

When a river is rejuvenated...

Kota (Rajasthan): Environmentalist Bitthal Sanadhya was roaming near the Labhakho and Peepalda areas of the Dabi forest range in Rajasthan's Bundi district when he was told by a forest ranger that the place was a river buried by debris from illegal mining sites.

Stunned by the revelation, Bundi Jal Biradari president Sanadhya -- who draws inspiration from Ramon Magsaysay Award winner Rajendra Singh -- was driven to revive the river, a tributary of the Chambal known locally as the Aeru. Armed with GPS images of the illegal mining sites and the buried river, he approached Rajasthan High Court in 2018 and filed a PIL

to revive the Aeru in the region. An eight-kilometre stretch of the Aeru, which covers 40 kilometres through the Bhilwara and Bundi districts before merging into the Chambal, had been buried under debris from illegal mines.

The Aeru originates from Tilaswa Mahadev in Bhilwara and passes through six villages before entering Bundi at Lamakhoh. For years, suspected mining mafia illegally mined stones and slabs in the Aeru, turning the river into a dump yard.

"The ranger's response when he said it was part of the Aeru river buried under mining dump stunned me," Sanadhya said. "Since then, I devoted myself to bringing

the river back to life," he added. Following a five-year battle, the high court last year ordered the Department of Mines & Geology to prepare an action plan for the removal of the mining waste from the river and allocate funds for its implementation.

Complying with the order, Bundi collector Akshay Godara allocated Rs 10 crore from the District Mining Foundation Trust for removing the waste earlier this year. Work on the river revival project, beginning with the removal of the mining debris, started in June and it has already begun to pay dividends.

Crystal-clear water now flows over a more than two-kilometre stretch, with the

hope that the Aeru will once again enrich the riverbanks as it had previously done.

At least 15 earthmovers and 25 dumpers have been deployed to remove the mining waste and 40 per cent of the work has already been completed, said Ajay Singh Gurjar -- a junior engineer of the water resources department, which is executing the cleanup drive. The work is now stopped for the monsoon but it will be completed by November, he added.

Research scholar Suman Sharma, who is pursuing a PhD on the water crisis in the Kota-Bundi region, said it was a rare example of a "buried river" being revived by an environmentalist's passion. -PTI



NDRF personnel evacuate people from a flood-affected area following heavy monsoon rainfall, at Adhayanagar village, on the outskirts of Agartala on Thursday

Pic: PTI

LG nods tree felling, AAP wants resignation

New Delhi: The Aam Admi Party (AAP) on Monday demanded Lt Governor V.K. Saxena's resignation for allegedly approving the felling of 1,100 trees in Delhi's Ridge area.

There was no immediate reaction from the Lt Governor's Office.

Addressing a press conference, Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said the affidavit filed by the contractor involved in the project showed that the permission to fell the trees was issued by the lieutenant governor.

"The affidavit filed by the contractor says that in an email received from the DDA (Delhi Development Authority), he was told that permission to remove the trees that obstructed the right of way had been granted by the lieutenant governor," he claimed.

Bharadwaj said the email had "exposed" the lieutenant governor. "He should immediately tender his resignation. I challenge him to come clean," the minister added.

The Supreme Court initiated suo motu (on its own)

contempt proceedings against the DDA vice-chairman over the alleged felling of 1,100 trees in the ridge forest for a road-widening project.

AAP leader Sanjay Singh, on the other hand, alleged that the BJP and the lieutenant governor were "ruining" Delhi. Holding up some purported documents during a press conference, he said, "The company that felled the trees has given an affidavit in court, saying the lieutenant governor is responsible for it."



Saurabh Bharadwaj addresses a press conference at the party office, in New Delhi on Monday. Pic: PTI

He said that according to the original plan, the land of nearby farmhouses was

to be acquired for the road. But 1,100 trees were felled to save the farmhouses.

Ice cave collapse in Iceland kills one

Berlin: At least one person has died and two others are still missing after an ice cave partially collapsed as a group of tourists was visiting the Breidamerkurjokull glacier in southern Iceland.

Local police say first responders received a call shortly before 3 p.m. on Sunday as a group of about 25 foreign tourists from several nationalities were exploring ice caves when four people were hit by ice.

Two people were seriously injured, one dying from their injuries at the scene of the accident.

Surge in elephant deaths

Odisha overhauls squad deployment

Bhubaneswar: Under scrutiny for the death of over 40 elephants so far this fiscal, the Odisha forest department has reassigned protection squads from forest divisions to circle levels for more effective wildlife protection.

In a recent letter to all Regional Chief Conservators of Forests (RCCFs), the office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) and Chief Wildlife

Warden said despite having 397 squads deployed in different forest divisions for protection and conservation of wildlife, more than 40 elephant deaths have been reported during the current financial year.

The letter stated that while the services of these squads are crucial, the leadership necessary for their effective utilisation and the standard operating procedures for field operations.



Smoke from wildfires fills the air near above the Mario Donega highway in Ribeirao Preto, Sao Paulo state, Brazil on Sunday

Pic: PTI

DMRC tweaks plans to save 69 trees

New Delhi: The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) has redesigned its Phase-4 construction plan to save 69 trees on the Janakpuri West-RK Ashram Marg Corridor, officials said on Monday.

