

# THE PERFECT VOICE



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## Fears of wider war in Middle East grow

**ISRAEL AND IRAN TRADE THREATS AS EIGHT ISRAELI SOLDIERS KILLED IN LEBANON**

**Jerusalem:** The Middle East moved closer to a long-feared regional war on Wednesday, a day after Iran fired a barrage of missiles at Israel and Israel said it began limited ground incursions into Lebanon targeting the Iran-backed Hezbollah militia.

The Israeli military says eight soldiers have been killed in combat in southern Lebanon.

The deaths were announced Wednesday, a day after Israel said it had launched a ground incursion across its northern border.

Fighting between Israeli troops and Hezbollah militants is ongoing in southern Lebanon, both sides said in separate statements.

The news comes as Israel sends more troops and



artillery to the border area.

Israel said it intercepted many of the missiles, and officials in Washington said US destroyers assisted in Israel's defence. Iran said most of its missiles hit their targets. There have been no reports of

casualties.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed late Tuesday to retaliate against Iran, which he said "made a big mistake tonight and it will pay for it". An Iranian commander threatened wider

strikes on infrastructure if Israel retaliates.

The United Nations Security Council called an emergency meeting for Wednesday to address the spiralling conflict.

Israel and Hezbollah have traded fire across the Lebanon border almost daily since the day after Hamas' cross-border attack on October 7, 2023, which killed 1,200 Israelis and took 250 others hostage.

Israel declared war on the militant group in the Gaza Strip in response. More than 41,000 Palestinians have been killed in the territory, and just over half the dead have been women and children, according to local health officials.

US sanctions Chinese firms

The US has imposed sanctions on an Iranian

man and three Chinese firms that Washington believes helped the Houthi militant group acquire materials needed to manufacture and deploy advanced missiles and drones against the US and its allies.

Iranian citizen Hasan Ahmad Hasan Muhammad al-Kuhlani is named in the sanctions announced on Wednesday. He is accused of facilitating weapons smuggling for the Houthis.

Treasury's Acting Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Bradley T. Smith says the Houthis "continue to leverage their networks of companies and procurement operatives to sustain their reckless attacks on civilian vessels, their unarmed crews, and civilian populations".

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**W**e name our daughters Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati; we worship the divine feminine power in the temples but oppress, repress and even attack the feminine power amidst us. That is the irony in the way India sees its women.

After the safety of the daylight fades, women are seen as easy prey by the predators of the night.

We mark the nine nights of Navratri, the festival of the goddess, by celebrating the dedication and valour of nine real-life women who brave the challenges of the night to pursue their dreams.

**PART - 1**

## Brave Shooter

**VEENA GOKHALE CONTINUES TO SHINE AMID ERRATIC SCHEDULES AND LATE NIGHTS**

**By Ruddhi Phadke**

Thirty-five years ago, when Veena Gokhale, 55, chose to be a photographer, her presence at events, heavy camera equipment perched on her shoulder, met with surprise. Undeterred by erratic schedules and late nights, she's made a mark in the world of photography—from movies to weddings and events with more than 4000 weddings and 12 Marathi movies in her portfolio. "My profession has a new work schedule everyday. Late nights are frequent and sometimes stretch into the morning. My parents were worried about my marriage because everyone wanted a daughter-in-law who had fixed work timings. I refused to alter my career path to get someone to marry me," she says. But life had other plans for her; at a wedding, she met a man who admired her passion and the two married. Her new family, she says, fully supported her passion. "My profession gave me my life partner too."

While she's rarely faced harassment at work, having "fortunately worked at weddings that involved well-behaved families", she's often boarded the last train at night after wrapping up a shoot. "The train used to be crowded, with the lady's compartment full at capacity. That's when I actually realised that I am not the only woman who is working at wee hours. Mumbai is full of such strong women, who fearlessly, and confidently set out in the middle of the night to do their shifts."

Work challenges come in different forms and one such difficult shoot was at Mumbai's Taj Mahal Palace hotel in 2008. This was just two months before the dastardly attack of 26/11. She had to secretly shoot the daughter of a 'sheikh' from Dubai. The girl insisted on a lady photographer who could enter posing as



**VEENA GOKHALE**, Professional photographer and Director of Photography

a friend, maintain her privacy and not allow even her father to know that she had got a photo shoot done. "She wanted to get casual and candid pictures of herself clicked in different looks and costumes. lace. The girl wanted the pictures for her personal happiness, and she dreaded the dire consequences that would follow if the family

**Photography is an art and treats no gender differently. Stop inviting pity or praise for being a woman at work.**

found out," says Gokhale.

Gokhale took up the assignment and they shot without a break for seven hours. "While talking to her, I was constantly acknowledging to myself how blessed we Indian women were compared to many out there. While I was fearlessly filming her, she was scared to even share it with her own father," recalls Gokhale. But the end came with a surprise, for Gokhale bumped into a six and a half feet tall man. "He was the girl's father; I was sweating but avoided eye contact and quickly left," she says.

Over the past three decades, Gokhale has shot 4000

weddings, concerts, corporate events and worked on films such as Sade Made Teen, Gair and Harish-chandrachi Factory.

Did she face discrimination or surprise at her choice of career? Yes, she says. But Gokhale chose to ignore them. "When I started my career, photography was a laborious job involving holding heavy machines on both the shoulders. However, I chose not to enjoy unnecessary sympathy being a woman. Gokhale has shot prominent personalities like Amitabh Bachchan, Madhuri Dixit, Ustad Zakir Hussain and Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia, among others.

The best way to counter male chauvinism, says Gokhale, is for women to stop treating themselves differently. "Stop inviting pity and praise out of sympathy. Trust yourself, be confident and treat yourself equal to men. Once you treat yourself equal to men, the sky's the limit as life is one big pool of opportunities. This attitude will help combat male chauvinism, she says. Gokhale advises caution while out for work-be alert, be communicative and be aware of who to contact when in crisis. "A good assessment of risk factors and adequate precautions are a few things that need to be remembered," she says. With that in mind, there's no stopping a determined woman.

## Badlapur school trustees detained



**Thane:** The Thane Police on Wednesday arrested the two accused school trustees, Tushar Apte and Uday Kotwal, in the Badlapur sexual assault case, an officer said.

A day before, the Bombay High Court had refused pre-arrest bail to the school chairman and secretary, and also come down heavily on police for failing to arrest them so far.

Officers of the Thane crime branch nabbed the duo from Karjat, the police official said, adding that they would be handed over to the special investigation team probing the alleged sexual assault of two kindergarten girls at the school

at Badlapur in August.

The high court in its order on Tuesday noted that "prima facie there is material to show that the two accused were aware of the alleged incident before August 16, but they failed to take any steps to report the same to the police or local authority".

There is a legal obligation to report an offence under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSOA) if a person is aware of it, or is made aware of it, the court said. The main accused in the case, sweeper Akshay Shinde, was killed in an alleged shoot-out with police on September 23.



**Haze engulfs the city skyline in Mumbai on Wednesday.** Pic: Bhushan Koyande

## Wanted in India, Zakir Naik meets Pakistan PM

**By Sajjad Hussain**

**Islamabad:** Controversial Islamic preacher Zakir Naik Wednesday called on Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who praised his lectures and said they are "insightful and impactful".

Naik, wanted in India for alleged money laundering and inciting extremism

through hate speeches, left the country in 2016. He was granted permanent residency in Malaysia by the previous government led by Mahathir Mohamed.

In a post on X, Naik wrote that he interacted with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. He also posted a picture of himself with Sharif.

"Islam is a religion of peace, and you are doing an important duty by spreading the true message of Islam among people," Sharif told Naik.

He said Naik's lectures are "highly insightful and impactful", and he has a significant following among young audiences, state-run Radio Pakistan reported.

## Lowest score in Kanga league after 36 years

**FIRST TIMER ARSH DHONDY PICKS UP NINE WICKETS**

**By Correspondent**

**Mumbai:** A 26-year-old bearded bowler Arsh Dhondy recorded sensational bowling figures of 7-4-4-9 to bundle out Parel Sporting Club for 10 runs in the A Division Kanga League match played at Matunga on Wednesday.

Incidentally, this is the lowest score in the A Division matches equaling other two sides Khar Gymkhana against Shivaji Park Gymkhana (1956) and Parsee Cyclists against Karnataka Sporting (1988).

