



THE CITY, PAGE 4
ATHAWALE
BATS FOR SENA,
BJP ALLIANCE



THE CITY,
PAGE 4
'METRO WORK
CLOSELY
MONITORED'

EXPRESS HOUSE, PLOT No. 1205/2/6, SHIROLE ROAD, SHIVAJINAGAR, PUNE-411004 | INDIA, E-MAIL: PUNE.NEWSLINE@EXPRESSINDIA.COM, PHONE: 67241000, FAX: 67241148

CBSE Class XII results bring cheer to Pune schools

Several schools had 100 per cent pass percentage; many students scored 90 per cent and above

Teen with Asperger's scores 95.6 per cent, wants to be a scientist

For Akshay Shanbag and his family, it took years of hard work and overcoming last-minute hurdles

ALIFIYA KHAN
PUNE, MAY 26

WHILE THE '90 per cent and above' club may not be so exclusive anymore, as scores of students across city schools have scored that much, the story of one of these students is quite special. And inspirational too.

The story is that of Akshay Shanbag, a teenager with Asperger syndrome — an autism spectrum disorder — who emerged as the second rank topper at Orchid School in Baner. Akshay scored 95.6 per cent in Class XII CBSE exams.

Always an exceptional student, Akshay had scored 95 per cent in Class X exams from an ICSE school. Emerging as one of the school toppers, he had set an example for children with spe-

cial needs in the country. Not too fond of English literature, Akshay, who said he didn't enjoy Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* in Class X, switched over to CBSE simply to avoid studying literature. On Saturday, he was most happy about scoring 95 in CBSE's relatively easier English paper. The high marks in the rest of the subjects were quite expected, he said.

"I had set a target of 90 to 95 per cent overall and prepared for exams accordingly, but I was worried about English," he said. While Akshay has always been a bright student, his parents, Geeta and Prakash Shanbag, insisted that it took years of hard work and a disciplined approach towards studies from all three of them, as well as a lot of support from his school, to reach this academic high point.

Prakash said Akshay faces certain communication problems because of Asperger syndrome. He also gets restless, especially if there is a change in routine, and always wants the same thing in the same place, said Prakash.

"In fact, if one of his teachers was scheduled to take a class for him and she didn't turn up, he had to be informed first by the school so that he didn't get dis-



Akshay celebrates with his parents, Geeta and Prakash Shanbag. Sandip Daundkar

turbed. There were so many small things they had to take care of and we wish to express our appreciation for the support that

the school gave us," said the resident of Model Colony. And then there were the last-minute hiccups. In Class X,

Akshay took his board exams by using a laptop, as it was allowed by ICSE board. To ensure that he could use a laptop in the Class XII

board exam, Geeta and Prakash fought for the issue for two years, and even wrote to the Union Ministry of Human Resource

International-level archer hits bull's eye in Class XII exam

POULOMI CHATTERJEE
PUNE, MAY 26

ONE DAY before her history paper in the Class XII board exams, Khushbu Dhayal, an internationally-ranked archer and student of Army Public School, Camp, was competing in the Senior National Championship.

While she bagged a silver medal in the championship, it was double celebration time for her on Saturday, as she managed to score well above 90 per cent in the CBSE board exams.

Khushbu, who is ranked world no. 147 in archery, scored 94 per cent in her Class XII board examinations.

"I give a lot of credit to my



Khushbu Dhayal was thrilled to score 91 in history, a subject which she had less than a day to prepare for.

school because my teachers were really supportive of me

throughout the year. I had to travel a lot for my archery events so I ended up missing lots of classes. My teachers used to take extra classes for all the subjects during my holidays, so that I could catch up," said Khushbu, who was thrilled to score 91 in history, a subject which she had less than a day to prepare for.

While she is undecided on which course to pursue for her graduation, Khushbu is determined that sports will continue to be an integral part of her life. "Sports management is still an emerging concept here, so maybe I will go to the United States for that. But I am also thinking about doing a BA or a BCom in the city before that," she said.

A serious accident sent him to ICU days before practicals, but he still scored 86 pc

ALIFIYA KHAN
PUNE, MAY 26

A FEW days before his practical exams for Class XII boards, 17-year-old Siddharth Sharma met with a serious road accident. He suffered intestinal hernia and kidney damage, fractured his ribs and spine, and landed up in the intensive care unit of a city hospital. Thirteen days after the accident, when Siddharth was finally out of the ICU but was still confined to a hospital bed, his school principal Neelam Chakrabarty met him and gave him an assurance.

She told him that he would be able to take his board exam.

"I didn't want him to be dis-



Siddharth with his mother Ekta Sharma. Express

couraged... he was such a sincere student. Since practical exams

were over, we wrote to the board. They told us he could take the exams until late February, which was a great motivation for him," said Chakrabarty, principal of Delhi Public School.

