at AIIMS, Delhi on Wednesday afternoon, her body reached Bhiwani late last evening. Earlier, the post-mortem examinations had been conducted at the Bhiwani Civil Hospital and the PGIMS Hospital in Rohtak.

On Thursday morning, her last rites were conducted with a large number of people in her native village Dhani Laxman in Bhiwani attending the cremation.

Manisha's father Sanjay was inconsolable as the funeral pyre was lit.

Earlier, the Haryana government had ordered the suspension of mobile internet, bulk SMS and

dongle services in Bhiwani and Charkhi Dadri districts for 48 hours from 11 am on Tuesday amid public outrage over the death of the teacher. On Thursday, the government extended the suspension of mobile internet only in the Bhiwani district.

According to the order issued by Additional Chief Secretary, Home, Sumita Misra, "This order is being extended to prevent any disturbance of peace and public order only in the jurisdiction of district Bhiwani for next 24 hours, that is from 11:00 hrs of August 21..."

Earlier, the teacher's death caused massive outrage, with people blocking roads in the district, and the opposition parties, including the Congress, demanding a CBI probe.

Presidential Reference Hearing Judicial activism shouldn't become terrorism: CJI

New Delhi: Judicial activism should not become judicial terrorism, Chief Justice of India B R Gavai said on Thursday during the presidential reference hearing which raised constitutional questions on whether the court can impose timelines for governors and the president to deal with bills passed by state assemblies.

The chief justice's remark came when Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, told a bench that elected people who have a lot of experience should never be undermined.

"We never said anything about the elected people. I have always said that judicial activism should never become judicial terrorism or judicial adventurism," the CJI told Mehta.

The bench also comprised Justices Surya Kant, Vikram Nath, P S Narasimha and A S Chandurkar.

Mehta resumed his submissions by referring to various verdicts of the apex court on powers of the governor as the hearing entered its third consecutive day.



At the outset, the solicitor general said he is looking forward to senior advocate Kapil Sibal's submission on the presidential reference as he has enormous experience in public life and has also been in governance as well as a parliamentarian.

"Elected people belonging to whichever political party have to nowadays respond to voters directly. People now directly ask questions from them. Unlike 20-25 years back when things were different, voters are aware and cannot be taken for a ride," Mehta said.

He said "withholding assent" by the governor is a standalone and complete function of the constitutional functionary as provided under Article 200 of the Constitution.

On Wednesday, the top court said the governor cannot send bills to the

president for consideration when presented to him for the second time after the state assembly has cleared it.

The top court, while responding to the preliminary objections raised by the Tamil Nadu and Kerala governments on maintainability of the presidential reference, has said it would exercise its advisory jurisdiction as it was not sitting in the appellate jurisdiction.

In May, President Droupadi Murmu exercised powers under Article 143(1) to know from the top court whether judicial orders could impose timelines for the exercise of discretion by the president while dealing with bills passed by state assemblies.

The Centre said in its written submission that imposing fixed timelines on governors and the president to act on bills passed by a state assembly would amount to one organ of the government assuming powers not vested in it by the Constitution, and lead to "constitutional disorder".

-PTI



TMC MP Mahua Moitra (right) and Congress MP Saleng A Sangma take a selfie during the Monsoon session of Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday.

Pic: PTI

Woman set ablaze at home

Kannur: A 39 year-old woman died on Thursday after being set on fire by a man known to her in this north Kerala district, a police official said.

The victim was set ablaze by the accused at her residence in Uruvanchal, near Kuttiyattor after he trespassed into the house, police said.

According to the official, Jijesh, set Praveena, wife of Ajeesh, on fire at her home on Wednesday.

The woman, who suffered over 70 per cent burns, was rushed to Kannur Government Medical College Hospital in Paryaram, where she died on Thursday morning, said police. Jijesh, who also suffered severe burns, is admitted to the hospital.

As per the FIR, Jijesh trespassed into the house and set Praveena on fire.

The neighbours said that Praveena's father-in-law and mother-in-law, along with the sister-in-law's children, were at the house at the time of the incident.

Her husband, Ajeesh, is abroad. Police sources said that Jijesh first reached the doorstep and asked for water.

Centre provides 'Z' security cover to Gupta

New Delhi: The Union government has accorded 'Z' category VIP security cover to Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta following an attack on her, official sources said on Thursday.

Gupta, her official residence and the Camp Office on Raj Niwas Marg in the Civil Lines area of the national capital will also be secured by the VIP Security Group (VSG) of the paramilitary force that also provides protection to Union Home Minister Amit Shah and the Gandhi family of the Congress party.

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) took charge of the Delhi chief minister's security on Thursday following the direction of the Union home ministry.

She has been granted 'Z' category central security cover following a threat perception report prepared by central intelligence agencies, sources said. Gupta, 51, was earlier being provided a top-level security cover by Delhi Police.

She was attacked during a 'Jan Sunwai' programme at her camp office on Wednesday morning, with her office terming the as-

Accused sent to 5 days' police custody

New Delhi: The man accused of attacking Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta during a 'Jan Sunwai' programme at her Camp Office in Civil Lines on Wednesday has been sent to five days of police custody, court sources said. They said the accused, Sakriya Rajeshbhai Khimjibhai (41), was produced at the house of a magistrate in southwest Delhi's Dwarka late at night. The accused was not produced before any magistrate in the Tis Hazari court premises, sources said. Police have registered a case against the accused, a resident of Rajkot (Gujarat) under Section 109(1) (attempt to murder) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). He has also been booked for allegedly assaulting and obstructing public servant from discharging his duty.

sault a part of a "well-planned conspiracy to kill her".

A team of 22-25 armed CRPF commandos will be on the CM's protection duty round-the-clock, they said.

-PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Influx of outsiders from Myanmar is real and ongoing. The Assam Rifles collected biometrics of those who have been entering India illegally from Myanmar. It is reassuring that these individuals are being kept under close watchand monitored under strict authority."

N Biren Singh, Former CM, Manipur

'Someone in our own rocket will travel to space'

New Delhi: Excited after a successful mission to the International Space Station (ISS), Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla on Thursday hoped someone would very soon travel to space "from our own capsule, from our rocket, from our soil".

Addressing a press conference here, Group Captain Shukla said the first-hand experience from the ISS mission was invaluable and a lot better than any training.

He also said India looks "saare jahaan se achcha

(better than the entire world)" even today -- words first used by Indian astronaut Rakesh Sharma after his space mission in 1984.

On his Axiom-4 Mission, Shukla said the experience from the ISS mission would be very useful for India's own Gaganyaan mission, and he learnt a lot in the past year as part of his mission.

"No matter how much training you have done, even after that, when you sit in the rocket and the engines ignite, when they catch fire, I think it is a



very different feeling. "I had not imagined how it would feel, and I was actually running behind the rocket for the first few seconds, and it took me some time to catch up to it. From that moment until the time

we splashed down, the experience was unbelievable. It was so exciting and so amazing that I have really been struggling to find words to convey it to you, so that you can live that experience through my words," he said.

At the press conference, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said the Department of Space has been around for nearly 70 years, and officially, the ISRO was established in 1969.

".... why all this had to happen only in the last few years, why it couldn't have

happened in the last five, six decades. We have started following the strategies which are followed by the rest of the world. Now, our benchmarks are global benchmarks, our strategies are global, and the parameters that we are seeking to live up to are global," he said.

Group Captain Prasanth B Nair, who is part of India's Gaganyaan crew, said, "A few months from now, we are going to have Diwali. That is the time when Ramji entered Ayodhya. Over here right now,

if I can call myself Lakshman... even though I am older than 'Shuks' (Shukla), I would love to be Lakshman to this Ram any day."

"But let's remember Ram and Lakshman got a lot of help from the entire 'vanar sena', that is our fantastic ISRO team... otherwise it would not have been possible," he said.

Shukla thanked the government, ISRO and everyone else who worked hard to successfully execute the mission.

GoM backs GST rejig, opposition questions Centre

New Delhi: A panel of ministers from different states on Thursday in principle approved the Centre's proposed sweeping GST reforms through rate cuts, but some opposition-ruled states wanted to know the revenue loss from the move and how that would be bridged.

The Group of Ministers, headed by Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary, discussed the Centre's proposal of reducing the number of slabs under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) to 2 (5 and 18 per cent) from 4 (5, 12, 18, and 28 per cent). The Centre has also proposed a 40 per cent rate for 5-7 select goods.

While the GoM was in favour of rate and slab rejig if it benefited the common man, some members wanted ultra-luxury items, like high-end cars, to be subject to an additional levy on top of the special 40 per cent tax.

Recommendations of the six-member panel, which has 3 members from BJP-ruled states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, and an equal number from opposition-ruled states of Karnataka (Congress), Kerala (Left Front) and West Bengal (TMC), will go to the high-powered GST Council, which will take the final call on the reforms.