They said that permission was received for felling overall 15,508 trees across Delhi for this phase, and approval was awaited for cutting 71 more on the Majlis Park-Maujpur Corridor.

"The DMRC has redesigned its construction plans to avoid felling of 69 trees on the Janakpuri West to RK Ashram Marg corridor. Earlier, permission was sought for these trees as well.

"For Phase-4 works overall, permission has been received for the cutting of 15,508 trees across Delhi. Out of these, 5,003 trees have been cut and over 7,000 have been transplanted," the official stated. The DMRC makes provi-



sions for the plantation of 10 trees for each tree cut or transplanted for construction. All efforts are made to either avoid areas with trees while planning the alignment or transplantation, they said.

However, delays in receiving tree felling permissions have also led to delays on all the three priority corridors of Phase-4, they added. The work in this phase began in December 2019 and was hit due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The DMRC is undertaking construction work on 65.2 km spanning 45 stations under the project's three priority corridors: Janakpuri West-RK Ashram Marg (28.92 km), Majlis Park-Maujpur (12.55 km), which are extensions

of the already operational Magenta Line and Pink Line; and the Aerocity-Tughlakabad (23.62 km) Corridor that is being built as "Silver Line", connecting the operational Violet Line and Airport Line from the respective ends.

According to government figures, the DMRC cut down 13,858 trees and transplanted 3,584 during the construction of Phase 1, which commenced in 1998 and concluded in 2005. The 65-kilometre-long rail network comprised 59 stations. In Phase 2, carried out between 2005 and 2011, the DMRC axed 17,997 trees and transplanted 3,052 trees. The Phase 2 had 89 stations across 125 km.

In Phase 3, which took nine years to complete from 2011, the DMRC cut down 11,872 trees and transplanted 506. Phase 3 involved the development of a 160-km-long rail network comprising 109 stations. -PTI

Dam collapses in Sudan, dozens missing

Cairo: A dam collapsed in Sudan's eastern Red Sea state, sending water flooding over nearby homes, the country's health ministry said. Local media said dozens of people are missing.

In a statement late Sunday, the ministry said that the Arbaat dam had collapsed and that resources had been deployed to the area to help the people who had been stranded.

The statement said at least four people had died in the floodwaters but did not give an estimate of how many were missing. How-

ever, a local official told the Sudanese news site Al-Tagheer that he believed there to be at least 60 dead. Amr Eissa Taher, the head water resources official for the Red Sea state, said the damage was extensive.

The Sudanese news outlet Medameek, citing the country's air force, reported more than 100 people were missing, and that many other villagers had climbed to hills tops to avoid the rising waters.

The dam is 40 kilometres north of the city of Port Sudan.

PM assures full support

Agartala: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Monday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to him about the flood situation in the state and assured him of full support to the people to tide over the crisis.

At least 26 persons have died and 1.17 lakh people have been rendered homeless in Tripura due to devastating floods since August 19.

"Spoke to Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji spelling out all the details of the flood situation in the state. He assured of full support to the people of Tripura."

Revitalisation of Okhla Bird Sanctuary Bisleri partners with UP govt

By Correspondent

Noida (UP): Bisleri International on Monday organized a mega cleaning drive and installed display boards depicting bird history in collaboration with UP Forest Department at the Okhla Bird Sanctuary, a vital ecological haven located at the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh state border. The initiative is a part of a larger commitment aimed towards the improvement and conservation of the sanctuary's infrastructure.

The restoration program included critical improvements like updating and

repairing bird information display boards, installing new signage to improve the overall visitor experience, benefiting both the sanctuary and its visitors. The sanctuary is roughly four-square kilometers in size and houses more than 300 species of waterbirds. The most prominent feature of the sanctuary is the large lake created by damming the river, which lies between Okhla village to the west and Gautam Buddha Nagar to the east. The sanctuary draws over 70 thousand visitors each year.

P.K. Srivastava, IFS, District Forest Officer (DFO),

Gautam Buddha Nagar, said, "The Okhla Bird Sanctuary is a critical haven for a diverse array of bird species and an important site for conservation and education. This cleaning drive is a significant contribution to preserving and improving this vital ecological resource. By updating facilities and enhancing visitor experiences, these efforts will help sustain the sanctuary's role as an essential refuge for wildlife and an inspiring destination for nature enthusiasts."

Earlier this year, Bisleri International successfully restored and rededicated a



lake at Madras Christian College, enhancing its water-holding capacity to 20 million liters.

This project, supported by Mega Foundations and the Scrub Society, involved widening the lake's bound-

aries, desilting, developing an island to attract bird species, restoring the check dam, planting over 100 native species, and installing an IoT-enabled floating duck for real-time water quality monitoring.

Economists say ending the war would help

Israel's economy is struggling

Jerusalem: In Jerusalem's Old City, nearly all souvenir shops are closed. In Haifa's flea market, forlorn merchants polish their wares on empty streets. Airlines are canceling flights, businesses are failing and luxury hotels are half empty.