Arsh missed the chance of bagging all 10 wickets



in the match.

Arsh, a Juhu resident, is playing for the first time in the Kanga League. He had a dream spell. Bowling from the Petrol Pump end Arsh bagged nine wickets with five batsman

being bowled, two batters Leg Before Wicket.

Batting first New Hind piled up a substantial total of 200 for three declared in 44 overs. The leading batters were Aditya Parab 83 runs and Kush Kariya 79 runs boost their innings. Ashutosh Gharge 2/50 was the only successful Parel Sporting bowler.

Following on Parel Sporting were 31 for 2. New Hind Sporting Club won on 1st innings lead.

MIG CC also won on the 1st innings lead against P.J. Hindu Gymkhana and D.Y. Patil SA also snatched 1st innings win against Parkophene Cricketers.

**Shivaji Park Gymkhana** 209 for 9, 57 overs (Jayesh Pokhare 30, Parag Jadhav 25, Mairaj Khan 23; Aryaraj Nikam 3/52, Shreyansh Bogar 2/26, Yogesh Patil 2/30) **Vs Mumbai Police Gymkhana** 97 for 6, 17 overs (Sachin Rao 30, Rohit Pol 26; Satyam Chaudhary 3/34, Varun Joljode 2/35). Match drawn.

**Chavan** 4/24, Praful Devkate 3/13). Match drawn. **MIG Cricket Club** 190 all out, 40.1 overs (Atharva Ankoekar 59, Varun Lavande 56, Om Keshkamat 38; Rahul Sawant 5/18, Wkigston Nadar 2/32, Jitendra Paliwal 2/55) **Vs P.J. Hindu Gymkhana** 70 all out, 25.4 overs (Sahil Jadhav 33; Atharva Ankoekar 6/30, Harsh Tanna 2/13) & 34 for 2, 9 ovs (Shreyans Gurav 2/6). MIG CC won on 1st innings lead.

**Parkophene Cricketers** 149 for 7 decl, 66.5 overs (Shreeraj Gharat 54, Sagar Mishra 30; Mohd Umar

**Khan** 5/46, Karan Kothari 2/48) **Vs Dr. D.Y. Patil Sports Academy** 151 for 4, 17 overs (Pranav Kela 47, Sahil Gode 40, Ayaz Khan 28; Sagar Mishra 2/31). D.Y. Patil SA won on 1st innings lead. **Parsee Gymkhana** 231 for 5 decl, 38.3 overs (Kevin D'Almeida 61, Angkrish Raghuvanshi 48, Sachin Yadav 46, Nutan Goel 36; Prem Devkar 3/41) **Vs National CC** 190 for 4, 38 overs (Atharva Kale 62, Aaditya Srivastava 47, Ayush Vartak 30, Bhushan Talwadekar 27; Dev Patel 2/36, Harikesh Yadav 2/64). Match drawn.

**Cricket Club of India** 222 for 7 decl, 49 overs (Rudra Dhanday 58, Akash Parkar 58, Akash Anand 36, Vishwajit Jagdale 31; Sohun Sabnis 3/40, Yash Dicholkar 2/57) **Vs Victory CC** 173 for 7, 28 overs (Pragnesh Kanpillewar 84, Manan Bhatt 33; Badrey Alam 4/62, Irfan Umair 2/43). Match drawn. **New Hind Sporting Club** 200 for 3 decl, 44 overs (Aditya Parab 83, Kush Kariya 79; Ashutosh Gharge 2/50) **Vs Parel Sporting Club** 10 all out, 15 overs (Arsh Dhondy 9/4) & 31 for 2. New Hind Sporting Club won on 1st innings lead.

**Brief scores: A Division**

# NCP (SP) prepares 'charge sheet' against govt

## THE PARTY FLAGS LAW AND ORDER COLLAPSE, INDUSTRY SHIFT

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Ahead of the Maharashtra assembly polls, the NCP (SP) on Wednesday came up with a "charge sheet" against the Mahayuti government, highlighting the shifting of industries from the state and the "collapse" of law and order.

The Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) launched a campaign focusing on ten critical areas including the "economic decline of Maharashtra, flight of industries, and women's safety".

The party leaders, led by Lok Sabha member Supriya Sule and Maharashtra unit chief Jayant Patil, marched from the Mahatma Gandhi statue near Mantralaya to the statue of former prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and later walked to Hutatma Chowk in south Mumbai.

"We are launching the 'Hakk Magtoy Maharashtra' (state demanding rights) campaign across the state. We stand united to create a charge sheet against the Maharashtra government," Jayant Patil told reporters.

This campaign is characterised by audio-visual outreach, including advertisements, on various media and a new song. The first advertisement focuses on "rising unemployment and the shifting of key projects to Gujarat", he said.

"In the last ten years, the BJP and its two allies (NCP led by Ajit Pawar and Shiv Sena) have weakened the ideology of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Jyotiba



Shahu, Jyotiba Phule, and B R Ambedkar," Patil alleged.

Alleging agricultural distress, Patil claimed farmers are suffering because they want fair prices for soybeans, onions, and oranges. They are not given drought relief and are awaiting crop insurance. "Dairy farmers, in particular, bore the brunt of this government's actions," he added.

Patil alleged the common people are reeling under inflation and the spike in prices of petrol, diesel, LPG and electricity, and despite being the highest contributor to the GST payment pool, Maharashtra failed to get any justice in the Union Budget, unlike neighbouring states.

He claimed the state BJP's "dependence" on Union Home Minister Amit Shah indicates the change of government in Maharashtra after the elections.

"Even as elections are being conducted in Haryana and Jammu & Kashmir, Shah is forced to camp in Mumbai, which suggests the seriousness of the crisis in the Maharashtra government. The MVA will come

to power after winning elections," Patil said.

The NCP (SP) leader flagged issues like corruption, the "breakdown" of law and order, and the exodus of industries from Maharashtra.

"Each partner in the government keeps asking for its share. Factors like deteriorating law and order, corruption, and unfriendly business policies led to industries shifting from Maharashtra. The industrial legacy of the state from the days of Yashwantrao Chavan (first CM) is being erased," he alleged.

Patil accused the government of looking the other way even as projects are shifting to Gujarat. "We came to know today that projects are moving away from the Chakan industrial estate (in Pune)."

Targeting the state government over the popular monthly cash transfer scheme for women, Patil said the state has failed to ensure the safety of "Ladki Bahin" (the name of the flagship scheme).

The charge sheet also highlighted how gangs in the Maharashtra government (long sickles) are operating with im-

punity and the proliferation of drug rackets.

"This government didn't even think twice before indulging in corruption in the construction of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's statue in Malvan," he alleged.

The collapse of the statue at a fort in coastal Sindhudurg, inaugurated by PM Modi last year, led to huge outrage.

Under the "Hakk Magtoy" campaign, the NCP (SP) also launched a missed call initiative and a website to encourage the participation of the common people.

Queried on the state government's decision to declare Indigenous cows as Rajyamata-Gomata, Patil accused the BJP of financial links with beef exporters through electoral bonds.

"How much money the BJP has received from beef exporters through electoral bonds? It will be clear how much they love gau mata," he said.

Patil said Union minister Nitin Gadkari's observations on state finances must be true as the senior BJP leader is known for speaking his mind.

## MVA will defeat Mahayuti, says Cong

Mumbai: AICC in-charge of Maharashtra Ramesh Chennithala on Wednesday exuded confidence that the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi will defeat the ruling Mahayuti in the upcoming state assembly polls, which he claimed were being delayed.

The seat-sharing talks with the MVA partners were progressing smoothly and the opposition alliance will unitedly fight the state polls, the Congress leader said, adding there were no differences among the MVA constituents.

The MVA comprises the Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) led by Uddhav Thackeray and Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP).

Elections to the 288-member Maharashtra assembly are likely to be held next month.

"We will defeat the Mahayuti (comprising the Shiv Sena, BJP and NCP). The question is when will the elections be held," Chennithala told reporters after paying homage to Mahatma Gandhi on his 155th birth anniversary at Mani Bhavan here.

He said the seat-sharing talks are on and will continue for some time.

"The elections are being delayed and the state cabinet is taking 40 decisions in a day. The issue will be of implementation of these decisions," he said.