"The GoM has decided to accept the two proposals of the Centre," Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary said. The proposal of the Centre



to remove the 12 and 28 per cent slabs was accepted, and we have given recommendations," Choudhary said.

Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna said all states welcomed the Centre's proposal, saying it is in the interest of the common man. Ultra-luxury goods, including ultra-luxury cars, and sin goods will fall in the 40 per cent tax bracket.

"Some states demand that states should be compensated for revenue loss upon implementation of the new rate structure. The revenue loss will be calculated," Khanna said.

West Bengal Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya said the Centre's proposal presented before the GoM on rate rationalisation did not include the revenue loss that is going to accrue on account of rate and slab changes.

"We have said we are okay with any rate rationalisation proposal, which is pro-people, but we should also know what is

the revenue loss that we are going to suffer. Because, ultimately, if a state suffers any loss, then it boils down to the sufferance of the common man. The GST Council will discuss the rate proposal item by item," she said.

Bhattacharya said she has suggested that Section (1) of the GST Act be amended so that a levy can be imposed over and above the 40 per cent maximum permissible rate to ensure that the tax incidence on ultra-luxury and sin goods remains the same even after the slab changes and once the compensation cess ends. Currently, a GST Compensation cess is levied on select goods, such as tobacco products, aerated drinks and motor vehicles at varying rates. Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said rate rationalisation must be balanced by ensuring that the revenues of the states are protected. Otherwise, the welfare schemes meant for poor people, the middle class and infrastructure projects will suffer. -PTI

Stock markets extend winning run

Mumbai: Stock markets extended the winning run to the sixth consecutive day on Thursday, with benchmark Sensex closing higher by nearly 143 points on buying in blue-chip shares ICICI Bank and Reliance Industries.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 142.87 points or 0.17 per cent to settle at 82,000.71 in a restricted trade. During the day, it rallied 373.33 points or 0.45 per cent to 82,231.17. As many as 14 Sensex shares closed higher, while 16 ended with losses.

The 50-share NSE Nifty rose by 33.20 points or 0.13 per cent to 25,083.75.

Among Sensex firms, Bajaj Finserv, ICICI Bank, Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finance, Larsen & Toubro and Bharat Electronics were the major gainers.

However, Power Grid, Eternal, Hindustan Unilever and Adani Ports were among the laggards.

Market experts stated that the proposed GST reforms and a recent credit rating upgrade have bolstered investors' confidence.

A Group of Ministers on GST rate rationalisation has accepted the Centre's proposal to move to a two-slab structure of 5 per cent and 18 per cent. The GST Council is likely to take a final call on the proposal next month. Goods and Services Tax is a 4-tier structure of 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi and Shanghai's SSE Composite index settled in positive territory, while Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng ended lower. Markets in Europe were trading in negative territory.



Women shop for various items during preparation ahead of the 'Ganesh Chaturthi' festival in Thane on Wednesday.

Pic: PTI

Must consolidate engagement in economic sphere: EAM

New Delhi: India and Russia should come out with a creative and innovative approach to confront complex geopolitical challenges, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Wednesday amid increasing strains in New Delhi's ties with Washington over its purchase of Russian crude oil.

Jaishankar made the remarks at a meeting with Russia's First Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov in Moscow.

In his televised opening remarks, the external affairs minister said India and Russia should continuously diversify and expand their "agenda" of cooperation including by diversifying the bilateral trade basket and through more joint ventures.

"Doing more and doing differently should be our mantras," he said.

The comments came against the backdrop of a downturn in relations between India and the US af-

ter President Donald Trump doubled tariffs on Indian goods to a whopping 50 per cent including a 25 per cent additional duties for India's purchase of Russian crude oil.

The external affairs minister arrived in Moscow on Tuesday on a three-day visit.

The Jaishankar-Manturov talks were held under the framework of India - Russia Inter-Governmental Commission for Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological, and Cultural Cooperation (IRIGC-TEC).

The meeting was aimed at preparing grounds for Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India later this year.

Elaborating on the importance of India-Russia ties in the context of current geopolitical upheaval, Jaishankar made specific suggestions to further consolidate the engagement, especially in the economic sphere.



"The various working groups and sub groups could perhaps take a more creative and innovative approach towards their respective agendas. The challenges posed by the larger landscape that I mentioned require us to do so," he said.

The external affairs minister said both sides should continuously diversify and expand their agenda through mutual consultation.

"This will help us tap into full potential of our trade and investment ties. We should not get stuck on a beaten track," he said.

Jaishankar also called for setting "quantifiable

targets and specific timelines" to achieve more in expanding the ties between the two countries.

"I would urge that we set ourselves some quantifiable targets and specific timelines so that we challenge ourselves to achieve more, perhaps even surpass what we set out to do," he said.

"Each working Group and each sub Group could apply itself to setting of targets and see what we could achieve by the next session of the IRIGC-TEC," he said.

"For example, if you are looking at trade barriers, could we pick a certain number and make a commitment? If we have agreed to a certain proposal, can we set a firm timeline for that?" he said.

Jaishankar also pitched for a "coordination mechanism" between the business forum and the different working groups of the IRIGC to ensure a two-way flow of ideas. -AP

Rapido faces action for misleading ads

New Delhi: Consumer protection authority CCPA has imposed a penalty of Rs 10 lakh on ride-hailing platform Rapido for misleading advertisements and unfair trade practices, the consumer affairs ministry said on Thursday.

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) also directed Rapido to reimburse customers who used the company's "Auto in 5 minutes or Get Rs 50" offer but did not receive the promised compensation.

The watchdog took action after examining Rapido's advertisements that promised "Auto in 5 minutes or Get Rs 50" and "Guaranteed Auto," and found them to be false and misleading to consumers.

Data from the National Consumer Helpline showed complaints against Rapido surged to 1,224 between June 2024 and July 2025, compared with 575 complaints in the previous 14-month period.

The CCPA's investigation revealed that disclaimers in Rapido's advertisements were displayed in extremely small, unreadable fonts. The promised Rs 50 benefit was not actual

currency but "Rapido coins" worth "up to Rs 50," which could only be used for bike rides and expired within seven days.

The authority found that while advertisements prominently claimed the guarantee, terms and conditions stated the assurance was offered by individual drivers, not Rapido itself - an attempt to shift liability away from the company.

"Such restrictions materially reduced the value of the offer and effectively compelled consumers to use another service from Rapido within an unreasonably short time," the ministry said in a statement.

According to the Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements 2022, disclaimers cannot contradict main claims or conceal material information. The CCPA said Rapido's advertisements violated these requirements by omitting key limitations without equal prominence. Rapido operates in over 120 cities and ran the misleading campaign for approximately 548 days in multiple regional languages. -PTI



Students during Techno India University's Convocation 2025, at Biswa Bangla Convention Centre in Kolkata on Wednesday.

Pic: PTI

Retail inflation for workers ease

New Delhi: Retail inflation for farm and rural workers eased to 0.77 per cent and 1.01 per cent in July from 1.42 per cent and 1.73 per cent, respectively, in June, according to data released by the Labour Ministry on Thursday.

The All-India Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labourers increased by 1.23 points to 135.31 in July 2025, while the index for Rural Labourers increased by 1.30 points,

reaching 135.66, a Labour Ministry statement said.

The Food Index increased by 1.94 points for Agricultural Labourers (AL) and 2.16 points for Rural Labourers (RL) in July 2025.

According to the statement, the year-on-year inflation rate for agricultural labourers and rural labourers stood at 0.77 per cent and 1.01 per cent, respectively, in July 2025.

The food inflation in July 2025 stood at (-) 1.56

per cent (contracted) for AL and (-) 1.13 (contracted) per cent for RL.

The Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour & Employment, releases Consumer Price Index Numbers for Agricultural Labourers and Rural Labourers with the base year 2019=100 for the month of July 2025.

These indices are based on data collected from a set of 787 sample villages across 34 States/UTs.

-PTI

Parl panel bats for affordable cancer insurance

New Delhi: A parliamentary panel has recommended that cancer diagnostic packages with standardised pricing should be developed under government-regulated health insurance schemes to enable wider inclusion.

The Committee on Petitions, Rajya Sabha, headed by Narain Dass Gupta in its 163rd report presented on Wednesday, also recommends that the price caps enforced by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) such as the existing 30 per cent

trade margin cap on 42 essential anti-cancer drugs should be extended to cover cancer vaccines, immunotherapy, and oral chemotherapy.

"This expansion of regulatory oversight is essential to containing insurer costs and making cancer insurance products more affordable and accessible to a wider population segment," the Committee said.

It also recommended that more cancer hospitals equipped with advanced medical technology be established through govern-



ment funding, private sector participation, and Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models.