A bright student who scored 90 per cent in his pre-board exams, Siddharth, a resident of Magarpatta, is still awaiting his final results as the practical marks have yet to be added to his theory exam tally.

But Chakrabarty said the board authorities have asked her to add the practical marks and announce the results to Siddharth, ending his anxiety. She said Siddharth has

scored 86 per cent.

"I tried studying while I was in the hospital, but I was in so much pain that I couldn't do it... After coming home, I couldn't study much as I found it difficult to concentrate because of the medication, which made me drowsy. Since I had done well in my pre-boards in most subjects, I kept my focus only on biology and psychology for revision, relying on my previous studies for the boards. My school teachers and principal, and my mother Ekta Sharma, gave me the support that I needed," said Siddharth.

An aspiring law student, he has given the entrance exams for many city-based law schools and is now awaiting the results.

IN MAHARASHTRA

Granted bail, 23 women prisoners still behind bars as they can't pay surety

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PUNE, MAY 26

TWENTY THREE women prisoners are languishing in jails across the state, even after being granted bail, because they have not been able to pay the surety amount needed for their release, a study conducted by the Maharashtra State Commission for Women has revealed.

Vijaya Rahatkar, chairperson of the Maharashtra State Commission for Women, said she has asked the prison department to submit a proposal to the commission to set up a corpus fund that can be used for helping such prisoners. An amount of Rs 1.5 crore can be allocated for the purpose, she said.

Rahatkar, who was in Pune to conduct an inspection of the women's jail in Yerwada, said she was looking into issues such as overcrowding in prisons, the

health facilities provided, legal help for women inmates, rehabilitation plans including skill development and the quality of food provided to prisoners, among others.

She added that new barracks were needed at the women's jail in Yerwada and a proposal in this regard was pending with the prison department. While the jail has the capacity to accommodate 126 prisoners, currently as many as 289 women are lodged there, including a Bangladeshi and an Indonesian national.

The State Commission for Women is also conducting a study on the health issues faced by women prisoners with the help of Driшти, a Pune-based NGO. "The study will be conducted for about three to four more months across all jails in the state. So far, we have found the situation to be satisfactory... telemedicine facilities are helping inmates diagnose... ill-

nesses," she said.

Rahatkar said the State Commission for Women has also sought permission from the state government for installing sanitary napkin vending machines and incinerators in all the 31 women's jails in the state. She pointed out that women prisoners can use the information boards and complaint boxes inside the jail premises to file complaints on whatever issue was plaguing them. A panel, formed after the death of a woman prisoner in Byculla jail last year, had recommended that such boards should be put up at all prisons.

Rahatkar said she interacted with the women inmates in Yerwada jail while there were no other jail staffers around. "Women inmates can talk to the district judge, who visits the jail regularly, or with the commission member at the time of inspection. The district judge has the key to the complaint box", she said.

NIPAH WATCH

State steps up efforts, starts collecting samples for testing

PARTHA SARATHI BISWAS
PUNE, MAY 26

STEPPING UP its surveillance for possible cases of Nipah virus, officials and staff of the state Animal Husbandry Department have started collecting samples from pig farms and testing them.

Kantilal Umap, commissioner of Animal Husbandry department, said a similar exercise was being carried out in places frequented by bats, in a joint effort with the wildlife department.

The virus spreads through contact with bat droppings or consuming fruits infected with it. Infected pork is another medium through which the disease can spread. The virus has claimed 12 lives in Kerala and there are reports about the virus spreading to Karnataka.

Umap said special teams have been formed at district levels, and they have been given the

task of collecting samples both from pig farms as well as areas populated by bats. Teams have been asked to use special masks and other protective clothing as they go about collecting samples of pig excreta, bat droppings etc.

He said most of the pig farms were in the western part of the state. "The region also has a large population of bats due to the large-scale cultivation of fruits there," he said. "We have also roped in local experts for the exercise."

The samples are to be submitted at the Animal Disease Investigation Section's laboratory in Aundh, where they will be tested for the virus.

The department has also set up a control room to monitor the situation and district administrations have been asked to set up similar mechanisms. "We are stressing on proper dissemination of information to avoid panic among the public, as well as to identify any possible signs of the disease," he said.

36 Bangladeshi nationals with 'suspicious documents' held from Buddhavihars in Pune district

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PUNE, MAY 26

THE PUNE Rural Police have detained 36 Bangladeshi nationals from different parts of the district for allegedly living illegally in India.

The "illegal" Bangladeshi migrants were picked up from Daund, Yevat, Wadgaon Nimbalkar and Baramati, said police sources. Some of them were found to be living as bhikkhus (priests) in Buddhavihars.

