

Matter of Thought

India's newest king of 64 squares

The name Gukesh Dommaraju is on everyone's lips in India these days. A name that was relatively unknown until recently, Gukesh has now earned a place in the global spotlight by becoming the world chess champion at the young age of 18. This feat is extraordinary not just for the achievement itself but also for the character and discipline Gukesh embodies. There is an old Marathi saying, "eighteenth year is dangerous," which highlights the turbulence often associated with adolescence. At this age, young people are typically navigating a range of emotions, distractions, and challenges—making it difficult to focus on anything for too long. The craving for independence and the allure of distractions often outweigh mental stability. However, Gukesh has defied these stereotypes. His incredible focus, patience, emotional regulation, humility, and dedication have set him apart from many of his peers. In the intense atmosphere of the World Chess Championship, he handled the pressure with remarkable calmness, managing not only the challenges during the match but also maintaining poise after his victory. Unlike many who flaunt even the smallest successes on social media, Gukesh has remained remarkably grounded after his momentous win. In a world where young people often ignore their physical and mental well-being, Gukesh stands as a role model for balance. It's common for youth to feel they don't have time for exercise or self-care, but Gukesh has shown that it's essential to take care of both the mind and body. While many see yoga and meditation as practices for times of stress, Gukesh has made them part of his regular routine, using them not just to prepare for challenging moments but to maintain an overall sense of well-being. Gukesh's journey offers hope and inspiration, showing that with dedication, perseverance, and balance, it is possible to not only excel but also to stay grounded. His victory sends a clear message to the youth: do not give up, even when faced with setbacks, and always maintain the belief that defeat is not the end. His achievement could inspire a new generation to take up chess and other sports, recognizing that such pursuits can bring recognition, prestige, and even financial stability. Gukesh has often emphasized the crucial role his parents have played in his success. In a society where many parents expect their children to prioritize academics over extra-curricular activities, Gukesh's parents supported him unconditionally in his pursuit of chess. Gukesh's success serves as a reminder to the youth to live in the present. Too often, young people either dwell on the past or worry about the future, forgetting to enjoy the small moments that life offers. Through his journey, Gukesh has shown that sports can be a source of joy, learning, and success. His victory is a testament to the value of pursuing one's passions and remaining focused on long-term goals.

Bhuse, Zirwal, Kokate take oath as cabinet ministers



NAGPUR/NASHIK: Three Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) from Nashik district took their oath as cabinet ministers yesterday at the Raj Bhavan in Nagpur, marking a significant political development for the region. The MLAs who were sworn in include Manikrao Kokate and Narhari Zirwal from the National Congress Party (NCP- Ajit Pawar) and Shiv Sena's Dada Bhuse.

Manikrao Kokate, elected with a record margin from the Sinnar as-

sembly constituency, and Narhari Zirwal, who represents the Dindori-Peth constituency, both from the Ajit Pawar faction of NCP, were among the 39 ministers to take the oath in the ceremony. Also taking the oath was Dada Bhuse, a prominent leader from Shiv Sena, who represents the Malegaon Outer constituency.

However, senior NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal, despite being a key figure in state politics, did not secure a place in the first batch

of ministers who took their oath yesterday. His position in the state cabinet may be addressed in future announcements.

This oath-taking marks an important moment for the political landscape of Nashik, with local leaders now holding significant positions in the state cabinet. The inclusion of these MLAs is expected to bring attention to the needs of Nashik district and strengthen the region's political representation in the state government.

39 ministers take oath in Nagpur

Thirty-nine newly elected legislators of Mahayuti (grand alliance) took the oath as ministers in the Devendra Fadnavis-led Maharashtra government in

a programme held at Raj Bhavan here on Sunday. The much-awaited cabinet expansion finally took place on eve of the winter session of Maharashtra Assembly, which is due to commence here from Monday (today).

Cabinet Ministers

1. Chandrasekhar Bawankule
2. Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil
3. Hasan Mushrif
4. Chandrakant Patil
5. Girish Mahajan
6. Gularao Patil
7. Ganesh Naik
8. Dada Bhuse
9. Sanjay Rathore
10. Dhananjay Mundhe
11. Lodha Mangal
12. Uday Sawant
13. Jayakumar Rawal
14. Pankaja Munde
15. Atul Save
16. Ashok Uike
17. Shambhuraje Desai
18. Ashish Shelar
19. Dattatraya bharne
20. Aditi Tatkar

21. Shivendrasimaraje Bhosale
22. Manikrao Kokate
23. Jayakumar Gore
24. Narhari Zirwal
25. Sanjay Savkare
26. Sanjay Shirath
27. Pratap Sarnaik
28. Bharat Gogawle
29. Makarand Jadhav Patil
30. Nitesh Rane
31. Akash Phundkar
32. Babasaheb Patil
33. Prakash Abitkar

Ministers of State

1. Madhuri Misal
2. Ashish Jaiswal
3. Pankaj Bhojner
4. Meghna Bordikar
5. Indranil Naik
6. Yogesh Kadam

Spread of hyacinth in Godavari a concern



This is not a thriving green crop—it's invasive water hyacinth choking the riverbed at Chandori, endangering the environment and public health.

NASHIK: The Godavari riverbeds at Chandori and Saikheda in Niphad taluka are overrun by invasive water hyacinth, causing widespread hygiene and health concerns. Despite repeated calls for action, the issue remains unresolved, with the infestation worsening each year.