"These facilities should be empanelled within insurer networks to enable the provision of cashless

services to patients. The formulation of clearly defined treatment packages will further assist insurers in standardising costs and passing on financial benefits to policyholders," the panel said.

The Committee also recommended policy level interventions to integrate cancer screening within major health schemes such as PMJAY, and to include cancer diagnostic tests under CGHS and ECHS. This would enable optimal utilisation of private sector diagnostic infrastructure for public health objectives, the panel said.

The Committee observed that ensuring accessible and affordable cancer care necessitates a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder strategy un-

derpinned by strong governmental policy support.

It underscored the critical need for effective public-private partnerships, the adoption of standardised treatment protocols, and the expansion of insurance coverage to reduce the financial burden on patients.

Additionally, it highlighted the importance of strengthening healthcare infrastructure and enhancing public awareness as integral components of a resilient cancer care ecosystem. -PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Need to scale up India's handloom and handicraft exports. Efforts are underway to raise the monthly income of women artisans to at least Rs 15,000-20,000 per month. Around one crore people in India are engaged in the handloom and handicraft sector."



Giriraj Singh, Union Minister, Textiles

Ukraine expects clarity soon on US guarantees

Kyiv: Russia launched one of its biggest aerial attacks this year at Ukraine, firing 574 drones and 40 missiles overnight, the Ukrainian Air Force said Thursday. The attack mostly targeted western regions of the country, it said. The strikes killed at least one person and injured 15 others, according to officials.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said Russia struck a "major American electronics manufacturer" in western Ukraine. He provided no further details.

Western parts of Ukraine are far from the battlefield's front line in the east and south of the country. Much of the military aid provided by Ukraine's Western allies is believed to be transported and stored there.

It was Russia's third largest aerial attack this year in terms of the number of drones fired and the eighth-largest in terms of missiles, according to official figures.

The strikes occurred during a renewed US-led effort to reach a peace settlement in the three-year war following Russia's invasion of its neighbour.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy condemned the attack, saying it was carried out "as if nothing were changing at all."

Moscow has shown no signs of pursuing meaningful negotiations to end the



war and urged the international community to respond with stronger pressure, including tougher sanctions and tariffs, he said.

Russia "wasted several cruise missiles against an American business," he said, noting it was a regular civilian enterprise producing domestic utilities, such as coffee machines. "And that too became a target for Russia. Very telling."

Earlier, Zelenskyy said Ukraine will hold intensive meetings to understand what kind of security guarantees its allies are willing to provide after receiving signals that the United States would back reinvigorated discussions seeking an end to war.

The details are being hammered out among national security advisers and military officials and Zelenskyy thinks they will take clearer shape within 10 days. He then expects to be ready to hold direct talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin for the first

time since the full-scale invasion.

The talks could also be conducted in a trilateral format alongside US President Donald Trump, Zelenskyy said.

"We want to have an understanding of the security guarantees architecture within seven to 10 days. And based on that understanding, we aim to hold a trilateral meeting. That was my logic," Zelenskyy said, speaking to reporters Wednesday after his trip to Washington along with Europe's top leaders.

"President Trump suggested a slightly different logic: a trilateral meeting through a bilateral one," Zelenskyy said. "But then we all agreed that, in any case, we continue working on the security guarantees, establishing this approximate framework, similar to Article 5. And what we have today is political support for this."

Article 5 is NATO's common defence guarantee under which an attack on one

member is considered an attack on them all.

A venue for the meeting is being discussed with Switzerland, Austria and Turkey as possibilities, Zelenskyy added.

Kyiv still does not have clarity over what kind of support it can expect from allies. A coalition of more than 30 countries have in a standstill when the US remained ambivalent about its role.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said working on security arrangements in Ukraine without Moscow's involvement would not work, according to state news agency RIA Novosti.

"We cannot agree with the fact that it is now proposed to resolve collective security issues without the Russian Federation. This will not work. We have already explained more than once that Russia does not overstate its interests, but we will ensure our legitimate interests firmly and harshly," Lavrov said at a news conference Wednesday.

Recent positive signals from Trump suggesting the US will support "Article 5-like" security guarantees and Ukraine's hopes to join the European Union have reinvigorated those discussions, Zelenskyy said.

-AP

Uganda-US strike deal on migrants

Kampala: Uganda has agreed a deal with the United States to take deported migrants on condition that the deportees should not have criminal records and not be unaccompanied minors, officials said Thursday.

The Ugandan foreign affairs ministry in a statement said the "two parties are working out the detailed modalities on how the agreement shall be implemented."

Uganda also expressed a preference that those brought into the country should be of African nationalities. It was not clear if the agreement had been signed but the ministry statement said it had been "concluded."



International Relations Minister Henry Okello Oryem told The Associated Press that while Uganda is known globally for its benevolent refugee policy, there are limits. And he questioned why the country would take people rejected by their own countries.

"We are talking about cartels: people who are unwanted in their own countries. How can we integrate them into local communities in Uganda?" he asked.

He said the government was in discussions about "visas, tariffs, sanctions, and related issues, not accepting illegal aliens from the US. That would be unfair to Ugandans."

In July, the US deported five men with criminal backgrounds to the southern African kingdom of Eswatini and sent eight more to South Sudan.

-AP



Waoarani Indigenous people lead a demonstration outside the Constitutional Court in Quito in Ecuador on Wednesday. Pic: AP/ PTI

Hurricane Erin picking up steam again

Rodanthe: Hurricane Erin began strengthening again Wednesday as it crept closer to the mid-Atlantic coast, its outer bands brushing North Carolina's Outer Banks as beaches closed across much of the US East Coast.

Forecasters expect the storm to peak going into Thursday and say it could intensify again as a major hurricane.

While Erin is unlikely to make landfall along the East Coast before turning farther out to sea, its outer edge is packing tropical force winds while approaching North Carolina's Outer Banks.

Water began pouring onto the main route connecting the barrier islands and around a handful of stilted homes precariously perched above the beach. By Wednesday evening, officials had closed Highway 12 on Hatteras Island as surge increased and waves were growing higher, while

Ocracoke Island's connection to its ferry terminal was cut off.

Authorities expect the largest swells during high tide will cut off villages and vacation homes on the Outer Banks and whip up life-threatening rip currents from Florida to New England.

New York City closed its beaches to swimming on Wednesday and Thursday. Some beaches in New Jersey, Maryland and Delaware also will be temporarily off-limits. The storm is expected to bring widespread, moderate coastal flooding to low-lying areas of Long Island and parts of New York City.

Off Massachusetts, Nantucket Island could see waves of more than 10 feet later this week. But the biggest threat remained along the Outer Banks where longtime residents didn't seem too concerned.

"I remember taking ca-

noes out of my front yard to get to school, so I don't think it's gonna be that bad," said Jacob Throne, who lives on Hatteras Island and works for surf shops.

Surfers flocked to the oceanfront in Virginia Beach, where Erin was supplying robust waves for the East Coast Surfing Championships and the kind of swells that many locals hadn't seen in awhile.

"We're notorious for not having waves," said Henry Thompson, who competed in the open long board event. "Usually we get a surf competition and it gets cancelled due to no waves or they just run it in really bad waves."

The championships will pause Thursday when Erin blows directly off the Virginia coast. But Thompson said he's expecting more hurricanes and good surfing in the coming months.

-AP

Bolsonaro had planned to seek asylum: Police

Brasilia: Brazil's federal police said that messages found on the telephone of embattled former president Jair Bolsonaro showed that at one point he wanted to flee to Argentina and request political asylum, according to documents seen Wednesday by the Associated Press.

Bolsonaro is currently awaiting a Supreme Court ruling about an alleged coup attempt and on Wednesday found out he might face another case as police formally accused him and one of his sons, Eduardo Bolsonaro, of obstruction of justice in connection with his pending trial.

The AP had access to the police investigation, messaging app exchanges, voice messages and reviewed the documents, which were sent to Brazil's Supreme Court.

The 170-page police report said that Bolsonaro had drafted a request for political asylum from Argentine President Javier Milei's government dated Feb 10, 2024. Bolsonaro saved the document two days after authorities searched his home and of-

fice as part of an investigation into an alleged coup plot.

In a 33-page letter addressed to Milei, Bolsonaro claimed he was being politically persecuted in Brazil.

"I, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, request political asylum from Your Excellency in the Republic of Argentina, under an urgent regime, as I find myself in a situation of political persecution in Brazil and fear for my life," the former Brazilian leader wrote.

Argentina's presidential spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Bolsonaro did not make comments about the investigation either.

On Feb 12, Bolsonaro reportedly spent two nights at the Hungarian Embassy in Brasilia, fueling speculation among critics that he may have been attempting to avoid arrest.

Brazilian federal police investigators also said in their report that Bolsonaro's decision to ignore precautionary measures established for his house arrest and spread content to his allies "sought to di-

rectly hit Brazilian democratic institutions, notably the Supreme Court and even Brazil's Congress".