Nearly 11 months into the war with Hamas, Israel's economy is struggling as the country's leaders grind ahead with an offensive in Gaza that shows no signs of ending and threatens to escalate into a wider conflict.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has tried to allay concerns by saying the economic damage is only temporary. But the bloodiest, most destructive war ever between Israel and Hamas has hurt thousands of small businesses and compromised international trust in an economy once thought of as an entrepre-

neurial dynamo. Some leading economists say a ceasefire is the best way to stop the damage.

"The economy right now is under huge uncertainty, and it's related to the security situation — how long the war will go on, what the intensity will be and the question of whether there will be further escalation," said Karnit Flug, Israel's former central bank chief who is now the vice president of research at the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank.

The war has inflicted a far heavier toll on Gaza's already broken economy, displacing 90% of the population and leaving the vast majority of the workforce unemployed. All banks in the territory have shut. The fighting has killed more than 40,000 people, according to Palestinian health of-



ficials in the Hamas-run territory. Their count does not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

The fighting in Gaza and daily attacks from Hezbollah militants in Lebanon have also driven tens of

thousands of people from their homes along Israel's northern and southern borders and caused large-scale damage.

The Israeli economy has recovered from previous shocks, including shorter

wars with Hamas. But this longer conflict has created a bigger strain, including the cost of rebuilding, compensating families of victims and reserve soldiers, and vast military spending.

NUMBERS SPEAK

1200	Israelis killed in Hamas attack
16 per cent	Drop at Israeli ports
\$120 billion	Israel's cost of the war
20 per cent	Cost of war equal to GDP
1.5 per cent	Projection of growth of GDP in 2024
8 per cent	Budget deficit
4.8 per cent	Unemployment rate
46,000	Businesses closed down since start of war

The drawn-out nature of the fighting and the threat of further escalation with Iran and its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah, have an especially harsh impact on tourism. Though tourism is not a major driver of the econo-

my, the damage has hurt thousands of workers and small businesses.

Jacob, 45, returned in April from six months of duty as a reserve soldier to find out that business had dried up. He was forced to

shutter the tourism company he spent two decades developing. His only income is aid from the government, which pays him half his prewar salary every few months.

Meir Sabag, a Haifa antiques dealer whose shop sat empty, said business is worse now than during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On a recent weekday, the formerly bustling port of Haifa, a major hub of Israeli import-export where massive container ships would often stop, was still.

With Yemen's Houthi rebel group endangering ships passing through Egypt's Suez Canal, many long-haul ships have stopped using Israeli ports as hubs, said a port official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was sharing internal information.

- AP

China patrols near Myanmar border

Beijing: China's military is carrying out armed patrols near the Myanmar border this week, where the government is concerned about potential fallout from fierce fighting in a civil war on the other side.

Troops were deployed to Yunnan province in southwestern China on Monday to test their ability to maintain security in border areas, the military's Southern Theater Command said.

An alliance of ethnic militias has dealt a series of setbacks to Myanmar's military in the country's



northeast, which is near China. Five people were injured on the Chinese side in January by a stray artillery shell.

Live-fire drills will be

held from Tuesday to Thursday in four locations including two in Ruili city, the Yunnan government said.

The units will carry out

armed patrols and joint air-ground patrols to test their ability to mobilize quickly, block and control and strike together, the southern command said in a statement.

The military previously held live-fire drills near the Myanmar border in November.

China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, said earlier this month that his country "opposes chaos and war in Myanmar," according to Chinese state media.

Beijing helped broker a cease-fire in January, but

that fell apart in June when one member of the Three Brotherhood Alliance launched new attacks.

Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, the leader of the military government, alleged recently that foreign countries were backing the ethnic militias, a likely reference to China, which has long ties to the groups.

Wang, who was on a visit to Myanmar, told Min Aung Hlaing that China opposes the attacks in Shan state, according to Myanmar state television.

- AP

Malaysian naval ship sinks

Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian authorities were working Monday to salvage a 45-year-old fast attack naval ship that sank after it struck an unknown underwater object.

The navy said in a statement that a leak was first detected in the engine room of the KD Pendekar on Sunday, which quickly flooded the vessel. The crew failed to fix the hole and the 260-ton ship sank underwater hours later off the coast of southern Johor state, it said. All 39 crew members were evacuated safely, with no injuries.

Drone attack kills 21 civilians

Bamako (Mali): Airstrikes on a village in northern Mali near the Algerian border Sunday killed 21 civilians, including 11 children, a spokesman for a coalition of Tuareg-majority pro-independence groups said.

If confirmed, the attack on the village of Tinzaouatine would mark the largest number of civilians killed by drones since the breakdown of a peace agreement between the country's ruling military junta and armed pro-inde-

pendence groups in northern Mali last year.

The Strategic Framework for the Defense of the People of Azawad is a coalition of Tuareg-majority groups fighting for the independence of northern Mali, which they call Azawad.

The strikes Sunday targeted a pharmacy, then other strikes followed that targeted people gathering in the vicinity of the initial damage, the coalition said in a statement.

- PTI



This photo released by the European Union's Operation Aspides shows fires burning aboard the oil tanker Sounion in the Red Sea on Sunday. The EU mission said Monday that there were no signs of an oil spill.

