

A 25-year-old woman working in a dispensary at Kasarwadavali was allegedly sodomised by an unidentified person, police said on Sunday. *PTI*



MUMBAI CONFIDENTIAL



FRONTRUNNER

SUMIT MULLICK, a 1982 batch IAS officer, is reportedly the frontrunner to replace Swadheen Kshatriya as Maharashtra's new Chief Secretary. The latter's extended term ends this month. Although a proposal to grant an extension to Kshatriya for another two months is still doing the rounds, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has reportedly narrowed down on Mullick, who is currently the Additional Chief Secretary (Protocol), for the post.

ALL FOR A VOTE

WHILE FREEBIES and discounts at malls and restaurants to encourage voting are fun, most in the state bureaucracy feel that Ulhasnagar civic chief Rajendra Nimbalkar overstepped his bounds when he offered discounts in property tax to select voters. Questions are being raised as some believe that such a measure may just amount to influencing the voter, while also impacting the civic exchequer.

BLUE-EYED BOY

IT IS common knowledge that Thane Municipal Commissioner Sanjeev Jaiswal, 1996 IAS batch, is highly regarded by the CM. But there were murmurs in the corridors of power when Devendra Fadnavis effectively projected Jaiswal as his face during an election rally in Thane last week. Rumours abound that Jaiswal may well be inducted in the Chief Minister's Office.

OF CARROTS

CM DEVENDRA Fadnavis kept his big poll promises for the very last. As the election battle intensified, he promised bigger slum homes in Mumbai and closure of the dumping ground in neighbouring Diva within a year. The Shiv Sena mocked these promises — by distributing carrots to passersby outside the Diva railway station as a "gift" from the Chief Minister.

HEAD HUNT

IT TOOK almost a year for the state government to appoint a permanent head of the department of energy. Fadnavis has appointed Arvind Singh, a 1988 batch IAS officer who has returned from an assignment in Tokyo, as the new Principal Secretary (Energy). In the absence of a full-time power secretary, those in power appeared to be comfortable with Bipin Shrimali, MD, Managing Director, Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Company Ltd, holding the charge in additional capacity.

SPACE NEEDED

THE STATE administration's plan to shift the Congress office opposite Mantralaya to an alternative location for the Metro rail work has run into a hurdle. The government's talks with owners of Apeejay House (near Churchgate) to rent a ground-floor space for the office have broken down. The CMO, the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation and the Chief Secretary's office are now in search of a new place for the Congress party.

COMPILED BY SANDEEP ASHAR

Have a comment or suggestion for Mumbai Confidential? Write to mumbai.newslines@expressindia.com with subject line: Mumbai Confidential

Four workers killed in blaze at Bhiwandi factory

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 19

FOUR WORKERS died when a fire broke out in a plastics factory in Bhiwandi Sunday morning. The bodies were badly charred in the blaze making identification difficult, said police.

According to the police, the fire broke out at Hari Om Compound in Mankoli at 11.50 am while 16 men and women were inside the building manufacturing plastic beads. The police said the fire broke out in the first-floor godown and spread to the working space on the ground floor.

"The fire broke out in the godown and spread quickly," said Manoj Patil, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Zone II. He added that the workers in the factory did not expect the fire to spread downstairs and went to the doors and windows hoping to be rescued.

Three fire engines and water tankers battled the blaze before it was extinguished around 4



The fire broke out at Hari Om Compound in Mankoli on Sunday morning. *Express*

pm. Bodies of three women and one man who died in the fire were taken to Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital for a post-mortem, the police said.

However, Patil said that the bodies were too charred to be identified. Two other women who suffered burns were admitted to Bhiwandi's Siraj Hospital

VANASHAKTI CITES RTI REPLIES IN AFFIDAVIT

Aarey Colony is forestland, NGO tells green tribunal

Says documents show the land owned by the Forest Division is part of SGNP

BENITA CHACKO
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 19

NGO VANASHAKTI, in its affidavit submitted to the National Green Tribunal, has stated that the Aarey Colony land, owned by the Maharashtra government's Forest Division, is part of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park and thus qualifies as forestland.

In an affidavit filed in February 2016, the forest department had said that Aarey Colony was not a forest.

Documents procured through a series of applications under the Right to Information (RTI) Act by Vanashakti reveal that the 2076.073 hectares of revenue land of Aarey Milk Scheme was transferred to the Forest Division in 1969 to be included in the national park.

Later, in July 1980, 575 hectares of the total area was excluded as a 'recreational zone' of the park, while the remaining 1501.073 hectares continued to be a part of the park.

In October 1980, it was further



Various NGOs, including Vanashakti, have been protesting against the proposed cutting of trees in Aarey for Metro rail projects. *Express Archive*

proposed by the Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra Limited that the recreational zone be declared a reserve forest or a protected forest.

However, this was never done and the status of these 575 hectares is currently not clear.

According to the NGO's affidavit, these historical facts prove that Aarey is a forestland.

"It is submitted that large

tracts of land from Aarey Colony have been transferred to the Sanjay Gandhi National Park at the time of expansion of the National Park and thereby, this area falls under the definition of a forest or forest-like area as it boasts of the characteristics common to a National Park," states the affidavit.