With regards to Wednesday's obstruction of justice accusations, Eduardo Bolsonaro, a lawmaker who has lived in the United States, said in a statement that he "never aimed at interfering in any ongoing proceedings in Brazil."

He added the conversations with his father that are part of the investigation are "absolutely normal" and its publication has a political bias.

Silas Malafaia, an evangelical pastor who is a staunch ally of Bolsonaro's, was also targeted by police. He had his passport seized by investigators but was not formally accused of obstruction of justice.

Several messages exchanged between Bolsonaro and his son show their interest in praising US President Donald Trump to affect legal proceedings in Brazil. Last month, Trump imposed 50% tariffs on some Brazilian exports and claimed the trial of the former president was the main reason for his sanctions.

-AP



Vice President JD Vance eats a Shake Shack hamburger as he meets with members of the National Guard at Union Station in Washington on Wednesday. Pic: AP/ PTI

Nikki Haley warns Trump

New York: The US' priority should be to reverse the "downward spiral" in ties with India, Republican leader Nikki Haley has said, stressing that New Delhi must be treated as a "prized free and democratic" partner.

The Indian-American leader's remarks in an opinion piece in the Newsweek magazine on Wednesday came amid strain in ties between the two countries following President Donald Trump slapping 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods.

Haley said that few objectives are more critical to

the Trump administration's foreign policy goals of "outcompeting China and achieving peace through strength" than putting "US-India relations back on track".

For this, she said, "India must be treated like the prized free and democratic partner that it is—not an adversary like China", which, she said has so far avoided sanctions for its Russian oil purchases, despite being one of Moscow's "largest customers".

President Trump has doubled tariffs on Indian goods to a whopping 50 per

cent including a 25 per cent additional duties for India's purchase of Russian crude oil. Haley said if this disparity does not demand a closer look at US-India relations, the "realities of hard power should".

She said Washington's "most urgent priority should be to reverse the downward spiral" in bilateral ties with New Delhi.

"Scuttling 25 years of momentum with the only country that can serve as a counterweight to Chinese dominance in Asia would be a strategic disaster," she said.

-AP

Belarus, Iran to boost bilateral ties

Minsk: The leaders of Belarus and Iran signed new agreements on Wednesday to boost bilateral ties in key areas including defence, the two governments said.

Presidents Alexander Lukashenko and Masoud Pezeshkian signed a package of 13 documents in the Belarusian capital, Minsk.

Both governments have been placed under heavy sanctions, limiting potential trading partners. Pezeshkian said Iran would help Belarus to "neutralise" such measures, citing Tehran's decades of experience circumventing Western economic restrictions.

Lukashenko told Pezeshkian that Belarus was "ready to cooperate with you on all issues — from providing your country with food to military-technical cooperation," calling the Iranian president a "friend."

The two parties did not disclose any further details on how the countries intend to cooperate in the defence sector. Other areas covered by the agreement include industry and tourism, as well as joint initiatives in science, technology and education.

-AP

Access to Belarus' wood processing and chemical industry, as well as potash fertilisers, can all bring potential benefits to Iran.

The two presidents also said their countries would start work toward a strategic partnership treaty.

Lukashenko, a close ally of President Vladimir Putin, allowed Russia to use Belarusian territory as a staging ground for Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and later allowed the deployment of Russian tactical nuclear missiles.

Iran has supplied Russia with drones for use in the war, and Pezeshkian signed a strategic cooperation treaty with Putin in January, although it did not include a mutual defence clause.

The Iranian president's visit to Minsk has been postponed several times due to US strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. Lukashenko called the strikes on Iran's nuclear infrastructure "a serious threat to regional and international stability and security."

"We support Iran's legitimate right to develop peaceful nuclear energy," Lukashenko said.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The UN has seen a resurgence of activity by the IS in the Sahel and in West Africa the group has emerged as a prolific producer of terrorist propaganda and attracted foreign terrorist fighters."



Vladimir Voronkov, Head, UN Office of Counter-Terrorism

Mass grave yields children's belongings

Chemmani: A baby bottle, a squeaky toy, and a schoolbag are among items that have surfaced from a mass grave site in Sri Lanka's formerly war-torn northern region, along with 141 human skeletons, including some that appear to be of children of different ages.

The findings were made at a cremation ground in the Chemmani area near Jaffna town, the cultural heartland of the country's ethnic Tamil minority. But hardly any burials take place here, as Hindus most-

ly cremate their dead according to religious customs.

Excavations have been underway since June, after workers found human remains while digging to build an electric crematorium.

A pit test over nine days discovered 19 sets of human remains. Shallow burials of about 1.5 metres in a scattered and disorganised manner, and the absence of clothing, indicated the site was a mass grave, according to a report provided to a court in June.



Since the area was secured and declared a crime scene that month, a total of 141 skeletons have been dis-

covered within a 165-square-metre area.

About 135 of the bodies had no clothing, and only one set of adult clothing was identified. Tests confirmed that a skeleton found with a schoolbag was that of a girl between 4 and 6 years old. Toddlers' dresses, socks and footwear, tiny bead bangles and a baby powder tray were also recovered.

The identities of the dead and the cause and timing of their deaths are all unclear. But many think the victims could be civil-

ians who disappeared during Sri Lanka's civil war, which broke out in 1983 between government forces and ethnic Tamil rebels, who fought to create an independent homeland for the minority group. The war ended in 2009.

Several Tamil armed groups and an Indian peacekeeping mission were active in the region over the decades.

But attention has focused on the Sri Lankan military, which had a heavy presence for over a decade in Chemmani, as

the gateway to Jaffna town.

A 2003 report by Sri Lanka's Human Rights Commission said it investigated 281 complaints of missing persons from 1990 to 1998. Of these, three were found in prisons and later released, while the rest are still unaccounted for.

The report said the military was responsible for 243 cases, while the Tamil Tiger rebels were responsible for 25. The responsibility for 10 others is unknown. No children were listed as missing.

-AP

EDITORIAL

Gaming Gambit

India has long flirted with the idea of regulating online gaming. For years, the industry has grown in a regulatory grey zone, as state governments squabbled with courts over whether games like poker or fantasy sports constituted skill or chance. In April 2023 the IT ministry even introduced rules widely viewed as friendly to industry. Barely two years later, however, the government has executed a dramatic volte-face with the Lok Sabha now passing the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, 2025 within minutes of its introduction. It proposes sweeping bans on real-money gaming, harsh penalties for platforms and their celebrity promoters, and a central regulator to oversee the sector.

The abrupt reversal is justified by ministers on grounds of national security and social harm. They warn of widespread social costs like addiction, indebtedness and the exploitation of vulnerable young and poor players.

The bill is an awkward hybrid of promotion and prohibition. Its architects tout it as a framework to “regulate and promote” gaming. In reality, its provisions fall unevenly across four categories: esports, educational games, social gaming and real-money platforms. The first three are courted, even celebrated.

Real-money platforms, by contrast, are targeted with a legislative sledgehammer. A ‘prohibitions’ clause outlaws offering or even promoting such games. Banks and financial firms are forbidden from processing related transactions. Platforms caught violating the law could face fines of up to Rs. 1 crore and jail terms of three years; advertisers may be punished almost as severely.

Real-money games have been among the most lucrative segments of India’s digital economy. Instead, the law risks throttling its growth overnight.

India’s approach stands out globally. Other jurisdictions have sought to regulate rather than criminalise. In America and parts of Europe, licensing regimes, age restrictions and tax frameworks have sought to balance innovation with protection. In China, by contrast, regulators have repeatedly cracked down on both real-money games and time-wasting pastimes.

Gambling, online or offline, is a touchy subject across India’s political spectrum. Ruling-party strategists know that opposition to addictive money games plays well among parents and community groups, particularly when couched in terms of protecting the poor from predation. By marrying populist appeal with warnings of terrorist infiltration, the government has given itself a powerful justification for sweeping prohibitions.

Yet, a blanket ban is unlikely to stamp out real-money gaming. It is more likely to push the activity underground, into murkier offshore platforms beyond India’s legal reach. That would exacerbate the very national-security and tax concerns the bill claims to address.

The bill does get one thing right: it offers long-overdue recognition to esports and other non-monetary gaming. If nurtured wisely, the sector could offer jobs, investment and even national prestige. The legislation may score political points today. Whether it creates a safer, better regulated digital economy tomorrow is another game entirely.

SCIENTIFIC TEMPER

The Republic of Reason



By
Dr. Kishore Paknikar

As India turns 79, it is worth recalling that Article 51A(h) of the Constitution, added in the 42nd Amendment of 1976, calls upon every citizen “to develop the scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform.” This is no mere symbolic statement. It places a real responsibility on each of us to think critically, question openly and value evidence. In India, political freedom was never meant to stand apart from intellectual freedom. Our founding fathers linked self-rule with the liberation of the mind and the advancement of knowledge, knowing that true independence is measured not only by land or economy but by the ability to think and innovate without fear.