Long-range missiles designed to reach US mainland Kim supervises 'suicide drones'

By Kim Tong-Hyung

Seoul: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised a demonstration of new "suicide drones" and pledged to spur the development of such weapons to boost his military's war readiness, state media said Monday.

Kim has been flaunting his growing military capabilities amid tensions with Washington and Seoul. North Korean photos of the test showed a white drone with X-shaped tails and wings supposedly crashing into and destroying a target resembling South Korea's K-2 main battle tank. Most combat drones stand off from targets and attack with missiles.

The test, which state media said took place Saturday, came as the U.S. and South Korean militaries are conducting a large-scale exercise aimed at enhancing their combined capabilities to defend against growing North Korean nuclear threats.

The allies said the drills, which continue through Thursday, are focused on enhancing their readiness



In this photo provided by the North Korean government, its leader Kim Jong Un inspects a demonstration of what it says a drone crashing into a target at an undisclosed location in North Korea on Saturday.

against various North Korean threats and would also reflect lessons learned from recent armed conflicts.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said Saturday's test involved various types of drones built to fly different ranges to attack enemy targets on land and sea. It said the drones flew along various routes before accurately

hitting test targets.

Kim said that global trends in military technologies and modern combat show the importance of drones in war and that the North's military should be equipped with advanced drones "as early as possible."

He called for accelerated development and production of various systems, including "suicide drones"

that can be used by the infantry and special operations units, reconnaissance and multi-purpose attack drones, and underwater suicide attack drones, KCNA said.

Animosities on the Korean Peninsula is high as Kim uses Russia's war against Ukraine as a distraction while he strengthens his nuclear-armed military and issues verbal threats of conflict toward Washington and Seoul.

While most of the international attention has been focused on his long-range missiles designed to reach the US mainland, Kim has also been expanding weapons targeting rival South Korea, most notably short-range missiles and artillery systems the North has described as nuclear-capable.

Earlier this month, Kim staged a huge ceremony in North Korea's capital, Pyongyang, to mark the delivery of 250 nuclear-capable missile launchers to frontline military units and called for a ceaseless expansion of the military's nuclear program.

- AP

Russia unleashes massive attack

Kyiv: Russia unleashed a massive drone and missile barrage throughout Ukraine on Monday that appeared to target energy infrastructure. At least three people were reported killed.

The barrage began around midnight and continued beyond daybreak in what appeared to be Russia's biggest attack against Ukraine in weeks.

According to Ukraine's air force, there were multiple groups of Russian drones moving toward eastern, northern, southern, and central regions of Ukraine, followed by multiple cruise and ballistic missiles.

Explosions were heard in the capital, Kyiv. Power and water supplies in the city have been disrupted by the

attack, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said.

In the wake of the barrage, the city administration announced plans to open "points of invincibility" — shelter-type places where people can charge their devices and get refreshments during energy blackouts. Such points were first opened in Ukraine in the fall of 2022, when Russia

targeted the country's energy infrastructure with weekly barrages.

Ihor Polishchuk, mayor of Ukraine's western city of Lutsk, said a multistory residential building and an unspecified infrastructure object were hit and one person was killed.

Another person was killed in the central Dnipropetrovsk region. - PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY



Jenna Ortega, Actor

"I hate A.I... Did I like being 14 and making a Twitter account because I was supposed to and seeing dirty edited content of me as a child? No. It's terrifying. It's corrupt. It's wrong."

India, Singapore to enhance co-operation

Singapore: India and Singapore on Monday pledged to further enhance co-operation in the emerging and futuristic areas.

The Indian delegation led by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman deliberated upon six pillars identified under India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable (ISMR). Deputy Prime Minister Gan Kim Yong led the delegation of Singapore during the second ISMR.

"During the meeting, the leaders emphasised on ways of further enhancing co-op-



Union Ministers S. Jaishankar, Nirmala Sitharaman, Piyush Goyal and Ashwini Vaishnav and others during a meeting with the President of Singapore Tharman Shanmugaratnam, in Singapore.

eration between India and Singapore in emerging and futuristic areas. Both sides

deliberated upon six pillars identified under ISMR, which include Digitalisa-

tion, Skill Development, Sustainability, Healthcare & Medicine, and Advanced Manufacturing and Connectivity," the finance ministry said in post on X.

The leaders also discussed plans for commemorating the 60th Anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Singapore, alongside regional and global cooperation, including ASEAN & G20 developments, it said.

The leaders noted that the discussions in the first round of ISMR have result-

ed in the successful conclusion of MoUs on healthcare, education & skill development, digital cooperation and semiconductor ecosystem cooperation, it said.

Along with Sitharaman, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav were present for the meeting.

ISMR is a unique mechanism established to set a new agenda for India-Singapore bilateral relations.

- PTI

EDITORIAL

A Calculated Gamble

As Jammu and Kashmir gears up for its first Assembly election since the revocation of its special status in 2019, the Congress and the National Conference (NC) find themselves entering an alliance fraught with both promise and peril. For the two parties, this partnership is less a marriage of ideals and more a pragmatic arrangement aimed at countering the formidable challenge posed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The alliance is not without its internal frictions. While there is broad consensus on the distribution of the 90 Assembly seats in Jammu & Kashmir, disagreements persist over several key constituencies, particularly in the Kashmir Valley. The Congress, which has historically struggled to make significant electoral inroads in the Valley, is pushing for a substantial share of the 47 seats up for grabs there. The NC, which regards the Valley as its stronghold, is understandably reluctant to concede too many seats to its junior partner.