State Congress chief Nana Patole said elaborate discussions were needed and hence there was a delay in finalising the seat-sharing formula.

The MVA is determined to defeat the "corrupt" Mahayuti government, he said.

-PTI



Wreckage of a helicopter after it crashed at Bavdhan area in Pune district

## Two pilots among three killed as helicopter crashes

By Correspondent

Pune: Two pilots and an engineer were killed after a helicopter belonging to a private aviation company crashed and caught fire in Maharashtra's Pune district on Wednesday morning, police said.

Lok Sabha member and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) state president Sunil Tatkare told PTI he was supposed to travel from Mumbai to Raigad on Wednesday in the same helicopter, which was hired by his party.

The helicopter belonging to the Delhi-based Heritage Aviation took off from the Oxford County Golf Course helipad here and was heading to Juhu in Mumbai when it crashed at 7.40 am, police said.

The incident took place near a hilly terrain in Bavdhan area, which is close to the gold course, according to police. "Three persons have died in the helicopter crash. Our teams along with fire department vehi-

I am deeply saddened by the incident. The helicopter was hired by the party, and on Tuesday, I flew in it to Parli in Beed district. Today, I was supposed to fly from Mumbai to Raigad in the same helicopter.

-Sunil Tatkare, MP, NCP

cles have reached the spot," Pimpri Chinchwad Commissioner of Police Vinaykumar Choubey said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Vishal Gaikwad said the helicopter, belonging to Heritage Aviation, took off from the helipad of Oxford County Golf Course and crashed near Bavdhan in the hilly terrain, killing two pilots and an engineer on-

board the chopper. An official from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) also said the incident took place at 7.40 am and confirmed that the Agusta 109 helicopter which crashed belonged to the Heritage Aviation.

After the crash, the chopper caught fire, police said. Fire tenders and water tankers were rushed to the spot, according to fire officials.

"The deceased have been identified as Girish Kumar, Pritam Singh Bhardwaj and Paramjeet Singh," Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation's fire officer Anil Dimle said.

The helicopter took off from the helipad of the Oxford County Gold Course at around 7.30 am, Pimpri Chinchwad's Joint Commissioner of Police Shashikant Mahavarkar said.

Primary information suggested fog in the area led to the accident. "A detailed investigation will ascertain the exact cause of the crash," he said.

## CRIME WATCH

### Four of family found dead

Nagpur: A couple and their two sons were found dead at their home in Maharashtra's Nagpur district on Wednesday morning, with police suspecting it to be a case of suicide. A purported suicide note found in the house pointed to the family being under stress due to the arrest of one of the sons in a fraud case, a Nagpur rural police officer said. Some neighbours noticed unusual silence at the family's residence at Mowad village and alerted police. When the police broke open the house door, the four family members were found hanging from ceiling hooks, the official said. The deceased have been identified as retired teacher Vijay Madhukar Pachori (68), his wife Mala (55) and their sons Ganesh (38) and Deepak (36), the police officer said.

### Charas seized, one arrested

Palghar: Charas or concentrated cannabis worth Rs 35 lakh was seized from a man in Maharashtra's Palghar district, police said on Wednesday. Acting on a tip-off, the crime detection unit of Palghar police station arrested Sudhirkumar Shrideviprasad Sharma (37), a resident of Prataganj in Uttar Pradesh, at Nalasopara on the evening of September 30, said an official. He was found to be in possession of 884 grams of charas, valued at Rs 35.36 lakh, the official added. Police were probing from where he procured the drug and whom he was going to sell it. Sharma was booked under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985, the official said.

### Murder accused arrested

Mumbai: The Crime Branch's Unit 6 has arrested a murder accused at RCF in Chembur from a petrol chemical tanker. The accused, Chinna Subbarao Ayanar (24), had been living in Mumbai for the past three months after committing a murder in Tamil Nadu. The police acted on a tip-off and successfully apprehended him. After the case was filed, the accused was sent by his brother to stay with their uncle in Mumbai, who worked as a driver for a chemical tanker. The uncle later arranged a job for him on a petrol chemical tanker.



People feed cows after the Maharashtra government on Monday designated the indigenous cow as 'Rajmata-Gaumata', in Nagpur

Pic: PTI

## VHP hails 'Gomata' decision

Mumbai: The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) on Tuesday hailed the Maharashtra government's decision to declare indigenous cows as 'Rajyamata-Gomata' and said other states should also follow the suit.

Maharashtra government on Monday declared 'desi' cows as 'Rajyamata-Gomata' considering factors like their significance since Vedic period.

The other factors include the importance of indigenous cow milk in human nutrition, ayurvedic and

panchagavya treatment and use of cow manure in organic farming, a state government's resolution said.

"The decision to give the status of Rajyamata to cows on the basis of religion, culture, spirituality, economy and Vedic life values is welcome and praiseworthy," VHP national spokesperson Vinod Bansal said.

It is worth emulating in other states, he said.

"We are confident that the Maharashtra government's decision will not only respect Article 48 of

the Constitution but also protect the cow in the state," the VHP functionary added.

Article 48 of the Constitution, one of the directive principles, stipulates that the state shall endeavour to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds, and prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle.

## Ajit meets Shah amid row

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Ahead of the Maharashtra assembly elections, state Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar met Union Home Minister and senior BJP leader Amit Shah here on Wednesday.

What transpired in the meeting was not yet known.

The meeting comes against the backdrop of differences in the ruling Mahayuti alliance over the presence of Ajit Pawar-led NCP and his party's opposition to the anti-Muslim tirade by some BJP leaders.

Leaders of the Shiv Sena,



which is led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, have also been critical of the NCP. The three Mahayuti partners were yet to finalise the seat-sharing for elections to the 228-member assembly which are expected to be held next month.

Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis last

week acknowledged that the BJP received fewer votes in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections from its new ally NCP than those from the Shiv Sena. Ajit Pawar had earlier stated the Mahayuti partners will stay united and he will work to ensure the alliance's victory in the state assembly polls.

## Youth Congress leader held for rape

Chandrapur: Police on Wednesday arrested a teacher for allegedly sexually assaulting a 12-year-old girl student on the premises of a private school in Chandrapur district, an officer said.

The accused is the vice president of the Youth Congress in Korpana tehsil, he said.

The accused allegedly called the girl, a student of class 6, to the school under the pretext of a summer tuition class and sexually abused her, the FIR stated.

## Removal of Sai Baba statues criticised

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Both Congress and BJP leaders in Maharashtra on Wednesday criticised the removal of Sai Baba statues from some temples in Varanasi, saying disrespect to the 19th century saint from the state should not be tolerated.

State BJP chief Chandrashekar Bawankule said Sai Baba was a revered figure and nobody should be allowed to insult him. "This (campaign to remove

his statues) should stop," he added.

Congress leader Balasheb Thorat said Sai Baba was above caste, creed and religion. "What has happened in Varanasi is unfortunate," he said.

Santan Rakshak Dal, a Hindu outfit, has launched a campaign to remove Sai Baba statues from temples in Varanasi with some religious leaders claiming that he was not a deity and should not be worshipped.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"If a girl is beautiful she will opt for a person having a job. Girls who are at number two that is, who are somewhat less good-looking, prefer someone who runs a grocery shop or paan kiosk. A number three girl would like (to marry) the son of a farmer."

Devendra Bhuyar, independent MLA



## EzeRx Health Tech Wins Anjani Mashelkar Prize

By Correspondent

Pune: On the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti, the Anjani Mashelkar Foundation has announced EzeRx Health Tech, a Med Tech firm, as the recipient of the 14th Anjani Mashelkar Prize for its groundbreaking innovation that is poised to transform anaemia detection in India. Eminent scientist Dr. R.A. Mashelkar, who heads the Anjani Mashelkar Foundation, publicly congratulated Partha Pratim Das Mahapatra, Founder and CEO of EzeRx, during the ceremony.

Dr. Mashelkar articulated his enthusiasm, stating, "Anaemia

poses critical complications for pregnant women and results in significant physical and cognitive losses in children. With nearly 60% of women, adolescent girls, and young children affected by anaemia, our nation operates at less than half its potential. EzeRx's innovation exemplifies 'Gandhian engineering'—achieving more with less for a greater number of people. There is no more fitting occasion to present this award than on Gandhiji's birth anniversary."

