

Fadnavis receives grand welcome in Zurich during WEF visit

MUMBAI, Jan 18 (PTI)

MAHARASHTRA Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday landed in Zurich during his five-day visit to Switzerland to attend the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos.

Fadnavis received a traditional Marathi welcome from members of the Marathi community, who greeted him in ethnic attire, while the Maharashtra Song was played to welcome him.

The Chief Minister thanked them for the warm reception, a statement from the Chief Minister's office said.

He was formally welcomed by India's Ambassador to Switzerland, Mridul Kumar. Union Ministers Pralhad Joshi and Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu met Fadnavis and congratulated him on the ruling alliance's strong performance in the recent Maharashtra municipal elections.

Several members of the Indian diaspora also met Fadnavis and praised the civic poll results, with the political mood of

Maharashtra clearly visible even at the international venue.

At a function organised by the Brihan Maharashtra Mandal, Switzerland, banners reading "Welcome Devabhau" were displayed.

Addressing the gathering, Fadnavis said Maharashtra has set up a Maha-NRI Forum to strengthen engagement with the global Marathi community and promote Indian culture, language and identity.

"Cultural strength is the foundation of development. From this comes economic and material progress," he said.

Adding that a new development roadmap for Mumbai is being implemented, the Chief Minister said, in the next five years, Mumbai will be more advanced than the capitals of developed nations.

He also praised the International Marathi Forum's initiative to introduce Marathi language classes in Swiss schools, calling it an important step in preserving linguistic heritage abroad.

Jaishankar, US Senator discuss bilateral ties

NEW DELHI, Jan 18 (IANS)

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar met US Senator Steve Daines in the capital on Sunday, discussing bilateral ties and its strategic significance.

Following their talks, EAM Jaishankar wrote in a post on X, "A pleasure meeting Senator Steve Daines this morning in Delhi. A wide ranging and open discussion on our bilateral relationship and its strategic significance."

On Tuesday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke over the phone with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, reviewing key areas of cooperation, including civil nuclear energy, trade talks, and regional security in the Indo-Pacific.

"Discussed trade, critical minerals, nuclear cooperation, defence, and energy. Agreed to remain in touch on these and other issues," EAM Jaishankar wrote on X after the call. US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor described it as a positive call. "They discussed next



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with US Senator Steve Daines during a meeting, in New Delhi. (PTI)

steps regarding our bilateral trade negotia-

tions, critical minerals, and a possible meeting next month," Gor wrote on X.

During the call, Rubio congratulated India on enacting the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India bill, a recent law that is part of India's nuclear energy framework, Principal Deputy Spokesperson Tommy Pigott said.

He said the United States is interested in building on the legislation to strengthen civil nuclear cooperation between the two countries.

"He expressed interest in capitalising on this important development to enhance US-India civil nuclear cooperation, expand opportunities for American companies, advance shared energy security goals, and secure critical mineral supply chains," Pigott said.

The two diplomats discussed ongoing bilateral trade agreement negotiations and their shared interest in strengthening economic cooperation.

Trump invites India to be part of Board of Peace for Gaza

NEW DELHI, Jan 18 (PTI)

INDIA has been invited by US President Donald Trump to be part of the Board of Peace for Gaza along with other global partners, official sources said on Sunday.

Trump's Board of Peace is being projected by Washington as a new international body to usher in peace and stability in Gaza and beyond, triggering speculation that it may respond to other global conflicts as well.

Originally, the new body was to be tasked with overseeing governance and coordinating funding for Gaza's redevelopment as the strip was devastated during two years of Israeli mili-

Pak says Trump invited PM Sharif to join Board of Peace for Gaza

■ **By Sajjad Hussain**
ISLAMABAD, Jan 18 (PTI)

PAKISTAN on Sunday said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has been invited by President Donald Trump to join the Board of Peace for Gaza.

The White House released a list of appointed members to the founding Executive Board of the Board of Peace on Friday as the country moved to the second phase of Trump's 20-point

peace plan for Gaza. President Trump has already declared himself as the chair of the body.

In response to media queries, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Tahir Andrabi confirmed that Pakistan did get a formal invitation. "The Prime Minister of Pakistan has received the invitation from the President of the United States to join the Board of Peace on Gaza," Andrabi said in a statement.

tary offensive.

The US President unveiled the board as part of the second phase of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. In October last year, Israel and Hamas agreed to Trump's peace plan.

The US President has invited India to be part of the new body, the sources said.

The White House has already announced that the Board of Peace will play an essential role in fulfilling Trump's 20-point plan of providing strategic oversight, mobilising international resources and ensuring accountability as "Gaza transitions from conflict to peace and development".

Attack on Khamenei will be all out war: Iran prez

Iran's president warned on Sunday that any US strike would trigger a "harsh response" from Tehran after an Iranian official in the region said at least 5,000 people — including about 500 security personnel — had been killed in nationwide protests.

US President Trump has repeatedly threatened to intervene if protesters continued to be killed or were executed. He said in an interview with Politico on Saturday: "it's time to look for new leadership in Iran".

Iran indicated on Sunday it might go ahead with execution of people detained during the unrest, and with its clerical rulers facing mounting international pressure over the bloodiest unrest since the 1979 Islamic revolution, is seeking to deter Trump from stepping in. A series of actions have been iden-



tified as Mohareb, which is among the most severe Islamic punishments," Iranian judiciary spokesperson Asghar Jahangir said on Sunday.

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian on X said that Tehran's response "to any unjust aggression will be harsh and

regrettable", adding that any attack on the country's supreme leader Ali Hosseini Khamenei is "tantamount to an all-out war against the nation".

Internet blackouts were partly lifted for a few hours on Saturday but internet monitoring group NetBlocks said they later resumed.

One resident in Tehran said that last week he had witnessed riot police directly shooting at a group of protesters. Videos circulating have shown security forces crushing protests across the country. REUTERS

TERROR FUNDING 2.0 'Crypto Hawala' may revive separatist elements in J&K

SRINAGAR/NEW DELHI, Jan 18 (PTI)

SECURITY agencies have flagged a sophisticated "Crypto Hawala" network bypassing the country's financial safeguards to funnel untraceable foreign funds into Jammu and Kashmir, sparking grave concerns that the money is being used to support terror activities, officials said on Sunday.

This has put the security establishment on high alert, with officials warning that these shadow funds are intended to give a fresh lease of life to separatist elements and reignite the anti-national rhetoric within the Union Territory that had otherwise been virtually neutralised by a crackdown by police and Central agencies, they said.



"Crypto Hawala" network bypasses country's financial safeguards to funnel untraceable foreign funds into Jammu and Kashmir

Mirroring the traditional hawala system, where money is sent through non-banking channels, this digital version uses the anonymity of unregulated cryptocurrency to erase the financial trail and inject cash into the domestic economy. While India requires all

Virtual Digital Asset Service Providers (VDA SPs) to register with the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), this shadow network operates entirely off the grid. For the 2024-25 fiscal year, only 49 exchanges have registered as legal reporting entities, prompting the Government to

come out with fresh guidelines that include a mandatory liveness detection and geographical tracking, besides asking users to take a "live selfie" using software that verifies their presence, typically through eye-blinking or head movement.

The "penny-drop" method, which involves processing a nominal Re 1 transaction to confirm that the bank account is active and belongs to the registrant, is required. In addition to a Permanent Account Number (PAN), users must provide a secondary ID, such as a
(Contd on page 3)