This tension is most evident in the Congress's demands for seats in south and central Kashmir, including Tral and Srinagar, areas where the party's past performance has been less than stellar. The NC's hesitation is justified as these are regions where it has traditionally dominated, and any compromise could weaken its hold. The Congress's insistence is driven by the belief that its recent resurgence, bolstered by Rahul Gandhi's efforts to reinvigorate the party in Jammu and Kashmir, could translate into electoral gains.

The alliance's success hinges on a delicate balancing act. The NC understands that without Congress's support in Jammu, the prospect of a stable, anti-BJP government remains elusive.

Rahul Gandhi's revitalization of the Congress in Jammu & Kashmir has injected new energy into the party, particularly in the BJP-dominated Jammu region.

Meanwhile, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), once a formidable player in the region, finds itself sidelined. Excluded from the Congress-NC alliance, the PDP is struggling to recover from its ill-fated partnership with the BJP, which led to a sharp decline in its political fortunes.

As Jammu and Kashmir prepares for a three-phase election starting on September 18, the Congress-NC alliance represents a calculated gamble. It also risks being viewed as a mere opportunistic ploy, lacking a coherent vision for the future of Jammu & Kashmir.

The BJP, for its part, is likely to exploit these contradictions to the fullest. Having positioned itself as the architect of Jammu & Kashmir's new political order, the BJP will cast the Congress-NC alliance as a return to the politics of appeasement and separatism while projecting itself as the guardian of national unity and development—a message that resonates particularly well in the Jammu region.

For the BJP, the challenge lies in retaining its foothold in the Valley, where it remains deeply unpopular.

NATIONAL INTEREST

Cold war between Uddhav Thackeray and the Congress

By
Kiran D. Tare

The Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA), an alliance born out of political necessity rather than ideological congruence after the 2019 Assembly election, now finds itself at something of a crossroads despite its remarkable win in the recently concluded Lok Sabha election.

The unilateral move Uddhav Thackeray, leader of the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray), to project himself as the chief ministerial candidate for the 2024 Maharashtra Assembly elections has sparked a political cold war within the coalition, particularly with the Congress. Thackeray's move, ostensibly aimed at consolidating his base within the Sena and projecting an image of leadership after his ousting as chief minister in 2022, has ruffled feathers within the

Uddhav Thackeray wants the MVA to project him as their CM face for the upcoming Assembly elections. True to its nature, the Congress has given him a cold response. This is beginning of a new conflict.

Congress.

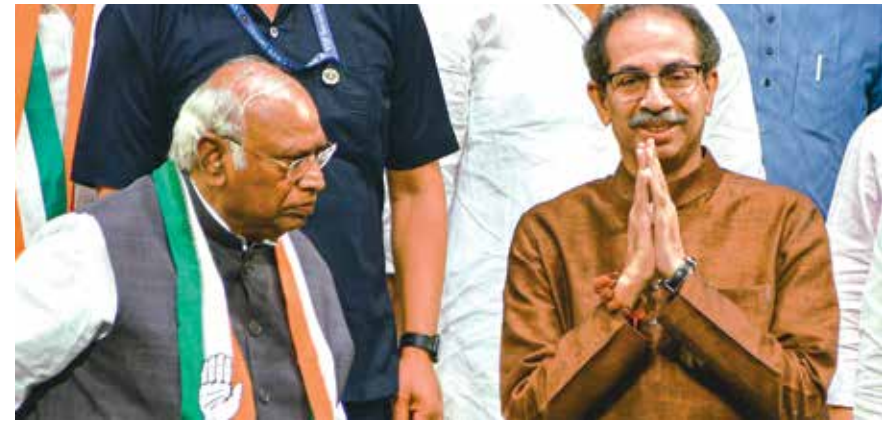
Thackeray's demands for a clear stance on the CM face seems to reflect his frustration with the MVA coalition's current dynamics. In recent meetings with Congress and NCP leaders, he has pressed for a clear decision on who will lead the government if the MVA wins.

When the MVA was formed with the sole consideration of keeping the BJP at bay, the Congress was the third partner in the coalition, having lesser MLAs as compared to the undivided Shiv Sena and the NCP. However, vertical splits within the Shiv Sena and the NCP in 2022 and 2023 respectively, followed by the Congress' stunning revival in Maharashtra - which saw the party win 13 of the 17 Lok Sabha seats it contested on to emerge as the single-largest in the State - have changed equations within the coalition.

The party's leadership, wary of being reduced to a mere junior partner, has voiced its displeasure, reminding Thackeray that such decisions ought to be made collectively within the MVA, not dictated unilaterally by any one leader.

Furthermore, Thackeray's growing support among Muslims could potentially strain his relationship with the Congress. The Congress, traditionally seen as the primary representative of Muslim interests within the alliance, view Thackeray's inroads into this voter base as an encroachment on its electoral turf. This could lead to heightening of tensions between the two parties as they jostle for dominance within the coalition, particularly in constituencies where minority voters play a decisive role. The Congress has historically relied on minority support as a cornerstone of its electoral strategy in Maharashtra.