Personnel from the anti-terrorist cell of the Pune Rural Police first nabbed 15 Bangladeshi nationals from a Buddhavihar in Patas in Daund taluka. The suspects had allegedly been living in India illegally for the past one year.

Police teams then picked up Bangladeshi nationals from

Kurkumbh village and Malegaon in Baramati. Some documents found in the possession of the detained men were fake and suspicious, said police.

Offences were registered against the "illegal" Bangladeshi migrants at Daund, Yevat and Baramati rural police stations on Saturday.

Police are investigating how the Bangladeshi nationals came to the Buddhavihars in Pune district.

While the suspects told police that they had come here to preach Buddhism, investigators are trying to ascertain why they came to India and how they obtained illegal Indian identity documents.

In March this year, in a joint operation, officials of the central intelligence agencies, Military Intelligence and the state Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) had arrested several illegal Bangladeshi

migrants from Raigad and Pune, including three Bangladeshi nationals who were suspected to have provided logistical support and financial help to members of the banned outfit Ansarulla Bangla Team (ABT), which is a 'front organisation' for Al-Qaeda.

The ATS had recovered identity documents such as Aadhaar cards, PAN cards and Voters' IDs from the trio, which they had procured by submitting bogus documents at the respective government offices. The trio were booked under sections of Indian Penal Code, Passport Act, the Foreigners Act and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.

A 41-year-old man from Khargar in Navi Mumbai was also arrested in connection with the case in March, for allegedly helping the illegal Bangladeshi migrants procure Aadhaar cards and PAN cards by submitting bogus documents.

Too high last year, falling this year: How imbalance of supply & demand hits onion prices

PARTHA SARATHI BISWAS
PUNE, MAY 26

ONIONS ARE in the news again, this time because of the extremely low rates at which farmers across the state are being forced to sell the produce. As the central government fine-tunes its policy about extending the export incentive for onions, most farmers don't seem to have much hope about prices recovering.

balance
The annual consumption of onions is pegged at around 16 million tonnes in India, while close to 20 million tonnes is produced in India. The amount that falls between supply and demand finds its way out of India, in the form of exports. Exports are necessary to maintain the balance of prices in domestic markets, as even a minor glut can result in prices collapsing in local wholesale markets.

While the central government keeps a close watch on the movement of onion prices,

most interventions are aimed at ensuring that the price of the essential vegetable does not rise suddenly.

Since onion is an integral part of most kitchens, the crop is cultivated throughout the year. The crop grown in kharif (sown in June-July and harvested after September) and late kharif (sown after September and harvested January onwards), are not suitable for storage due to their higher moisture content.

The third crop, or rabi onion, can be stored and that's the one supplied to the market

from March to September. Usually, farmers store onions in on-field storage structures called *kanda chavlis* and release it as per price movement in the markets.

In Maharashtra, onion is sown across an area of over 5 lakh hectares, and the state is the largest supplier of the bulb in the country. Pune-Ahmednagar-Nashik-Dhule is considered the 'onion belt' of the state.

The wholesale market of Lasalgaon in Niphad taluka of Nashik is the largest onion market in the country.

A different problem last year

Last year, the failure of the rabi onion crop in neighbouring Karnataka had led to a price escalation in retail markets due to a major discrepancy between supply and demand.

Wholesale prices had shot up from Rs 5-6 per kg to Rs 20 per kg in June and by the end of 2017, onion prices in the wholesale markets had almost touched Rs 40 per kg, with retail prices hovering around Rs 60-70 per kg.

To stabilise prices, the government had introduced a steep \$850 per quintal

Minimum Export Price (MEP), in an attempt to discourage exports. MEP is the minimum price and export contracts can't be finalised at an amount below it. Around 20,000 tonnes of onions were also imported to reduce prices in wholesale and retail markets.

Problems this year

The markets have quite the opposite problem this year. Since March, onion prices at Lasalgaon market have been in the low range of Rs 5-6 per kg, with retail prices hovering around Rs 10-12 per kg. The glut of onions

comes after a season of bumper crops. Instead of being cultivated on 3 lakh hectares, cultivation of rabi onion in the state has expanded to an area of around 3.5 lakh hectares. This 6-7 per cent increase in production has disrupted the supply-demand equation and led to a fall in prices. While the MEP was removed in February, onion prices in wholesale markets are yet to pick up. Farmers and traders in the sector had demanded that the excess onion be exported to arrest the freefall in prices.

Export promotion scheme

Pasha Patel, chairman of the State Commission for Agriculture and Prices, had recently met Union Minister of Commerce Suresh Prabhu to seek a 5-7 per cent incentive for sprucing up exports. The government is hopeful that because of the scheme, which offers an incentive to exporters, more and more of the excess product will be pushed out of the market.

This, in turn, will help firm up prices in domestic markets. The subsidy scheme, however, may cause a slight price rise in the market, though traders say the increase will be marginal.