EzeCheck is an ultra-portable, non-invasive device that measures haemoglobin and detects anaemia in under a minute by



The Anjani Mashelkar Foundation has awarded the Med Tech firm for its innovative device designed to revolutionize anaemia detection in India

scanning a fingertip—without the need for blood draws. Designed for use by semi-skilled workers, this IoT-enabled device pairs with a mobile app, delivering haemoglobin readings and interactive dashboards for mass screening

programs. Cost-effective and scalable, the device offers testing at just Rs. 10 per assessment. EzeRx has conducted over 2.3 million scans across 17 states in India, playing a crucial role in significant government initiatives such as Anemia Mukta Bharat and the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram. The device, certified by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), is also in use in three other developing nations.

Since its establishment in 2011, the Anjani Mashelkar Foundation has recognized 15 transformative innovations. Founded by the distinguished scientist and

thought leader, Padma Vibhushan Dr. R.A. Mashelkar, the Foundation was inspired by his late mother's desire for him to apply science for the benefit of the underprivileged. Its mission, centered on 'Inclusive Innovation,' seeks to ensure access equality amidst prevailing income disparities. The award includes a cash prize of Rs. 1 lakh from Dr. Mashelkar, alongside the Foundation's support in areas such as funding, market access, and technological development through strategic partnerships and innovative models. The award ceremony will take place on November 17, 2024 in Pune.

# Edge but not majority, say Mahayuti surveys



By Abhijit Mulye

**Mumbai:** It is likely to be an advantage Mahayuti situation in the assembly elections if various surveys conducted by independent agencies over past few days are to be believed. While the Mahayuti is expected not just to regain its 0.3 percent votes lost during Lok Sabha polls, but also get an edge, albeit wafer thin, over the MVA, most of the surveys have shown.

The situation was not favourable for the Mahayuti until very recently. But, the situation appears to have started changing in several pockets after the announcement of the Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana (MMLBY) and many more consecutive decisions made by the state cabinet over past few weeks, the surveys have shown.

The BJP leadership in the state was worried after feedback in several of sessions that the party leaders

conducted as well as those conducted by the RSS indicated a deep anguish against the incumbent government. Particularly, the rural voters were highly critical of the state BJP leadership in general and especially that of Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. However, most of the adverse opinion about Fadnavis can be attributed to the caste factor, the party leadership feels and hence have reinforced his power in the state. It now remains to be seen whether the gamble pays off.

Among the BJP's allies in the state, the Shiv Sena under CM Eknath Shinde is doing much better than the NCP under Ajit Pawar. While this situation is good for the state government to return to power, a section within the BJP fears repetition of 2019 like situation when the Shiv Sena under Uddhav Thackeray had joined hands with the Congress and the NCP to keep the BJP away from power

in the state. The seat sharing talks between Shinde and Shah, which took place last night at Sahyadri state guest house are crucial for the BJP from that point of view also.

During the meeting, Shinde is learnt to have blamed the callousness in finalizing candidates during the Lok Sabha polls and had blamed the BJP leadership for the poor show of the alliance in the state. He has also warned the BJP leadership against repeating similar mistakes during assembly polls and is learnt to have assured the BJP leadership of victory in the assembly elections.

Ajit Pawar, unfortunately, doesn't seem to have any luck and is likely to be overshadowed by his uncle just like it was during the Lok Sabha polls. While this may disturb the power dynamics within the ruling alliance, it would be beneficial for the state BJP, a group within the party feels.

## Mumbadevi temple all set for Navratri

By Swapnil R Mishra

**Mumbai:** The Shree Mumbadevi temple is all set to celebrate Navratri beginning from Thursday.

On the very first day of Navratri, the temple will be open for devotees after performing Mangala Aarti at 5.30 am. Moreover, on the same day 'Ghat Stapan' will be done by the trustees of Shree Mumbadevi temple between 7 am to 7.49 am which will be followed by 'Nav-Chandi Path' by 25 priests.

As per the panchami Muhurat on Monday (October 7) 'Deepotsav' will be done at Shree Mumbadevi Temple at 6 pm evening. Moreover on the last day of Navratri which is October 12, 'Chandi Mahayagna' Dhawan will be performed at the temple premises for the betterment of the world. Dhawan will start from morning 4 am and the last 'Aahuti' will be given between 10 am to 10.30 am. On the same day after 11 am, Dussehra will be celebrated.

The temple management has also made arrangements for two makeshift considering Mumbai's temperature which will be at its peak in October month. Cold water and juices will also be served to devotees inside temple premises.

Meanwhile, the security has been increased across temple surroundings considering the rise in footfall of devotees during Navratri. Nearly 40 CCTCs have been installed, while many volunteers from Vaishnav Charitable Trust and Mumbadevi Bhakta Mandal are ready to handle crowd management and hassle-free darshan of Mata Shree Mumbadevi.



To commemorate Gandhi Jayanti, the Mumbai Municipal Corporation's D-Ward organised a Swachhata Abhiyan rally, Upendra Krishnalal Thanawala, a Mahatma Gandhi lookalike, participated in the event and visited Mani Bhavan, a significant historical site, to pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi in Mumbai on Wednesday.

Pic: Bhushan Koyande

## Fracas in BJP-Sena in Konkan over Nitesh Rane's seat

By Suyash Padate

**Mumbai:** The Industry Minister Uday Samant is once again going to become a big hurdle for BJP leader Narayan Rane. Samant who is at loggerheads with Rane for a long time and is all set to vociferously oppose Nitesh Rane's candidature from Kudal-Malvan constituency in Sindhudurg district.

As the discussion for the seat allocation for ensuing assembly elections is in its final stage, former Union Minister, MP Narayan Rane met Chief Minister Eknath Shinde at his offi-

cial residence 'Varsha', on Wednesday afternoon. Nitesh Rane, the former MP and son of Narayan Rane, is said to be interested in contesting assembly elections from Kudal-Malvan. The close door meeting discussed this contentious issue. Rane left after the meeting but news is doing the rounds that one more political fracas is on the cards in Konkan.

Nitesh Rane has already made the announcement that he will fight the forthcoming assembly election. Since this constituency is likely to be allotted to the Shiv Sena, Nitesh Rane will

either have to go to Shinde's Shiv Sena or change the distribution and get this constituency sanctioned for the BJP. Against this backdrop, Narayan Rane met Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and insisted for the seat in the Konkan.

According to sources, Rane's first proposal was to have constituencies be swapped for his son. His plan B was also ready. He told Shinde that Nitesh is ready to join Shiv Sena by deserting the BJP and will contest assembly elections with a bow and arrow? Shinde did not react to both proposals and asked for

some time.

After the meeting with Narayan Rane, Shinde immediately summoned Industry Minister and Guardian Minister of Ratnagiri, Uday Samant. It is understood that he will discuss with Samant about the preparations and possible alignments with regard to assembly constituencies in Lower Konkan.

Samant said, "I heard about the meeting between the CM and Rane. Now I am going to meet my leader Shinde and will discuss this issue in length. The CM who is party chief will take the proper decision".

## Govinda's revolver accident Encounter cop Daya Nayak investigates 'misfire'

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** The Mumbai crime branch personnel have met actor Govinda, who sustained leg injuries after his revolver accidentally went off, and enquired with him about the incident, officer said on Wednesday.

While the local police have been conducting an investigation, the Mumbai crime branch has also initiated a parallel enquiry into the incident.

No one has lodged any complaint in this matter so far, police said. The accident took place on Tuesday at the Mumbai residence of the 60-year-old actor and he is currently recuperating at a private hospital here.

A crime branch team led by senior police inspector Daya Nayak visited the hospital on Tuesday and spoke to the actor about the incident, an officer said.

Govinda was alone when

the incident took place at his residence in the early hours of Tuesday, he said.

The actor has a licensed revolver of Webley company and the bullet hit him near his left knee, the officer said. The revolver, which is an old one, was not locked and got misfired, he said. The actor's revolver has been seized by police officials for further probe. After the incident, Govinda issued a statement informing his fans he is doing better.



Devotees take a dip in the Banganga Tank on 'Sarvapitri Amavasya', marking the end of the Pitr Paksha, in Mumbai, on Wednesday.