However, after the split within the Sena following Eknath Shinde's revolt, the minorities, electorally jaded after supporting parties like the Congress and the AIMIM in the past, now see Thackeray as an attractive alternative given that he has been aggressively taken on



the BJP and PM Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Uddhav's increasing appeal to these demographics challenges the Congress's position, potentially leading to a reconfiguration of political dynamics within the MVA as both parties seek to consolidate their influence ahead of the 2024 Maharashtra Assembly election. Thackeray has been insistent that the coalition agree on a Chief Ministerial candidate prior to the elections, even if the name remains undisclosed to the public.

At a recent press conference, he made clear on the need to avoid the discord that he had experienced when in alliance with the BJP, where a lack of clear leadership and seat-sharing agreements had led the collapse of the long-standing Sena-BJP alliance. The Congress has remained resistant to Thackeray's push. Congress leaders have even criticized Thackeray's performance in the Lok Sabha election, pointing to his party's 'poor' showing and the Sena (UBT)'s inability to transfer votes effectively to Congress-NCP undermines his position.

Of the three MVA parties, Thackeray's Sena (UBT), despite contesting on the largest number of seats (21), had managed to secure only nine while Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP) had the best strike rate - winning eight of the ten seats it con-

tested on.

Tensions within the opposition coalition were rife even before the Lok Sabha. The claim over the Sangli seat, which saw the Congress and the Sena (UBT) nearly coming to blows, was microcosmic of the inherent schism within the MVA. The Thackeray group had unilaterally claimed the Sangli seat for itself despite it being a Congress bastion for 50 years, provoking intense resentment among the Congress cadre throughout western Maharashtra. Ultimately, Congress rebel Vishal Patil won the seat by trouncing political neophyte Chandrahar Patil, a wrestler fielded by the Sena (UBT).

Amid this brewing discord between Thackeray and the Congress, the 83-year-old Sharad Pawar, the architect of the MVA, has adopted a cautious stance. Known for his political acumen and ability to navigate Maharashtra's complex political terrain, Pawar has refrained from openly endorsing Thackeray's move. Instead, he has called for unity within the alliance, urging all parties to focus on their common goal of defeating the BJP in the upcoming election.

Thackeray's insistence on a pre-election leadership decision and the Congress's resistance appears to underscore the fragile nature of the MVA coalition as it gears up for the upcoming election.

GLOBAL WATCH

Musk's space ascendancy vs Boeing's stumbling space odyssey

If all proceeds as planned, the Polaris Dawn mission is set to launch on August 27, marking a significant milestone in space exploration. Elon Musk's SpaceX is poised to achieve the historic first commercial spacewalk, a feat that underscores the company's growing dominance in the aerospace sector. Simultaneously, NASA is relying on SpaceX's Crew-9 mission to address a critical issue: the rescue of astronauts Sunita Williams and Barry E. "Butch" Wilmore, who have been stranded in space for over two months.

Williams and Wilmore embarked on their mission aboard Boeing's Starliner spacecraft on June 5, originally intended for an eight-day stay at the International Space Station (ISS). However, technical issues with Starliner have prolonged their time in orbit to more than 80 days, prompting NASA to seek alternative solutions for their return.

Meanwhile, over the course of five days, Polaris Dawn will embark on one of SpaceX's most audacious ventures to date. The mission will test the limits of human spaceflight with its use of slim spacesuits and a cabin lacking an airlock, elevating the risk involved. On the third day, the crew is set to conduct a 20-minute spacewalk at an altitude of 434 miles (700 km) above Earth—marking the furthest any human has ventured into space.

At first, NASA, wary of the seemingly improbable low bid offered by SpaceX, had preferred Boeing, trusting that the aerospace giant's established pedigree would ensure success.



This dangerous mission will see four crew members orbiting the Earth for five days aboard a Crew Dragon capsule, with two of them undertaking the first private spacewalk—a venture that will expose them to a radiation belt. The mission will be commanded by Jared Isaacman, a billionaire entrepreneur and experienced aviator, with retired U.S. Air Force Lt Col Scott "Kid Poteet" serving as the pilot. The team also includes SpaceX's Sarah Gills and Anna Menon.

This new SpaceX endeavour comes amidst ongoing challenges for Boeing's Starliner program. Despite Boeing's assurances earlier this month regarding the spacecraft's readiness to return Williams and Wilmore to Earth, NASA had opted to delay their return until February, using the Crew-9 mission instead.

This decision follows persistent technical issues with Starliner, including thruster malfunctions and helium leaks.

In the competitive realm of space travel, Boeing's early status as NASA's favoured contractor for transporting astronauts to the Interna-

tional Space Station (ISS) once seemed a foregone conclusion.

However, Boeing's journey has been one of mounting expenses and repeated setbacks. The company has faced delays and technical issues at almost every turn, undermining its early promise.

When Boeing's CST-100 Starliner spacecraft carried astronauts Wilmore and Williams on its inaugural crewed flight in June, there was a palpable sense of optimism. NASA and Boeing executives projected an image of triumph. For a moment, it seemed as though Boeing was on track to close the gap with SpaceX and regain its footing in the race to the ISS.