Science thrives best where there is freedom. Its method depends on questioning, testing, and rejecting old ideas when evidence demands it. A scientific claim that cannot be challenged is not science but dogma. In a democracy, the right to question and dissent is not only protected by law but also valued as part of the culture. Scientists can present radical ideas, publish their work for peer review and debate openly, knowing their worth will be judged by the strength of evidence rather than by status or influence.

History shows that science and free-

dom often grow together. The European Enlightenment, which triggered great advances in science and technology, flourished alongside political freedoms, open debate, and the printing press. The United States combined democratic ideals with scientific ambition, producing breakthroughs from electricity to the internet. Ancient India also had great centres like Nalanda and Takshashila, where scholars from across the world exchanged ideas in an atmosphere of intellectual openness.

While even authoritarian states have produced scientific achievements, they have struggled owing to lack of openness. The Soviet Union made giant leaps in space exploration and physics but damaged its biology for decades by enforcing the politically favoured but false ideas of Trofim Lysenko, who rejected genetics and promoted unscientific farming methods.

This led to failed crops, food shortages and the suppression of genuine genetic research. China has made rapid progress in fields like renewable energy, high-speed rail, and artificial intelligence, yet restrictions on free debate can slow its scientific self-correction. North Korea, despite an educated population, has isolated itself from the global scientific community and fallen far behind.

India’s own freedom struggle illustrates the deep link between liberty and scientific progress. Colonial rule restricted local institutions and kept higher education under tight control. Yet leaders of the nationalist movement saw science as a tool for dignity and self-reliance. Pioneers like Jagadish Chandra Bose, C. V. Raman and Meghnad Saha produced original research despite limited resources, proving that creativity can survive under constraint but flourishes in freedom.

After independence, leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Homi Bhabha tied sovereignty to building scientific institutions, turning the constitutional call for a scientific temper into national programmes that expanded research and lifted aspirations.



In recent years, achievements like Chandrayaan-3’s Moon landing and the development of indigenous COVID-19 vaccines have shown how a democracy can unite skill, public trust, and teamwork to achieve global milestones. These successes depended not only on resources but also on the willingness to invite feedback, cooperate internationally and face independent scrutiny was as important as technical skill.

Science is not just a beneficiary of democracy; it strengthens it. Scientific literacy helps voters demand evidence-based decisions and hold leaders accountable. When science is ignored or twisted for political gain, democracy weakens. The pandemic demonstrated this as countries (New Zealand, South Korea) that communicated science openly and acted quickly often did better than those where misinformation eroded trust.

Even in democracies, research is not immune to pressure. Funding tends to follow political fashion, institutions risk interference and dissenting voices can be muffled. The threat lies less in outright censorship than in the quiet narrowing of inquiry. Scientific freedom means testing both orthodoxy and heresy.

Science rests on the premise that no theory is sacred; democracy on the principle that no leader is untouchable. Both thrive on feedback and open debate. In science, no experiment is

definitive; in democracy, no election settles governance. Their resilience comes from humility before facts.

Of course, science and democracy are not the same. Science seeks truth regardless of public opinion, while democracy reflects the will of the people. Tensions arise when expert advice clashes with popular sentiment. A mature democracy handles this by respecting expertise without silencing participation. It treats scientific evidence as a public good, not a political weapon, and recognises that credibility comes from openness, not control.

The future will depend on how well we preserve this partnership. Authoritarian systems may act faster, but without checks, transparency and the creativity that freedom allows, their solutions can be brittle. Democracies can harness diverse talents if they protect the freedoms that make such diversity possible. India’s current debates over AI and renewable energy show how science can guide democracy, but only if both leaders and citizens put evidence before expedience.

Protecting this balance is not only the work of scientists but citizens as well. Scientists must engage with society openly, explain their work in clear language and be honest about uncertainty. Trust is the common currency of both science and democracy. When freedom and democracy are joined with responsibility and self-discipline, they can drive extraordinary progress.

As we step into the eightieth year of our independence, safeguarding science, freedom, and democracy is not just policy but part of our national character. Freedom and democracy give science its wings, and science gives them their direction. By defending them, we keep independence alive not just as a memory but as a living commitment to govern wisely and seek the truth fearlessly.

(The author is the former Director, Agharkar Research Institute and Visiting Professor, IIT Bombay. Views personal)

CREDIT RISK

Banks of Straw, Gold of Clay



By
C.S. Krishnamurthy

Trust is the currency that makes banking possible. But in India’s sprawling state-run lenders, that trust is being squandered not by cunning outsiders but by the very insiders paid to safeguard it. The latest example comes from Canara Bank’s Mint Street branch in Chennai where a routine audit in April uncovered that Rs. 2.38 crore had been siphoned off against fake gold collateral.

The anatomy of the scam is depressingly simple. Between October 2024 and March 2025, the branch sanctioned 21 loans against imitation jewellery. The branch manager choreographed the fraud. A gold appraiser, whose job is to verify purity, obligingly declared the trinkets genuine. An accomplice played the role of customer, pledging the fakes for cash. In barely six months, crores were drained from the bank’s coffers. Nobody noticed until an internal inspection belatedly stumbled across the rot.

This was no one-off aberration. In the past year alone, the same story has replayed with minor variations. A branch of Canara in Labbaikudikadu, Tamil Nadu, was defrauded of Rs. 1.2 crore. Union Bank lost Rs. 2.35 crore when 5.5kg of bogus gold was pledged. In Karnataka, Canara’s Managuli branch saw a staggering Rs. 53 crore evaporate in another

gold-related swindle. Across cases, the script is identical: collusion by insiders, appraisal based on ritual rather than science, and audits that react only after the loot has vanished.

Sacred Bridge

Gold loans are no fringe product. They are the beating heart of India’s retail credit market, worth nearly Rs. 1.45 trillion in Canara Bank’s books alone. For millions of families, they are the bridge between need and liquidity. The ornaments pledged are not inert assets but repositories of culture: bangles worn at weddings, chains passed down from grandmothers, jewellery bought to mark religious festivals.

Customers part with these heirlooms in the belief that banks will treat them with meticulous care. When employees collude to loot the system, they are not merely falsifying entries on a balance sheet. They are desecrating the sentimental trust households place in the system.

The irony is that in an economy where vegetable sellers and autorickshaw drivers now demand QR code payments verified in seconds, public-sector banks still appraise pledged jewellery using primitive methods. A necklace worth lakhs is rubbed on a touchstone, examined through a loupe and declared genuine. Rarely does it pass through a spectrometer or any foolproof machine test. In such an environment, the opportunity for fraud is not a loophole. It is an open door.

Rising gold prices only sharpen the incentive. In the past year, prices have soared by 44 percent, from Rs. 52,000 to Rs. 75,000 per sovereign. For crooks, each gram of pledged gold (real or fake) represents a richer opportunity than before. Unless banks modernise their practices, they will continue to be easy prey for those who know how to exploit them.

Uncomfortable Truths

Three realities stare the system in the face. First, the greatest threat to



India’s banks is not faceless cyberhackers operating from afar but their own employees, who know precisely where the weaknesses lie. Second, the audit culture in public-sector banks has become more ceremonial than preventive: a box-ticking exercise that provides comfort to headquarters while leaving branches exposed. And third, penalties for insider fraud remain so lenient that they are no deterrent at all.

If faith is to be rebuilt, several obvious reforms must follow. Technology must become mandatory. No gold loan should be sanctioned without testing through X-ray fluorescence spectrometers or equivalent devices. Guesswork is no substitute for science, and in banking, as in medicine, diagnosis by feel is malpractice. Unless a machine confirms purity, the loan should not proceed.

The cosy circuits of collusion must be broken. Appraisers and managers should not remain in the same branch for years, where familiarity matures into conspiracy. Routine rotation of staff is not a mere administrative chore; it is a firewall

against entrenched partnerships of fraud.

Approval systems must be fortified with double locks. No single official should be able to sanction a gold loan unchecked. Every transaction should be validated by two independent officers, ideally from different branches, before funds are released. Only such safeguards ensure that a lone dishonest employee cannot open the vault on his own.

Audits themselves must evolve from ceremony to surprise. Inspections announced months in advance serve little purpose beyond allowing branches to polish their files. Unpredictable raids, timed irregularly, are the only way to catch fraud in the act.

Punishments must be deterrent rather than symbolic. Quietly allowing a crooked official to resign, or dismissing him with pension benefits intact, is not justice but an exit plan. Insider fraud should trigger swift prosecution, seizure of illicit assets, and custodial sentences that demonstrate the seriousness of the offence.