The hyacinths block water flow, create stagnant pools, and foster mos-

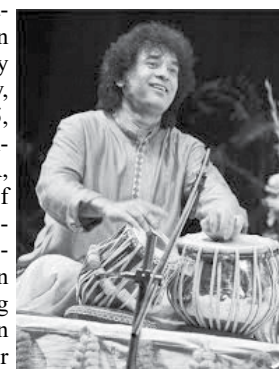
quito breeding, leading to foul odors and a surge in infectious diseases. Villages along the river are grappling with contaminated water supplies and the persistent threat to public health. Local residents blame administrative neglect and a lack of political commitment for the ongoing crisis. Temporary clean-up efforts are occasionally undertaken, but the problem persists.

Villagers have repeatedly urged authorities to implement sustainable solutions, including measures similar to those used for weed removal in other river basins.

The growing demand from citizens underscores the urgent need to restore the Godavari's health and ensure clean water for the affected communities.

Legendary Tabla Maestro Zakir Hussain passes away at 73 in the US

SAN FRANCISCO: Renowned tabla virtuoso Ustad Zakir Hussain passed away on Sunday, December 15, in San Francisco, USA, at the age of 73. The celebrated musician had been undergoing treatment in the ICU for heart-related



complications, as confirmed by close friend and flautist Rakesh Chaurasia. Reports indicate he had been dealing with severe health issues, including high blood pressure, leading to his hospitalization. Zakir Hussain was the son of the legendary tabla maestro Ustad Alla Rakha Khan and began his musical journey at the tender age of seven. By 12, he was performing across India, earning acclaim for his exceptional talent. Over the decades, he became a global icon, seamlessly blending Indian classical music with world music

and collaborating with renowned artists across genres. A resident of San Francisco for nearly four decades, Hussain made significant contributions to Indian classical music, international film scores, and global fusion projects. His extraordinary talent earned him several prestigious accolades, including India's highest civilian honors: the Padma Shri (1988), Padma Bhushan (2002), and Padma Vibhushan (2023). He was also a recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1990, solidifying his legacy as one of India's greatest cultural ambassadors. Zakir Hussain's passing marks the end of an era in the world of music. Tributes are pouring in from all corners of the globe, celebrating his unparalleled contributions to the art form and the indelible mark he left on music lovers worldwide.

City needs operational high-rise rescue mechanism

NASHIK: The municipal corporation faces a critical situation as the 15-year lifespan of its fire department's 32-meter hydraulic ladder has expired, leaving the city without an operational high-rise rescue system. Meanwhile, the process to procure a new ladder capable of reaching 90 meters, approved two years ago, is expected to take another two and a half years.

This delay has left the fire department in a precarious position, with no alternative for high-rise

emergencies. In response, the Municipal Corporation has requested the Regional Transport Department to extend the usage term of the current ladder until the new equipment arrives.

The existing ladder, purchased 15 years ago for ₹3.5 crore, initially faced skepticism. At the time of procurement, Nashik had no 32-meter-high buildings, sparking controversy over the necessity of such an expensive piece of equipment. Questions were raised about maintenance costs and operational

feasibility. Despite opposition, the purchase was approved, and the ladder arrived after a six-month wait.

For years, the equipment saw limited use, primarily for rescuing trapped birds or assisting residents locked out of apartments in high-rise buildings. However, as Nashik grew and taller structures became common, the ladder proved invaluable.

One notable instance of its utility was during the January 1, 2023, fire at Jindal Company in

Gonde Industrial Estate, where the ladder saved the lives of five workers.

The ladder was registered with the Regional Transport Department on August 21, 2008, and underwent a fitness check on July 28, 2023. The department confirmed that its registration would be canceled in 2024 due to the expiration of its operational life. This has left the city vulnerable to high-rise fire emergencies.

The absence of a reliable high-rise rescue system places Nashik's

residents and infrastructure at risk.

The Municipal Corporation must expedite the procurement process for the new ladder while ensuring the continued functionality of the current equipment through extensions and maintenance. The fire department's challenges underscore the urgent need for better planning and foresight to address the safety needs of a growing city.

Delay in procuring a new ladder

The NMC began the process of purchasing a new ladder with a 90-meter reach two years ago. Initially, the equipment was to be sourced from a monopoly supplier in Finland. However, the company's bankruptcy forced the cancellation of the tender and the initiation of a new procurement process.

The re-tendering and manufacturing process will take an additional two to two and a half years. Until then, the fire department will have to rely on the outdated and expired ladder, provided its term is extended by the Regional Transport Department.

Hydraulic platform for fire safety

With new regulations permitting buildings up to 90 meters in height, Nashik's Fire Department plans to acquire a 90-meter hydraulic platform vehicle to enhance safety measures for skyscrapers. This decision aims to ensure rapid response during emergencies and safeguard lives in the city's expanding urban landscape.

Since the implementation of the Unified Development Control Regulations in 2019, the city has approved 18 large housing projects exceeding 70 meters. The fire department's earlier procurement process for hydraulic ladders faced issues, leading to its cancellation. Now, the process has resumed, with Bronto Skylift entrusted to supply the ladder. A deposit of Rs 33 crore from fire department funds will serve as collateral, with interest earnings directed to the municipal treasury. This initiative marks a critical step in strengthening Nashik's fire safety infrastructure.