Yet this optimism has since evaporated. Boeing's once-prominent presence at press conferences has dwindled to near invisibility.

As the ISS nears its planned decommissioning in 2030, Boeing's role in ferrying astronauts could be severely curtailed in future. NASA's securing of SpaceX's services for the ISS's final descent suggests a broader trend of increasingly favouring private innovators over traditional giants.

STATES WATCH

AAP's New Vanguard in Delhi's Electoral Arena



In the wake of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, his former Deputy CM, Manish Sisodia, has emerged as the pivotal force in rejuvenating the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and reinvigorating its political momentum in Delhi.

The Supreme Court's recent decision to grant bail to Sisodia after a protracted 17-month incarceration marked a moment of respite for the AAP. Emerging from Tihar Jail on August 9, Sisodia is confronted with the daunting task of steering his party through the turbulence created by Kejriwal's absence. The Delhi Assembly elections, set for February 2025, loom large on the horizon, making Sisodia's role not just pivotal, but emblematic of the party's resilience.

From the moment he stepped out of prison, Sisodia launched a series of 'padyatras' foot marches through the streets of Delhi designed to rekindle public connection and sympathy for his beleaguered party. The strategy is to cover all 70 Assembly constituencies. The walks are obviously much more than mere public relations exercises, being emblematic of a concerted effort to remind voters of the achievements of Kejriwal's administration and to galvanize grassroots support for the AAP.

Under Sisodia's stewardship, the AAP's campaign is keenly focused on its core achievements—education, healthcare, and governance reforms. His emphasis on continuing Kejriwal's legacy of making quality education accessible and reducing private school fees is both a reaffirmation of the party's foundational promises and a strategic move to fortify its position as a reformist force in Delhi. His assurance that the initiatives such as reduced electricity bills, which have been implemented in Delhi and Punjab, will soon become a national norm, reflects an ambitious vision for the party's future.

His extensive experience in governance, particularly in the education sector, lends him an aura of credibility that is vital for the party's outreach efforts. The challenge for Sisodia and the AAP brass at the moment, however, lies in translating this credibility into electoral success in the absence of Kejriwal's charismatic leadership. Moreover, Sisodia has been keenly aware of the need to counter opposition attacks with a well-defined counter-narrative. By focusing on issues of governance and development, he will be aiming to keep the political discourse centred around the AAP's core strengths

rather than getting mired in legal controversies. His hectic itinerary includes visits to schools and community interactions, underscoring a hands-on approach to politics.

In parallel, AAP has initiated a series of worker conferences where local MLAs present progress reports on their activities over the past four and a half years. Sandeep Pathak, the party's National General Secretary and Rajya Sabha MP, revealed that these conferences have already been conducted in 18 constituencies, with plans to expand this outreach further. Pathak emphasized that the leadership's direct engagement with the public and meticulous booth mapping efforts are central to the campaign strategy.

Gopal Rai, AAP's Delhi convenor, has launched the 'Auto Samvad' campaign, led by a 14-member committee, to rally support among auto-rickshaw drivers and counter the BJP by warning of higher costs for essential services if the Kejriwal government is ousted. As the AAP navigates this challenging period, Sisodia's leadership and the party's intensified campaign efforts represent a bid to reclaim the initiative and solidify their electoral prospects ahead of the 2025 election.



KALEIDOSCOPE

- 1 Food supplies being distributed through an Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopter at a flood-affected area of Tripura.
- 2 A Scottish steam locomotive runs during an exhibition at Ypacarai, Paraguay on Sunday.
- 3 Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath offers prayers at Shri Krishna Janmasthan Temple on the occasion of the 'Janamshtami' festival in Mathura on Monday.
- 4 Rhiannan Iffland, from Australia, dives during the final of the women's Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series in Montreal on Sunday.
- 5 Journalists from Telangana protest at Jantar Mantar, in New Delhi on Monday.

All Pictures PTI, AP

GUEST VOICE

A Wake-up Call for Security in Our Public Institution!



By Praveen Dixit

Recent incidents of sexual assault on children at a school in Badlapur near Mumbai and the rape and murder of a resident doctor at R.G. Kar public hospital in Kolkata have shocked the country. In both cases, the perpetrators had unhindered access to the public institutes and executed their heinous activities undetected.

Two major incidents have exposed vulnerabilities in public institutions: child sexual assaults in Badlapur and a doctor's murder in Kolkata. Both crimes occurred in unmonitored areas. Perpetrators exploited isolated areas in public institutions. In Badlapur, delayed medical and police responses hindered justice. Improved security and prompt reporting are critical to preventing such incidents.

In Badlapur, the young children only disclosed the assault after fifteen days. In R.G. Kar Hospital, the culprit murdered the victim after the assault, preventing her from reporting the crime.

The investigation of the Badlapur incident is being conducted by the Special Investigation Team (SIT), while the R.G.Kar case is being investigated by the CBI. In both incidents, the culprits chose isolated areas without CCTV coverage, avoiding detection and lacking witnesses despite being in public institutions.