Pic: Bhushan Koyande

## Food Poisoning FIR against school management

By Correspondent

**Thane:** Police have registered an FIR against a private school management after 45 children took ill due to suspected food poisoning following consumption of mid-day meal at the institution near Maharashtra's Thane city, officials said on Wednesday.

Initially, 38 students, aged between 8 and 11 years, were admitted to a civic hospital in Kalwa town after they complained of giddiness, nausea, headache and pain in the abdomen after lunch on Tuesday. Seven more children were hospitalised late night, taking the total number of minors admitted to the medical facility to 45, officials said.

Following a complaint by the parents of a child, the Kalwa police have registered an FIR against the school management and the food supplier under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita section 125 (endanger personal safety or life of others through rashness or negligence) and FDA regula-

tions, an official said. No arrest has been made so far and a probe is on into the case, the police said. The children were being monitored, the hospital's medical-in-charge, Dr Aniruddha Malgaonkar, told PTI.

Thirty seven of them were in good health and after the 24-hour admission protocol, they will be discharged at 5 pm, an official from the Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) said.

The remaining eight children showed symptoms of fever and vomiting. They have to keep under observation for another 12 hours, he said. TMC Additional Commissioner Sandeep Malvi on Tuesday confirmed the children had eaten a mid-day meal at the private school. Another medical official had said the students were served rice and moth bean (matki) curry as the meal.

Samples of food served to students have been collected by FDA officials. Initially, five students complained of uneasiness and their number swelled gradually.

## Flesh trade racket busted, 15 Thai women rescued

**Thane:** The Anti-Extortion Cell of Thane Police on Wednesday busted a flesh trade racket and rescued 15 women, all Thailand nationals, by raiding a lodge.

Five persons were arrested during the early morning raid, said assistant commissioner of police Shekhar Bagde.

After learning that prostitution was going on at a

lodge in Ulhasnagar area, police first sent a decoy customer and then raided the place, he said.

Fifteen women from Thailand were rescued while lodge manager Kuldeep alias Pankaj Devraj Singh (37) and four employees were arrested under relevant sections of the BNS. Police also seized Rs 5 lakh in cash.

## Opportunity for slum-dwellers

**Mumbai:** The Maharashtra government has introduced a one-time "amnesty" scheme for slum residents who bought their houses after 2011 but were not included in 'Annexure-2' of the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA).

Inclusion in this list will make them eligible for SRA redevelopment schemes.

## 'Facebook friend' dupes woman

**Mumbai:** A 29-year-old woman was allegedly cheated of Rs 18 lakh by a fraudster who befriended her on Facebook, police said on Wednesday.

The woman, who hails from Ratnagiri district and works as a caretaker here, filed a complaint in this regard with Versova police station on Tuesday, said an official.

She came in contact with

a person who identified himself as 'Vivek Patil' on Facebook in January 2023, she told police.

He claimed to be serving in the Indian Army and posted in Jammu and Kashmir.

After they started chatting regularly, he requested her to lend him some money, citing medical issues. The woman transferred money to a UPI address

provided by him, the complaint said.

He asked for money many times after that, and the woman ended up transferring a total of Rs 18,30,101 to various accounts. Only when he stopped responding to her calls and messages, she realised that she had been taken for a ride. A case was registered against Vivek Patil and Laxman Dalvi.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Mahatma Gandhiji had wished that the Congress be dissolved after Independence since its utility was over. I would like to remind the Opposition about this wish if they are genuine follower of Gandhian ideals."

Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy CM



## 'Shivneri Sundari' to welcome passengers

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** Next time you travel on state-run electric luxury buses between Mumbai and Pune, don't be surprised if you are greeted on-board by a friendly attendant, "Shivneri Sundari," whose job will be akin to an air hostess.

In a move aimed at improving service quality and enhance travel experience on e-Shivneri buses, the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corpora-



tion (MSRTC), under its new chairman Bharat Gogawale, on Tuesday announced the introduction of air hostess-like attendants on these AC vehicles

plying between the two key cities under the brand name "Shivneri".

As per a MSRTC release, the decision was taken at the state-owned transport

corporation's 304th board meeting chaired by Gogawale in Mumbai and it seeks to provide air travel-like hospitality to commuters travelling on the

200-km-long busy route.

Appointing these attendants, who will welcome and assist passengers, will "elevate the quality of Shivneri e-bus travel without any additional charge to tickets" bought by commuters who complete the journey in around 4 hours, said the release.

As many as 70 different topics were discussed at the meeting, and approval to deploy "Shivneri Sundari" bus attendants was one of the most important

decisions taken by the MSRTC board, it said.

The popular e-Shivneri buses are a point-to-point service with only the driver on-board, while conductors issue tickets to passengers at designated halts on the route between Mumbai and Pune. The MSRTC's board also approved the procurement of 2,500 new buses and initiated a tender process for the same. It also discussed a proposal to convert 100 diesel buses into electric ones on a pilot basis.

# Vistara flight services to have AI2 prefix: AI

New Delhi: Air India on Wednesday said flights operated with Vistara aircraft will have numbers starting with the prefix 'AI2' after the merger next month while Vistara's planes, crew and service will continue to operate as before.

The Tata Group-owned full service carrier also emphasised that the Vistara experience will remain post merger.

The merger of Vistara -- a joint venture between Tata and Singapore Airlines -- with Air India is scheduled for November 12 that will mark a major consolidation in the Indian aviation space after the integration of AIX Connect with Air India Express.

There are concerns in

## New policy for Air India cabin crew

Mumbai: Air India is introducing a revised policy for the cabin crew members of domestic and international flights, wherein certain sections of the members will have to share rooms during layovers, according to a source. The revised policy will also be applicable for Air India Express, which has merged AIX Connect with itself. Among other changes, the source in the know said the allowances for cabin crew of international flights will be increased from USD 75-125 bracket to USD 85-135 bracket. There is no change in the allowances for the cabin crew of domestic flights. An airline

spokesperson said that with the merger of Air India and Vistara formalising, there is a need to harmonise these policies for employees of both the organisations. "As part of that exercise, we have communicated the changes applicable to Air India employees. The revised compensation and benefits continue to be competitive and benchmarked to industry standards," the spokesperson told PTI in a statement. Under the revised policy, cabin crew members, excluding in-flight managers and executives, will have to share rooms during layovers, the source said.



The Air India-Vistara merger, announced in November 2022, will also see Singapore Airlines acquiring a 25.1 per cent stake in the merged entity.

and service will continue to operate as before, but with AI2XXX flight numbers bookable via airindia.com," the spokesperson said in a statement to PTI.

Air India's airline code is 'AI' and that of Vistara is 'UK'. The latter will fly into the sunset after the merger. Among other elements, Vistara's catering is being extended to Air India.

According to the Air India spokesperson, its narrow-body fleet continues to be upgraded with new aircraft being delivered and legacy aircraft being refitted with entirely new interiors.

certain quarters on whether Vistara passengers will continue to get the same services like now, post merger as Air India, which is in the transformation phase, has been facing certain service issues in recent

times. An Air India spokesperson on Wednesday said the teams of Air India and Vistara have been working hard for over a year to ensure that the merger of the legal and regulated entities is

seamless for both customers and staff. "Though the legal entities and Air Operator Certificates will become one on 12 November, the Vistara experience will remain. "Vistara aircraft, crew



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during a visit to the Golden Pagoda temple in Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh.

Pic: PTI

## Institutional investments in real estate rise

By Correspondent

New Delhi: Institutional investments in real estate grew 45 per cent to nearly USD 1.15 billion in July-September with investors looking to encash the strong demand for premium homes and offices, according to Colliers.

Consultant Colliers India data showed that the institutional investments in real estate during July-September stood at USD 1,148.7 million as against USD 793.4 million in the year-ago period.

Among different assets

- The residential segment, which has seen a significant surge in demand post COVID pandemic, saw a 40 per cent growth in investments to USD 384.8 million from USD 274.6 million.
- Industrial & warehousing segment witnessed a fall of 72 per cent in fund inflow to USD 95.2 million from USD 340.3 million.
- Investments in mixed use projects almost doubled to USD 52.4 million from USD 27.2 million.

class in the overall real estate market, the consultant noted that office segment attracted USD 616.3 million during the third quarter of this calendar year, a more than seven-fold jump from USD 79.1 million in the year-ago period.