Nor can customers remain passive. Borrowers should be encouraged to demand receipts, question procedures, and insist on the credentials of those appraising their jewellery. A more informed borrower is also a less vulnerable target.

Economic Sabotage

The responsibility cannot rest solely with lenders. Police forces must learn to treat financial fraud as economic sabotage, not petty theft. Judicial processes must accelerate, for delayed justice is no justice at all. Human-resource departments must vet recruits more rigorously for ethical fitness. And behavioural specialists, often employed in the private sector, could be deployed in banks to identify employees whose conduct betrays early signs of compromise.

None of this is novel. India’s financial history is littered with cautionary tales that show what happens when systemic vulnerabilities are ignored. In the early 1990s Harshad Mehta manipulated securities markets with impunity, shaking the very edifice of the Bombay Stock

Exchange.

In 2018 Nirav Modi orchestrated a \$2bn fraud involving letters of undertaking at Punjab National Bank, another state-owned giant. Both cases began with what appeared to be minor lapses but snowballed into crises that dented confidence across the system.

Compared with those scandals, the Mint Street fraud seems small beer. Canara’s Rs. 2.38 crore loss is a drop in its Rs. 1.45 trillion gold-loan book. Yet reputations are not measured in crores but in credibility. Each insider-led scam chips away at the foundations of depositor faith. If unaddressed, today’s petty frauds will escalate into tomorrow’s megascams, counted not in crores but in hundreds of crores. And when they do, the public’s response will be as predictable as the crime itself: formulaic apologies from the bank, pledging corrective action, while trust erodes further.

Fragile Legacy

For ordinary families, gold remains more than a commodity. It is the ultimate store of value, sometimes the only one they can rely upon. They approach banks with heirlooms in hand because they assume these institutions embody probity, professionalism, and safety. That belief is fragile. Each new scandal, however small in scale, undermines it.

State-run banks in particular must rediscover their spine. They must show they are guardians of public wealth, not playgrounds for colluding officials. Technology, accountability, and deterrence must replace ritual, complacency, and leniency. Otherwise, the gold loan, once a pillar of Indian household finance, will become synonymous with fraud.

The glitter of gold has long been entwined with India’s identity. If banks fail to protect it properly, that glitter may yet turn to dust.

(The writer is a retired banker based in Bengaluru. Views personal)



- KALEIDOSCOPE**
1. Miss World 2025 Opal Suchata Chuangsri and Miss Asia 2025 Krishnah Gravidez interact with cancer patients at NIMS in Hyderabad on Wednesday.
 2. Bollywood actors Shah Rukh Khan and Sahher Bambba during the preview launch of the former's son Aryan Khan's directorial debut on Netflix 'The Bads of Bollywood' in Mumbai on Wednesday.
 3. People offer prayers at Moti Dungri Ganesh Temple ahead of 'Ganesh Chaturthi' festival in Jaipur on Wednesday.
 4. Fireworks explode above River Danube as part of celebrations of the national holiday in Budapest in Hungary on Wednesday.
 5. Katy Perry performs as part of the Lifetimes Tour on Wednesday.

All Pictures: PTI, AP

READERS' VOICE

The Sinister, Shameless Whitewashers



By
Rishabh Pardeshi

The controversy raging on social media over the Department of Inter-Religious Studies at the St. Xavier's College organising an online lecture of Father Prem Xalxo to mark the 'annual Stan Swamy Memorial Lecture', has brought to fore the larger phenomenon of the clan of sinister, shameless whitewashers of people who were accused of links with anti-India Maoists. The said lecture was cancelled after Akhil Bhartiya Vid-yarthi Parishad (ABVP) has written letter to the Principal of the College taking strong objection about the lecture. After the cancellation of program by college, some of the left leaning media, journalist, social media influencers created ruckus on social media and demanded not to bow down to the demands of ABVP. This clearly shows left ecosystem in Media and Academia have sinister nexus which stands in solidarity with Urban Naxals.

This is not the first time that such a memorial lecture has been organised to 'celebrate', and thus 'whitewash', an accused in Maoism links case. For the uninitiated, Stan Swamy, who is no more now, was accused of having links with the Communist Party of India (Maoist). He faced charges of the grave nature. In fact, when he was arrested in Bhi-ma-Koregaon violence case, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) had strongly opposed his release despite pressure mounted by the 'whitewashers' that he was old. During COVID-19, he died.

Apart from the 'Snakes in the Ganga' within India, his case was taken up by notoriously anti-India media like the British Broadcasting

Corporation (BBC). Just sample this paragraph from BBC's report of Stan Swamy's death: "Jailed Indian tribal rights activist Stan Swamy has died of a cardiac arrest in Mumbai city. He was 84. The Jesuit priest, who suffered from Parkinson's disease, was moved to a private hospital in May (2021) after he tested positive for Covid. Swamy, the oldest person to be accused of terrorism in India, was arrested in October 2020. He was among 16 renowned activists, academics and lawyers, who were charged under a draconian anti-terrorism law."



It becomes apparent that so-called 'independent' BBC's intention was to arouse sympathy for the Maoist-links accused and to target the Indian government over arrest of other persons facing the same charges. This was nothing but an attempt to not only challenge the Indian judicial system and the Indian investigation agencies, but also to 'whitewash' and acquit the accused without any verification. The same modus operandi is used by the clan of 'whitewashers' to create social media storm to generate sympathy and plant the seeds of discontent among the common people against the Constitutional and democratic institutions of India. They peddle narratives with an intention to create suspicion over integrity and effectiveness of the Indian institutions.

This has been happening for years now. The previous governments buckled under pressure of such so-called civil society, rights groups, activists, and international media. But, over the past decade or so, these nefarious anti-India elements stand exposed badly. They know that they cannot win in the courts of law,

given the solid evidence collected by the Indian agencies. Hence, they try to secure bail on technical grounds. Then the accused released on bail write books or articles, feature in some documentaries or articles in so-called international media. Social media campaigns have already been mentioned. The entire effort is to create a doctored image of the Maoist-links accused as a 'defender of human rights' or 'tribal rights activist' or 'an academic' or 'a revolutionary poet' or 'a renowned social worker' etc. And, all this happens in an extra-judicial manner, that is, while the accused have not been acquitted by the Indian courts of law.

Stan Swamy is not the lone case in this regard. Not long ago, it happened in case of Prof G. N. Saibaba, who was always projected as 'wheel-chair-bound, polio-stricken Delhi University professor'. A committee was formed in his 'defence'. In 2017, he was convicted by a sessions court in Gadchiroli, but was assisted by the 'whitewashers' to challenge this. The High Court acquitted him on technical grounds, following which the campaign to malign the Indian institutions started quickly in the usual suspect circles.

Prior to that, Anuradha Ghandy memorial lecture had landed in controversy over invitation to a controversial figure Angela Davis. But the fact that a memorial lecture committee was formed to 'celebrate' (whitewash) a person identified in police records as an active Maoist for long years, tells the story. In fact, after her death, her 'articles' (provocative and distorted at best) were compiled in the form of a book titled 'Scripting the Change' by her 'friends'.

There are several examples in which a person accused of Maoist links or an active Maoist was championed as a 'rights activist' but was later acknowledged by the Naxalites/Maoists as their own. Unfortunately, when such admissions come from the Maoists, no one holds these 'whitewashers' guilty of time.

(The writer is a lawyer practicing in Mumbai. Views personal)

EXPLAINER

Can Child Eyewitnesses Be Unreliable?

There is often a dramatic scene in crime shows where an eyewitness points to a suspect in a police lineup. This identification looks convincing on television, and it is also convincing in real-world investigations. But here's the problem: eyewitnesses can often be wrong. Their mistakes are a leading cause of wrongful convictions.

This risk is even greater when the eyewitness is a child. Although children can correctly identify the perpetrator when they are present in the police lineup, they are more likely than adults to identify an innocent person when the perpetrator is not included in the police lineup.

For instance, in 1990, a three-year-old girl was abducted from her Mississippi home. Her body was found two days later in a nearby pond, showing signs of sexual assault and drowning. The only eyewitness to the child's abduction was her six-year-old sister. The sister picked a man named Levon Brooks from the police lineup — and this identification sealed his fate. Brooks was sentenced to life in prison. After 16 years behind bars, DNA evidence led to his exoneration.

So, how do these mistakes happen? One major issue is that we have no way of knowing whether an eyewitness picked the right person. There is no built-in system to tell us whether the identification that is made is correct or not. As forensic psychology researchers, we have spent several years studying how to improve the reliability of eyewitness evidence, especially when children are involved. We have developed and tested a promising new police lineup technique that reflects how likely it is that the person identified by a child eyewitness is guilty.

Why eyewitnesses make mistakes

Crime shows are the most-watched TV genre in the world. They often portray police investigations as fast, clean and fool-proof. This has led to what experts call the "CSI effect," a phenomenon where people expect



real investigations to include clear-cut evidence, like perfect DNA matches or eyewitness accounts.