In the school incident, the child's genital pain complaint went unexamined by private doctors, missing potential evidence for legal action. The headmistress hid the information from the school authorities for three days. The school authorities also failed to report it to the police immediately, as required under the POCSO Act. The complaint was only registered after a delay of twelve hours following police involvement and a subsequent medical examination.

The suspect, a casual contract sweeper, was hired without verification two weeks prior and was allowed unrestricted access without an identity card.

The Bombay High Court ordered the police to charge the school authorities for failing to report the incident and stressed the need for better police sensitivity to child offenses. In offences against women and children, police may serve as the first responders, investigators, or officers responsible for registering F.I.R. It is their primary duty to inform victims about their legal rights. This approach is crucial for preventing, detecting, and investigating such crimes.

Many women are unaware of grievance procedures and reluctant to file a complaint due to the shame and stigma associated with such crimes. Although training provides knowledge and skills for investigation, it must also expand its focus to include attitudinal transformation as a key component. When a com-

plainant approaches the police, officers' behavior affects their cooperation. Training should focus on changing these attitudes.

To ensure fairness, police must follow these precautions:

- Who first receives the complaint at the police station?
- How long does it take to record the complaint?
- Is the complaint documented as stated by the complainant, or is it downplayed?
- Is the complaint recorded in the complainant's own words and language?
- Is an audio-visual recording made of the complainant?
- Was there any demand for illegal gratification?

For every complaint involving a woman or a girl child, the DCP should verify these details and maintain a record. Additionally, awareness should be raised about the e-FIR facility under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023, which enables filing complaints online.

Educational authorities must assess the security requirements during their visits to schools. They need to emphasize immediate reporting of every incident against a child to the police, even if it may be embarrassing to the institution. Similarly, the policy of using contractual labour for housekeeping services must be reviewed. While it may save costs for the institute, the effect of such contractual workers' behaviour is more damaging to the institute.

My experience reviewing the security requirements of medical colleges and hospitals in Maharashtra provides valuable insights. My recommendations included having personnel from the Maharashtra Security Force (MSF) deployed for surveillance, monitoring, and rapid response. They were equipped with CCTV facilities and weapons. This system has been effective for the past seven years and should be considered for implementation in other states across India.

(The writer is a former DGP, Maharashtra. Views personal.)

LEGALLY SPEAKING

Call for Women's Safety



By Mangala Waghe

One week after the Badlapur protest over the sexual abuse of two minor girls, tension persists. Senior police officer Aarti Singh is investigating, with new information emerging daily. Meanwhile, protest-related arrests are reigniting anger.

The police used the protest photos to arrest people at their offices and homes. Ten to twelve bank employees who happened to be at Badlapur station during the protests were arrested. In another incident, a taxi driver who had come to drop off a passenger was also arrested. Police arrested a bank employee for allegedly commenting on the sexual harassment case and around 800 people. Many of these people were not involved in stone-pelting or protest-

After protests over the sexual abuse of two minors in Badlapur, police arrested many bystanders, sparking public anger. Delays in justice and rights violations by authorities further fueled tension. Calls for stronger women's safety measures intensify across Maharashtra.



ing; they were simply bystanders.

The bank employees arrested on Saturday were only presented in court on Monday, violating their rights. Police failed to present them within 24 hours as required, increasing discontent in Badlapur.

The Constitution guarantees freedom of expression for all. Protesting in a democracy, and speaking out against injustice is part of this freedom of expression. If the police arrest people for reacting to injustice, it would be a violation of their freedom of expression under Article 19(1)(a)(b) of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and expression; and peaceful assembly without arms.

While the government can impose restrictions, it appears to have curtailed freedom of expression and the right to protest in this case.

For the first time in Maharashtra's history, people have spontaneously protested for nearly 10 hours against sexual harassment. The police's slow response contributed to the protest, and if they had acted promptly, the protest might not have occurred. Both the police and Badlapur residents share responsibility for the unrest.

The POCSO Act mandates action against delays, yet no case has been filed against the police for their delay, suggesting government support for the police and suppression of protest voices. This undermines democracy and may lead to electoral backlash in the upcoming assembly elections.

Chief Minister, please address the widespread anger and acknowledge

the ongoing safety issues for women in Maharashtra. Sexual abuse of minors continues in various institutions. Implement the Supreme Court's Vishakha guidelines in schools and workplaces. Last year's suppression of a woman officer's molestation case highlights systemic injustice.

Chief Minister, while the "Ladki Bahin" scheme is a positive step, a "Safe Sister" scheme is also needed. Police stations lack women officers to address complaints, and women often face the system alone. Take decisive action to ensure women can move freely without fear at all times in Maharashtra.

The physical wounds of the two girls will heal, but their psychological scars will persist. The "Manodhairya" scheme alone cannot compensate for these injuries. Work to create a situation where such schemes are unnecessary. Set a three-month deadline for fast-track case disposal and ensure severe punishment for the accused. The "Ladki Bahin" Scheme will only be effective if women can live with dignity.

Chief Minister, to achieve this, you must have control over the administration and the police. Just as Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj used to cut off the hands and feet of those who tortured women in his state, those who committed such crimes in Maharashtra must be stopped. If women continue to face such atrocities, they may be forced to take matters into their own hands.

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