Alternate assets, which

include data centres, life sciences, senior housing, holiday homes, student housing, and schools, among others, did not receive any funding in July-September as against USD 72.2 million in the year-ago period.

Overall, Colliers said that domestic investments

Multi-city deals accounted for 30 per cent share in the total institutional investment in real estate during July-September 2024.

remained robust at USD 0.5 billion, contributing 44 per cent of the total inflows during the July-September quarter. The consultant data showed that Chennai and Mumbai together accounted for about 57 per cent of the total inflows during Q3 2024.

## BP to continue with Ambani firm

New Delhi: Global supermajor BP Plc's exclusivity with Reliance Industries Ltd has ended but the energy giant will continue to pursue oil and gas as well as mobility ventures in India with the Mukesh Ambani firm owing to an unwritten strategic partnership, BP's outgoing India head Sashi Mukundan said.

BP in 2011 spent USD 7.2 billion to acquire 30 per cent interest in 23 oil and gas blocks of Reliance. Eastern offshore KG-D6 block was the cornerstone

of the deal that also provided for a 10-year exclusivity period which meant that BP would take up energy projects or investments in India only in partnership with Reliance.

The firm has so far invested more than USD 12 billion across the energy value chain including bringing on stream three new deepwater natural gas projects in KG-D6 that account for one-third of India's gas production.

"We started working with Reliance as early as 2005 when first (the then BP



CEO) Lord John Browne visited India," Mukundan said. It finally fructified in the 2011 deal. "13 years since we did the upstream deal, not once have we gone back and looked at the contract," he said, adding the partnership with Reliance is not a contract based but

one based on "trust and relationship".

"So anytime we have any issues between the two partners, we just sit face to face. I just have to make a call or (send a) WhatsApp (message) and say I want to come and see you. And you know, between him (Mukesh Ambani, Chairman and Managing Director of Reliance Industries Ltd) and Mr (PMS) Prasad (Executive Director at Reliance), we resolve everything," he said.

Mukundan said the original deal for stake in upstream oil and gas exploration

and production assets has grown into the retail partnership and EVs and continues to grow.

"In the (2011) contract, the exclusivity was for 10 years. That expired. But there is an unwritten... I wouldn't call it agreement, but it's an unwritten feeling that, basically, we are their strategic partner, and they are our strategic partner. And I think both companies have actually stuck to it," he said. "Anytime we get approached, we say no. Anytime they get approached, they say no."

## India Inc credit profiles benefit set to improve

Mumbai: High economic growth boosted India Inc's credit profile in the first half of FY25, and is set to improve further going ahead, domestic rating agencies said on Tuesday.

Crisil Ratings, which rates nearly 7,000 companies, said the 'credit ratio' or the ratio of upgrades to downgrades in its portfolio, improved to 2.75 times in April-September as against 1.79 times in the preceding six months.

The largest domestic credit rating agency saw ratings of 506 companies getting upgraded during the six months, while there were 184 downgrades, officials said.

Its Senior Director Somasekar Vemuri said the agency has a positive credit outlook on India Inc, led largely by the government's infrastructure investment and private consumption, which is the driving force for the economic growth estimated at 6.8 per cent in FY25. Over 38 per cent of the rating upgrades were of infrastructure or related sectors in the April to September period (H1) of FY25, achieved on the back of strong sponsors and lower-than-expected debt.

## Adani merges step-down subsidiaries with ANIL

New Delhi: Adani group has merged two step-down subsidiaries with green hydrogen and wind turbine manufacturing firm Adani New Industries Ltd, according to a stock exchange filing on Wednesday.

"Adani Infrastructure Private Limited and Mundra Solar Technology Limited stands amalgamated with Adani New Industries Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of the company," Adani Enterprises Ltd, the group's flagship firm said in the filing.

Adani Infrastructure and Developers operates as a real estate company, constructing and developing thermal and solar power projects as well as providing engineering, techno-commercial, project management and control, and commissioning services.

Less than three years old Mundra Solar Technology is involved in production, collection and distribution of electricity.

Adani New Industries Ltd (ANIL) is a subsidiary of Adani Enterprises Ltd that undertakes low-carbon projects. It undertakes green hydrogen projects, manufacturing of wind turbines and solar modules



batteries. It serves energy and utilities, transportation, logistics and incubation sectors worldwide.

According to a July note by CARE Ratings Ltd, Adani has an operational facility for manufacturing 4 GW of solar PV modules with backward integration capacity of 4 GW of solar PV cells and 2 GW of ingot and wafer, and the wind turbine manufacturer (WTG) manufacturing facility under the wind segment.

ANIL is reportedly setting up facilities to produce solar glass, aluminium frames, and backsheets -- key parts for its existing solar cell and module manufacturing.

French energy giant TotalEnergies holds a 25 per cent equity stake in ANIL while AEL holds the remaining.

-PTI

## Women bunk tech career for lack of support

Mumbai: Companies struggle to find right women talent with STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) profiles as lack of family support and higher cost of education discourage girls from pursuing higher education in this stream, according to industry experts.

The gender gap persists largely in STEM education due to societal and cultural factors including gender biases and lack of support.

## Three companies to make HIV drug

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Dr Reddy's Laboratories will manufacture and market Lenacapavir indicated for HIV-1 (human immunodeficiency virus type 1) treatment in India and another 120 odd countries, the company said in a statement.

The announcement was made after the company entered into a royalty-free licensing agreement with Gilead Sciences Ireland UC, which includes two other Indian companies -- Em-

cure an Hetero among a total of six global companies. Other global companies include Eva Pharma, Ferozsons Laboratories Limited, and Mylan, a subsidiary of Viatrix.

The initiative by Gilead to enter into such licensing agreements have been entered following world-wide criticism about the pricing of the drug for HIV patients.

Gilead plans to price the product at no profit to the company and supply Lenacapavir until generic man-

ufacturers fully support demand, it said in the statement.

According to industry experts, the drug costs USD 42,250 per year for new patients in the United States. However, it is believed that the drug could be mass-produced for as little as USD 40 per year per patient, though Dr Reddy's statement remained silent on pricing of the drug.

Lenacapavir is approved in multiple countries for the treatment of adults

with multi-drug resistant HIV in combination with other antiretrovirals. Additionally, the drug is currently under investigation for the prevention of HIV (PrEP) which is yet to be approved globally.

"The collaboration with Gilead will help us make this latest treatment option available to patients in 120 primarily low- and lower- middle income countries, including India," said Deepak Sapra, CEO, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd.

## Govt discussing scheme for 'made in India' label

New Delhi: The government is discussing a proposal to formulate a scheme for the 'made in India' label with a view to promote brand India in the global markets, an official said.

The official said that a high-level committee is examining the details of the scheme.

The objective is to create a strong brand identity for India, similar to how 'made in Japan' or 'made in Switzerland' evokes about specific images and qualities.

"That we want for India also," the official said, adding for instance, "when we think of Switzerland, we often think of their watches, chocolates, and banking systems."

"We are having discussions on how we can do that. Do we make this scheme for

specific sectors like textiles, where we have strength in that. So, we are looking into such things," the official added.

According to experts, quality consciousness is key to promote Brand India.

The government at present has India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF) to promote and create international awareness about the 'made in India' label in overseas markets and to facilitate dissemination of knowledge of Indian products and services. It is a trust established by the Department of Commerce.

Think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) suggested that India's branding strategy should focus on three pillars

-- brand high quality products; improve product quality for less than best products, do not focus on branding; and actions to improve product quality.

"India can take several actions to naturally improve its branding. Consistent product quality and reliability should be a priority. For instance, the Indian pharmaceutical industry has gained global trust through its production of high-quality generic drugs.

"To protect this reputation, India must enforce strict actions against substandard suppliers," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

He said, until India achieves top-tier production standards in a sector, branding

should take a backseat.

"For example, between 1990 and 2010, China quietly became the largest contract manufacturer of electronics like TVs and refrigerators without pushing its firms to focus on branding. Once confident in its product quality, China then aggressively promoted its brands," Srivastava said.

He also said that India could establish a unified brand called 'India Quality Product' that signals excellence and reliability.

To use this label manufacturers and exporters would need to meet specific product and packaging standards, he said.