But real-life investigations are rarely this tidy. In courtrooms and police investigations, eyewitness testimony is often treated as one of the most powerful pieces of evidence.

Child eyewitnesses

These mistaken identifications are especially likely when the eyewitness is a child, particularly those under the age of eight. Even more concerning is that an eyewitness's confidence in reporting is often mistaken for a sign of their accuracy. However, children are documented to be overconfident in their identification decisions.

This means their mistaken identifications can appear particularly convincing in court, where there is no way to actually verify whether the person identified in the lineup is actually the perpetrator.

As a potential solution, we developed the multiple independent lineup (MIL) technique to gauge the reliability of a child eyewitness's identification by providing insight into the likelihood of guilt. The MIL technique involves showing the child an eyewitness multiple, separate lineups, each focused on a different feature of the suspect. For example, one set of lineups might feature different faces, another of different bodies, a third would play different voices, and so on.

Instead of relying on a single identification, the child eyewitness makes several independent identification decisions across these lineups. By having child eyewitnesses make multiple independent identi-

cation decisions, we can use the number of lineups in which they identify the suspect as a reflection of how likely it is that the suspect is guilty. The idea behind this technique is that the more lineups that a suspect is selected in, the more likely it is that the person that the child has selected is guilty.

In our study, we asked children aged six to 11 to make identification decisions for a person they had met the previous day. The children were shown six independent lineups, which included a face, body, shirt, voice and two object lineups. Regardless of age, if a child identified the suspect only in the face lineup, this strongly suggested the suspect was innocent.

When children identified the suspect in the face lineup and any two other lineups, there was a 96 per cent chance that the suspect was guilty. And if the suspect was identified in the face lineup and three or more lineups, the chance of guilt rose to 100 per cent.

Reducing wrongful convictions

These results are encouraging. But more research is needed to test the parameters of the MIL technique and whether it should be used with real eyewitnesses. In the future, we plan to continue exploring ways to better reflect the likely accuracy of child eyewitness identifications.

Child eyewitnesses can be accurate eyewitnesses, but they are also more likely than adults to identify innocent suspects from police lineups. That's why it is essential to develop a technique that can help investigators distinguish between accurate and mistaken identifications. Doing so might help reduce the number of wrongful convictions.

It is also important to educate the public about the limits of eyewitness memory, especially with children, to reduce the influence of the CSI effect and encourage more informed expectations in the courtrooms. -

-The Conversation

No bilateral sporting ties with Pakistan: Govt

SAYS CRICKET TEAM FOR ASIA CUP WON'T BE STOPPED

New Delhi: The Sports Ministry on Thursday declared that India and Pakistan will not have any bilateral sporting ties even on neutral venues as per an unprecedented new policy but the cricket team won't be stopped from playing the Asia Cup next month as it is a multi-lateral engagement.

The ministry unveiled the new policy with regard to India's international engagements with emphasis on Pakistan. A well-placed ministry source said that the policy, which bars Indian athletes from travelling to Pakistan and likewise disallows neighbouring sportspersons from coming here for bilaterals, is effective immediately.

Asked if Indian teams will be allowed to travel to Pakistan for any multi-lateral competitions, the source said, "In that scenario, we will examine the case before deciding anything."

"Even in multi-lateral events, we can't leave our athletes in lurch. After all, Pakistan is a country that has no hesitation in declaring that it is a dumpster and can hit the shining Mercedes that is India," he added.

In the detailed policy that has been uploaded on the ministry's official website, the government



named Pakistan, which currently stands accused of being behind the Pahal-gam terror attack that killed 26 people leading to a military showdown between the arch-foes in May after India launched 'Operation Sindoor'.

"India's approach to sports events involving Pakistan reflects its overall policy in dealing with that country," states the ministry policy.

"In so far as bilateral sports events in each other's country are concerned, Indian teams will not be participating in competitions in Pakistan. Nor will we permit Pakistani teams to play in India," it added.

"India and Pakistan cannot play bilateral even if it is planned in America. No bilaterals," asserted a ministry source.

However, multilateral engagements will not be af-

fected and the Asia Cup-bound team will travel to the UAE next month for the eight-team tournament starting September 9, despite social media outrage.

"We will not stop Indian cricket team from playing in Asia Cup as it is a multi-lateral," the ministry source said.

"For multilateral cricket, we will not come in the way unless the host is Pakistan," he added.

Asked if the policy could be revised if the ties between the two countries improve, a ministry source said, "At this point, it looks unlikely."

Mandatory policy

The policy makes it clear that India, which is aspiring to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games and the 2036 Olympic Games, will abide by the Olympic Charter and its philosophy of

inclusivity to present itself as an amiable host of global events.

This is precisely the reason why the government agreed to grant visas to Pakistani hockey players for next month's Asia Cup in Bihar even though they refused to travel citing security concerns.

"With regard to international and multilateral events, in India or abroad, we are guided by the practices of international sports bodies and the interest of our own sportspersons.

"...Indian teams and individual players will take part in international events that also have teams or players from Pakistan. Similarly, Pakistani players and teams will be able to participate in such multi-lateral events hosted by India," the policy stated.

"To position India as a preferred destination for hosting international sporting events, the visa process for sportspersons, team officials, technical personnel, and office-bearers of International Sports Governing Bodies shall be simplified," it added.

The ministry said that for office-bearers of International Sports Governing Bodies, a multi-entry visa shall be granted on priority basis for the duration of their official tenure, subject to a maximum period of five years. -PTI

Vishal TK breaks record

Chennai: Tamil Nadu quarter-miler Vishal Thennarasu Kayalvizhi on Thursday smashed the men's 400m national record with a time of 45.12 seconds at the National Inter-State Senior Athletics Championships here on Thursday.

The 21-year-old ran a stunning race to leave behind his rivals way behind at the finishing line to cement his status as the numero uno quarter-miler of the country. He bettered the previous national record of 45.21 seconds which was in the name of Muhammed Anas since 2029.

Vishal's earlier best was 45.57 seconds while finishing fourth at the 2025 Asian Championships in May in South Korea where he was a member of India's gold-winning mixed 4x400m relay team and silver-winning men's 4x400m relay quartet.

With his 45.12 seconds timing after a scorching run, Vishal became the fourth fastest Asian 400m runner of the season, behind Yuki Joseph Nakajima (44.84 seconds) of Japan, Ammar Ismail Ibrahim (44.90 seconds) of Qatar and Liukai Liu (45.06 seconds) of China. He, though, was well behind the automatic World Championships qualification time of 44.85 seconds.

Seasoned Rajesh Ramesh, also of Tamil Nadu, was second with 46.04 seconds while Haryana's Vikrant Panchal was third with 46.17 seconds.

Vishal has been on a meteoric rise in his career which he began in 2022 only. He began running individual 400m race only in 2024 with 46.77 seconds being the best of that year.



Danielle Collins plays with Christian Harrison during the mixed doubles semi final at the U.S. Open tennis championships on Wednesday. Pic: AP

World Boxing will require sex testing

Los Angeles: The governing body for Olympic-style boxing will require sex testing for all fighters wishing to compete in the women's division at its world championships next month.

World Boxing already had announced its plan to require competitors to undergo a polymerase chain reaction test or an equivalent genetic screening test to determine their sex at birth. The rules will be implemented ahead of the World Boxing Championships in Liverpool, England, in early September, the organisation announced on Wednesday.

The tests identify the presence or absence of Y chromosome genetic material as the indicator of biological sex.

"World Boxing respects the dignity of all individuals and is keen to ensure it is as inclusive as possible," World Boxing president Boris Van Der Vorst said.

"Yet in a combat sport like boxing, we have a duty of care to deliver safety

and competitiveness fairness, which are the key principles that have guided the development and creation of this policy."

Paris Olympic champion Imane Khelif of Algeria declined to enter a World Boxing tournament in the Netherlands in June, shortly after the governing body initially announced its plans to introduce sex testing. Van Der Vorst later apologised for specifically naming Khelif, who initially planned to fight in the tournament, while outlining World Boxing's future testing plans.

Khelif and fellow gold medalist Lin Yu-ting from Taiwan excelled in Paris under a harsh spotlight of widespread scrutiny and misconception about their sex. The 26-year-old Khelif repeatedly has said she was born a woman, and she has competed at all levels of women's amateur boxing for a decade.

Chromosome testing was common in Olympic sports during the 20th century but was largely aban-

doned in the 1990s because of numerous ambiguities that couldn't be easily resolved by the tests, collectively known as differences in sex development. Many sports switched to hormone testing to determine sex eligibility, but those tests require governing bodies to make difficult decisions on the eligibility of women with naturally high testosterone levels.