Further, it mentions the Supreme Court ruling of 1996 di-

recting state governments to constitute an expert committee to identify forest areas in the state.

However, the Maharashtra government failed to produce records pertaining to Aarey Colony, leading it to not being declared a forestland and consequently inviting all non-forest activities to the area.

Vanashakti and members of the Aarey Conservation Group have challenged MMRDA's proposals to allow Metro Rail activities in Aarey Colony. The Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation (MMRC) had sought 33 hectares of land in Aarey for a car depot.

A public notice was issued in December last year for the change in land use from "No Development Zone" to "Metro Car Depot Workshop, allied facilities and Commercial (C1) Zone".

Later, it was revealed that the MMRDA had plans to construct a Metro Bhavan and an operating centre too for all the city Metro lines at Aarey, besides a temporary labour camp for Metro 7.

Kurla village tense after Mother Mary statues damaged

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 19

KURLA VILLAGE was tense Sunday after two statues of Mother Mary were found vandalised. Angry locals protested on busy roads before being persuaded by the police to calm down.

The statues, one located on Father Peter Pereira Road and another inside Kurla village, were found damaged, with their glass fronts broken with paver blocks. As word spread, locals gathered around the statues and were soon joined by political parties, which were to hold their final public meetings here ahead of the BMC elections on Tuesday.

"We banished the political parties from the area," said advocate Vivian D'Souza, who registered a complaint at Kurla police station.

He added that Kurla village remained tense until the afternoon with locals blocking traffic on LBS Road and demanding strict action against the vandals. "One statue has been completely upended," he said, adding that heavy police presence was deployed to quell the crowd.

"No one was willing to listen to the police initially, even when the additional commissioner of police appealed for peace. A

A local claimed to have spotted two men on a motorbike hurling paver blocks at one of the statues at 4 am.

large crowd had come out to protest the desecration," he said.

Paramjit Singh Dahiya, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Zone V, said the protesters were eventually persuaded to move away from LBS Road. "There was no violence, but a lot of people had gathered since the statues are of sentimental value," he said.

D'Souza added that a local had spotted two men on a motorbike hurling paver blocks at one of the statues at 4 am. "The man noted the licence number of the vehicle but could not get a good look at the men as they were wearing helmets," he said.

Dahiya confirmed that the police had spoken to the eyewitness and his description of the incident could be of great help to the investigation. The Kurla police station has registered a case against two unidentified men for defiling a place of worship in order to insult a religious community and with causing damage.

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London flight lost ATC contact mid-air, Jet de-rosers crew

Mumbai: After a London-bound Jet Airways flight (9W-118) from Mumbai with 330 passengers and 15 crew members on board briefly lost contact with the Air Traffic Control over German airspace on February 16, its crew has been de-registered till investigation is through.

"Contact between Jet Airways flight 9W 118, from Mumbai to London Heathrow, of February 16, 2017, and the local ATC, was briefly lost while flying over German airspace. Communication was safely restored within a few minutes. As a precaution, the German Air Force deployed its aircraft to ensure the safety of the flight and its guests. The flight with 330 guests and 15 crew subsequently landed at London without incident. Jet Airways has duly reported the matter to the concerned authorities including the DGCA. As part of the standard process, the flight crew of 9W 118 has been de-registered pending investigation," an official statement from Jet Airways read. **ENS**

City sweats it out at a high of 38.8 degrees C

ROHIT ALOK
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 19

RISING MERCURY levels in the city made for yet another sweltering day on Sunday, with maximum temperatures peaking at 38.8 degrees Celsius. Mumbai is currently one of the five hottest big cities in the country and the hottest in Maharashtra.

The maximum temperature recorded was 8.6 degrees Celsius above normal, India Meteorological Department (IMD) data indicated. IMD officials said the current "heat phenomenon" in Mumbai was mainly due to strong easterly winds that were forcing the sea breeze to set in late. On Saturday too, the city had recorded a maximum temperature of 38.8 degrees Celsius.

The weather station in Santacruz Sunday recorded a minimum of 19.5 degrees Celsius, while the maximum was 38.8 degrees Celsius. In Colaba, the minimum was 23.2 degrees Celsius and maximum 38.2 degrees Celsius. The humidity level in Colaba was 90 per

cent, while in Santacruz it was at 64 per cent.

"The late setting in of the sea breeze, which brings in some coolness, is the reason behind the higher temperatures. The easterly component of winds are strong and they are countering the sea breeze," said VK Rajeev, director, western region, IMD.

IMD officials said while the sea breeze usually sets in at 1 pm, at present, it was setting in after 2 pm.

Until February 13, maximum temperatures had been hovering around 32 degrees Celsius. In a span of six days, the temperature shot up by 8 degrees Celsius.

The Met department said there was an anti-cyclone wind circulation over Mumbai, which was one of the reasons why parts of north Konkan, such as Dahanu, were also witnessing high temperatures. Rajeev said the city would experience the excess heat till Tuesday.

The IMD added that the all-time record for the hottest February day is 39.6 degrees Celsius, which was recorded on February 25, 1996.

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