"The initiative could begin with categories like garments, shoes, and handicrafts, where India has a strong tradition, and then gradually expand to include electronics and engineering products," he added.



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Swachhata' call from Red Fort turned into a mass campaign, which motivated a spontaneous voluntary effort to maintain cleanliness and brought about a behavioural revolution among people across the country."



Jitendra Singh, Union Minister

# 'Modi diverted wealth of entire country to Gujarat'

## PRASHANT KISHOR BLASTS AT HIS ONE TIME MENTOR WHILE LAUNCHING HIS POLITICAL OUTFIT



**Patna:** The strategist-turned-politician Prashant Kishor on Wednesday alleged that after being voted to power by people impressed with his track record in Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has "diverted wealth of the entire country to his home state".

The I-PAC founder, whose first claim to fame was his handling of Modi's spectacular Lok Sabha polls campaign of 2014, made the scathing attack on the PM at a public meeting to mark the launch of his own political outfit Jan Suraj Party.

"People like you and me voted for Modi, listening to his speeches, taken in by

the impression that he has done a lot for the development of Gujarat. Indeed, Gujarat is progressing. The wealth of the entire country seems to have been diverted to Gujarat where factories are being set up in every village. People from Bihar are flocking to that state in search of employment," Kishor alleged.

The 47-year-old leader was underscoring the point that people got from governments what they had voted for in elections and asked, "How can people of Bihar get development if they have voted for the growth of Gujarat?"

Kishor, who had also worked with JD(U) supre-

mo Nitish Kumar and RJD president Lalu Prasad when the two arch rivals had joined hands to form the 'Mahagathbandhan' which swept the Bihar assembly polls of 2015, also took a swipe at the two leaders who have dominated politics in the state for the past three decades.

"You voted for Lalu ji in the name of social justice and honour for the poor. And nobody can deny that the poor got the right to live with dignity during his regime even though law and order went for a toss and economic progress came to a grinding halt," said Kishor, referring to the RJD's nearly 15-year-long rule.

"Likewise, you voted for Nitish hoping for better roads and electricity. He delivered on these. It is another thing that his fetish for smart pre-paid meters is breaking the back of power consumers," said Kishor, who incidentally was formerly a national vice president of JD(U).

"Similarly, today people are voting for Modi for five kg of ration. So all are getting that even if corruption may be slicing off one kg of the quota... But, during my extensive travel across Bihar I have learnt from the people that never have they voted to secure a better future for their own children," he said.

"Jan Suraj campaign, which has today become a political party, is an attempt to explain to the people the very nature of the malaise affecting the state. Vote for your own children, on the issues of better education and job opportunities. And you will see the change," he added.

Kishor's tirade against leaders of the state's three largest parties could be seen as an attempt to dispel the impression that he was merely a "spoiler" who would cut into votes and queer the pitch for other players. While the RJD has gone to the extent of calling Jan Suraj a "B team of the BJP", state leaders of the saffron party have voiced suspicion that he

was being propped up by former clients, who include leaders as diverse as K Chandrasekhar Rao, Y Jagan Mohan Reddy, Arvind Kejriwal and Mamata Banerjee.

Earlier in the day, Kishor announced the launch of his political outfit Jan Suraj Party, a much-anticipated move by which he hopes to take the political landscape in Bihar by storm.

Kishor also named Manoj Bharti, a Madhubani-born former Indian Foreign Service Officer, as working president of the party, saying the latter will hold the post till March when organisational polls will be held. The party was launched at Veterinary College Ground in the state capital in the presence of many renowned figures, including former Union minister Devendra Prasad Yadav, diplomat-turned-politician Pavan Varma and ex-MP Monazir Hassan.

The party was floated exactly two years after Kishor had embarked on a more than 3,000-km-long 'padayatra' of the state, from Champaran where Mahatma Gandhi had launched the first Satyagraha in the country, in a bid to mobilise the people for a "new political alternative" that could cure Bihar of its chronic backwardness. -PTI



Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra with party candidate Vinesh Phogat during the party's Haryana Vijay Sankalp Jansabha ahead of Assembly polls in Julana, Haryana on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

## Protests in Budgam over Nasrallah killing

**Srinagar:** The protests broke out in Jammu and Kashmir's Budgam district on Wednesday against the killing of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon, officials said.

The protests were held in Magam market area and Budgam town of the central Kashmir district on the fourth day of mourning of Nasrallah. Some market places were shut following the protests.

The Hezbollah leader was killed on Saturday and he was laid to rest a day later. The people, including men, women and children, assembled on the main roads -- carrying black flags -- and held protests against the killing, the officials said.

The protestors were chanting anti-Israel and



anti-US slogans, denouncing Nasrallah's killing in Israeli airstrikes on Saturday, they said.

The protests were by and large peaceful even as a large posse of police personnel maintained vigil to ensure that the demonstrations did not turn violent, the officials said. Meanwhile, the shops in Magam market and Budgam town were shut, the officials said. The situation was peaceful, they added. -PTI

## Burglars gang rape woman after looting ornaments

**Bhubaneswar:** Two burglars allegedly gang-raped a woman in her flat here after looting her ornaments at knife-point, police said on Wednesday.

Police have detained two persons in connection with the incident, and an investigation is ongoing.

The attack took place around 2 am on Monday in the city's Maitri Vihar area, where the woman was with her two-year-old daughter, police said, adding that there was no male member present in the flat.

Police said the burglars might have accessed the building using bamboo poles. The burglars first looted her ornaments and mobile phone at knife-point. Then they allegedly gang-raped the woman. -PTI

## Baba Ram Rahim walks out of jail on parole

**Chandigarh:** Dera Sacha Sauda chief and rape convict Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh on Wednesday walked out of the Sunaria jail in Haryana's Rohtak after he was granted a 20-day parole.

During his temporary release period, Singh will stay at the Dera ashram in Barnawa in Uttar Pradesh's Baghpat. He came out of jail under tight security this morning after his release on parole, an official said. The Haryana government has granted a 20-day parole to Singh while barring him from taking part in election-related activities, making speeches and staying in the state during the period.

Singh is serving a 20-year sentence given in 2017 for raping two of his disciples. The Dera chief and three others were also convicted in 2019 for the murder of a journalist more than 16 years ago. He had sought a 20-day parole ahead of the October 5 Haryana Assembly polls. According to the parole conditions, the sect chief will not take part in any election-related activity or deliver public speeches and will stay out of Haryana during the period.

He will stay at Dera ashram in Uttar Pradesh's Barnawa (Baghpat) during the period. The Dera chief had said that he wanted to stay in Baghpat during the parole if granted. The jail department had recently forwarded the Dera chief's parole plea to the office of the Haryana Chief Electoral Officer in view of the Model Code being in place for the assembly polls.

Chief Electoral Officer Pankaj Agarwal had said on Monday that the Haryana government may consider Singh's parole subject to the correctness of facts mentioned in his parole plea and satisfying other conditions with respect to the Model Code of Conduct for the elections.

Haryana goes to polls on October 5 and the results will be declared on October 8. In the past, some of Singh's paroles and furloughs have coincided with the polls in Punjab, Haryana and neighbouring states.

The opposition parties had criticised the grant of relief to Singh. Earlier in August this year, Singh was granted a 21-day furlough. -PTI



Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan with daughter Palina Anjani Konidela as she signs a declaration at Tirumala temple, in Tirupati district on Wednesday. Konidela is reportedly a non-Hindu and the rules mandate that non-Hindus have to declare their faith in the deity before making a visit to the temple. Pic: PTI

## Non-bailable warrant against MUDA 'scam' complainant

**Mysuru (Karnataka):** A Mysuru court has issued a non-bailable warrant against social activist Snehamayi Krishna, the complainant in the alleged MUDA land 'scam', for failing to appear in a cheque bounce case.

Krishna was unable to attend the court on Tuesday as he had to appear before the Lokayukta police following a notice issued to him by the investigation officers probing the MUDA site allotment case

against Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and others, sources close to him said.

"Krishna missed the appearance due to a scheduling conflict and vowed to attend the court soon," a source said. The Lokayukta police had booked CM Siddaramaiah, his wife Parvathi and two others in the MUDA (Mysuru Urban Development Authority) land allotment case on the directions of a special court based on Krishna's

petition. A team of Lokayukta police probing the case on Tuesday surveyed the land, in lieu of which 14 sites were "illegally" allotted to Siddaramaiah's wife in Mysuru.