Athletes with DSD

World Boxing said athletes with DSD in which male androgenization occurs will be eligible to compete only in the men's category. But the governing body also said it would offer extensive additional analysis and evaluation for athletes with Y chromosome genetic material who wish to compete in the women's categories, including genetic screening, hormonal profiles, anatomical examination and further evaluation of endocrine profiles by medical specialists. An appeals process also is available.

Sinquefield Cup

Gukesh held by Sevian, Praggn draws with Abdusattorov

St. Louis (USA): World champion D Gukesh was held to a draw by the lone wild card Samuel Sevian of United States, while fellow Indian R Praggnanandhaa also split the point with Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan in the third round of the Sinquefield Cup here.

With his second draw in as many days, Praggnanandhaa remained in the leading group of three players that now include Fabiano Caruana of United States besides the overnight co-leader Armenian-turned-American Levon Aronian.

Caruana handed Alireza Firouzja of France his first loss in the tournament in the lone decisive game of the day. Aronian was held to a draw by Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France, while another American Wesley So split the point with Duda Jan-Krysztof of Poland.

With six rounds still to come in the 3,75,000 USD prize money tournament, Praggnanandhaa, Aronian and Caruana share the lead on two points each and they are now followed by Wesley, Firouzja, Vachier-Lagrave, Sevian and Gukesh -- who all stand a



half point behind.

Duda is next in line on one point, while Abdusattorov opened his account to be on a half point from his first three outings here.

For Gukesh, first draw in the tournament was rather easy with black pieces. Samuel Sevian tried his hands at the Rosslimo variation against the Sicilian defense but Gukesh was always in control. The middle game arrived and passed smoothly as both players exchanged pieces at regular intervals leading to a drawn endgame.

Praggnanandhaa played his first black after two white games and chose the Nimzo-Indian defence wherein Abdusattorov, struggling to find his form, could not get much. The players reached an oppo-

site coloured Bishops endgame where the draw was a just result.

It could have been an uneventful day but for Caruana who played a fine positional game to outwit Firouzja. The Fianchetto variation against the Nimzo gave Caruana a spatial advantage as his pieces stood better in the middle game and after a fine grind the American pushed his central passed pawn to the seventh rank for the desired effect.

With the top four places in the Grand chess tour at stake for the grand finale later this year, Caruana seemed pleased with his victory. The American observed that Vachier-Lagrave has almost qualified and the rest of the bunch is fighting for the last spots. -PTI

Rahane quits as Mumbai captain

Mumbai: Veteran India batter Ajinkya Rahane on Thursday stepped down from his position as Mumbai captain ahead of the upcoming Ranji Trophy season, saying it is the right time to groom a new leader.

The 37-year-old, who has amassed 14000 runs in 201 first-class matches, however, will continue to play as a batter in the team. The Ranji season begins on October 15 and Mumbai will be up against Jammu and Kashmir in their opening game.

"Captaining and winning the championships with the Mumbai team has been an absolute honour," Rahane wrote on his 'X' account.

"With the new domestic season ahead, I believe it is the right time to groom a new leader, and hence, I have decided not to continue in the captaincy role."

"I remain fully committed to giving my best as a player, and will continue my journey with MCA to help us win more trophies, looking forward to the season," he added.

Under his captaincy, Mumbai clinched the Ranji Trophy title in the 2023-24 season.

Salima Tete to lead Indian women's team

New Delhi: Seasoned midfielder Salima Tete was on Thursday retained as captain of a 20-member Indian women's hockey team for the Asia Cup to be held in Hangzhou, China from September 5 to 14.

The tournament assumes added significance as the winner will secure a direct berth in the 2026 FIH Women's Hockey World Cup.

India has been drawn in Pool B, where it will face Japan, Thailand, and Singapore. The team will open its campaign against Thailand on September 5, followed by a clash with Japan on September 6.

India will play their final pool-stage match against Singapore on September 8.

"We are excited about the squad we have selected for the women's Asia Cup in Hangzhou," Chief Coach Harendra Singh said in a press release issued by Hockey India.

The 27-year-old Salima has been an integral part of the team for a while after being appointed captain last year.

"The group has been training with great intensity, and we have tried to



strike the right balance between experienced campaigners and young talent," Singh said.

"Our focus will be on playing an aggressive and disciplined brand of hockey, and we believe this team has the capability to compete strongly against the best in Asia," he added.

Emphasising the stakes, Singh said the side cannot afford a mis-step in any of the matches.

"Every match will test our composure, fitness, and tactical execution. The players are motivated to rise to the occasion, and we

are confident of delivering performances that make India proud."

The squad features a balanced mix of youth and experience with goalkeepers Bansari Solanki and Bichu Devi Khariabam providing depth under the post.

The defence unit will be marshalled by experienced players like Nikki Pradhan and Udita, supported by youngsters Manisha Chauhan, Jyoti, Suman Devi Thoudam, and Ishika Chaudhary.

In the midfield, the team boasts strong names such as Neha, Salima, Lalremsiami, Sharmila Devi, Sunelita Toppo, and Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, ensuring both creativity and stability.

The forward line includes a blend of seasoned campaigners and rising stars — Navneet Kaur, Sangita Kumari, Mumtaz Khan, Deepika, Beauty Dungdung, and Rutaja Daso Pisal.

However, experienced players Savita and Sushila Chanu, who were part of the European leg of the FIH Pro League are not part of this squad. -PTI

Mansi wins gold, Yashasvi silver

Shymkent (Kazakhstan): Mansi Raghuvanshi won the gold medal while compatriot Yashasvi Rathore claimed bronze in a 1-2 finish for India in the women's junior skeet competition of the Asian Shooting Championship here on Thursday.

Mansi shot 53 in the final to emerge champion while Yashasvi fired 52 to take the second place ahead of Kazakhstan's Lidiya Basharova (40).

The other Indian in the fray, Agrima Kanwar (15), ended sixth and last in the final.

Mansi made the final in second position with a total of 106 across five rounds, while Basharova topped the qualifications with 112.

Yashasvi was fifth in the qualifications with 102, and Agrima too made the cut with 101.

Meanwhile, Ishaan Singh Libra (116), Harmehar Singh Lally (115) and Jyotiraditya Singh Sisodiya (110) qualified for the final of the men's junior skeet in first, third and fifth position respectively.

Aslam Inamdar proud to represent Maharashtra at PKL

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Maharashtra has long been known as a hotbed for Kabaddi and will have the second-most representation in Season 12 of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL). Carrying forward the state's rich heritage in the sport are U Mumba and Puneri Paltan – both former PKL champions.

Puneri Paltan captain Aslam Inamdar says that it is always been an honour to represent Maharashtra in the PKL. The star raider guided Puneri Paltan to the season 10 trophy, becoming the first Maharashtri-

an captain to win PKL.

Back from injury and eager to make his mark, Inamdar said, "Being born and raised in Maharashtra, it was always my dream to represent the state in Kabaddi. Playing for Puneri Paltan and becoming champions has been one of the proudest moments of my career. To once again stand on such a big stage in the PKL and represent where I come from is a very special feeling for me."

The commencement of Season 12 will see the return of classic Maharashtrian rivalry between U Mumba and Puneri Paltan. Traditionally, both



sides have been regular contenders at the business end of the tournament, and as always, expectations are high to go one better this season.

The latest chapter of this ri-

valry will unfold on September 18 in Jaipur at the historic Sawai Mansingh Indoor Stadium – the same venue that hosted the league's 1000th match in 2024. The clash will feature

PKL's most successful captain, Sunil Kumar of U Mumba, against Aslam Inamdar.

Kabaddi legend

Further heightening the contest is the presence of Kabaddi legend Ajay Thakur as coach of Puneri Paltan, while U Mumba is guided by head coach Anil Chaprana, who will be rejoining the side as the top boss after a season as the assistant coach.

Looking ahead to the season, U Mumba captain Sunil Kumar shared: "Maharashtra has always been a powerhouse of Kabaddi, and this shows how big the sport truly is here. For me, to lead U Mumba—a team

with such a strong legacy and talented players—is a matter of immense pride. We have prepared with full focus and determination, and our goal this season is to go beyond the play-offs and bring the trophy back to Mumbai."

U Mumba's head coach Anil Chaprana added: "It is a matter of great pride for me to return as head coach of U Mumba. This team has entrusted me with responsibility once again, and that fills me with excitement and determination. My focus is on instilling discipline, fearlessness, and a never-give-up attitude in the players so

they give their best in every match. With hard work and commitment, I am confident we will make the fans proud."

Puneri Paltan head coach Ajay Thakur expressed: "Transitioning from being a player to taking on a full-time coaching role is both a challenge and a privilege. Having played Kabaddi for many years, I now want to use that experience to bring out the best in this new generation of players. Coaching a big team from Maharashtra is a proud moment for me, and I am committed to helping the players perform to their fullest potential."