The team that visited the 3.16 acre land was joined by the special land acquisition officer, surveyors and town planning members from the MUDA, official sources said, adding, Krishna was also present. -PTI

## Railway station receives bomb threat

**Jaipur:** A letter threatening bomb blasts at several railway stations and other places in Rajasthan was received at the Hanumangarh railway station, police said on Wednesday.

Additional SP, Hanumangarh, Pyare Lal Meena said the letter was delivered by post to the Hanumangarh station master and the local police was informed on Tuesday evening.

"It was threatened in the letter, which was in the name of Jaish-e-Mohammed, that the railway station and places in Ganganagar, Hanumangarh, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Kota, Bundi, Udaipur, Jaipur will be blown up by bombs on October 30," he said.

Jaish-e-Mohammed is a Pakistan-based terrorist organisation. He said personnel of the Government Railway Police (GRP), local police, BSF have conducted a search.

A case has been registered with the GRP police station and the matter was being investigated to track the sender. -PTI

## Shutdown affects life in valley

**Imphal:** Normal life was affected in the five Imphal Valley districts in Manipur on Wednesday due to a shutdown called by Meitei group Joint Action Committee (JAC) over the kidnapping of two youths.

Shops and other commercial establishments remained closed, and vehicles remained off the roads as demonstrators blocked the streets in Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Kakching and Thoubal districts.

In Thoubal, where the shutdown started in the early hours of Tuesday, women blocked the NH 102 at Mela Ground, Wangjing, Yairipok and Khangabok, police said. Near the Mela Ground, women demonstrated in the middle of the road, while young men burnt tyres to prevent movement of vehicles.

The shutdown was strongly enforced at Khurai and Lamlong in Imphal East district.

JAC convenor L Subol said, "The agitation will continue till the youths are released."

Three young men hailing from Thoubal district were allegedly kidnapped

in Kangpokpi last week. Later, one of them was rescued, but the other two remain missing.

Accompanied by two friends, N Johnson Singh went to appear for a recruitment test at New Keithelmanbi in Manipur's Imphal West district, but took a wrong turn, ending up in Kuki-dominated Kangpokpi district, according to police.

**Militant shot dead**

Unidentified men shot dead a self-styled town commander of a proscribed militant outfit near Leishang village in Manipur's Churachandpur district, police said on Wednesday. The deceased, a member of the United Kuki National Army (UKNA), was identified as Seikhohao Haokip, a resident of Kaprang village in the southern district of the state.

Police said the incident occurred around 1.5 km from Torbung Bungalow in Churachandpur at 12:15 am on Tuesday. Police have kept Haokip's body in Churachandpur Medical College morgue. -PTI

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"In the High Court he has said that the sites belong to (his family) the court for public representatives (Special court) has ordered a Lok Ayukta probe. How can they say that they want to give back sites, whose sites are they? How can they give?"

H.D. Kumaraswamy, Leader JD(S)



## Sonam Wangchuk detained again after release

**New Delhi:** Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk and 150 other protestors from Ladakh who are under detention on Wednesday continued their indefinite fast, saying they find their rights "trampled upon" on Gandhi Jayanti, a day that symbolizes peace and democracy.

Wangchuk was leading 'Delhi Chalo Padyatra', which began from Leh a month ago. They were detained on Monday night.

In a statement issued on Wednesday morning, Jigmet Paljor, Coordinator

Apex Body, said their detention, which is continuing for over 24 hours, is illegal.

"We, the 'padyatris', find ourselves in an alarming situation. We have been detained for over 24 hours. This detention is illegal, as the 24-hour period has elapsed, and we must be produced before a magistrate," Paljor said.

"Some groups have been released after just under 24 hours, only to be returned to the police station. Last night, the police attempted to forcibly relocate us to an



unknown location, but we stood our ground in resistance," he added.

"Our phones have been confiscated at the Bawana Police Station, leaving us cut off from the outside

world," Paljor said in the statement. Delhi Police, however, said that the 'padyatris' were released last night and detained again.

Wangchuk and other detained Ladakhis were allowed to go on Tuesday night but they were adamant to march towards the central part of Delhi, therefore, they were detained again, a senior police officer told PTI.

The 'padyatris', who started from Leh on September 1, marched all the way, except upon entering

poll bound Haryana where they boarded buses. They were detained at Delhi's Singhu border on Monday night and taken to different police stations, where they started an indefinite fast.

"Also all the 'padyatris' are on 'anshan' since 36 hours. Today, October 2nd, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, we had intended to visit Gandhi Samadhi to pay our respects. Instead, we find our rights trampled upon on a day that symbolizes peace and democracy," Paljor

said. "This situation raises serious concerns about the state of our democracy. We call upon everyone to stand in solidarity with us during this critical time," he added.

The march was organised by the Leh Apex Body (LAB), which along with the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), has been spearheading an agitation for the past four years to demand statehood for Ladakh, seek its inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. -PTI

# Gaushala with bio CNG plant

**Bhopal:** A gaushala with a bio CNG plant that can produce three tonnes of gas per day using 100 tonnes of cow dung has been set up in Madhya Pradesh's Gwalior, an official said on Tuesday.

Established in collaboration with the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), this is India's first modern and self-reliant gaushala (cow shelter), the official from the public relations department said.

The plant will utilise 100 tonnes of cow dung to produce up to three tonnes of CNG per day and 20 tons of high-quality organic manure, he said, adding that the IOC will assist in the operation and maintenance of the plant.

The gaushala has been developed with a cost of Rs 32 crore from the corporate social responsibility fund of the IOC, and considering its future expansion, an ad-



**100 tonnes** – The quantity of cow dung the plant will utilise to produce up to three tonnes of CNG per day and 20 tons of high-quality organic manure  
**Rs 32 crore** – The cost of developing the cow shelter  
**Rs 2 crore** – Money provided from the local area development fund of the Member of Parliament

ditional one hectare of land has been reserved for the purpose, the official said.

To construct a modern cow shelter for 2,000 bovines, Rs 2 crore was provided from the local area development fund of the Member of Parliament.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav expressed gratitude

to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for realising his vision of "Waste to Wealth" for the nation and thanked the community of seers and devotees for taking care of cows. "The state government will extend fullest possible support for the expansion of this initiative. It is worth recalling

here that the largest bio CNG plant in Asia is operational at Indore, the prime minister inaugurated," he said. According to officials, 10,000 cows are being cared for with the support of the local municipal corporation at Lal Tipara Gaushala in Gwalior. An incubation

## Modi inaugurates gaushala

**Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually inaugurated the Lal Tipara Gaushala with Bio-CNG plant in Gwalior and launched various development projects of Rs 685 crore in Madhya Pradesh on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti on Wednesday.**

centre will also be launched soon.

The plant will produce approximately two to three tonnes of bio CNG and 20 tonnes of high-quality organic manure daily. This will generate an income of around Rs. 7 crore for the Gwalior Municipal Corporation. The plant will economically sustain the gaushala by utilising cow dung. Farmers from surrounding districts will be encouraged to practice organic farming as they will be easily getting bio-manure at very reasonable prices, the official said.

According to a recent report from the Union Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Madhya Pradesh ranks third in establishing biogas plants in villages. The state has 104 biogas plants in various villages, with the highest 24 in Betul, 13 in Balaghat, and 12 in Singrauli.



People commute on Airoli-Mulund bridge amid smog in Navi Mumbai on Wednesday morning.

Pic: PTI

## PM Modi hails Swachh Bharat campaign

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the

Swachh Bharat Mission has become the largest and most successful people's movement in the cen-

tury with mass participation and public leadership.

Addressing a gathering on completion of 10 years of the Mission here, he said the Swachh Bharat

campaign is not just a cleanliness movement but a new path to prosperity.

"Through continuous efforts we can make India clean," he added.

-PTI

## Non-forest depts allowed to work on activities of disaster prevention



**New Delhi:** The Centre has said that in emergencies where the state forest department lacks the necessary technical expertise, other government departments may be allowed to carry out forestry activities in forests to prevent natu-

ral disasters.

The Union Environment Ministry on Tuesday issued guidelines detailing steps that can be taken to prevent or manage natural disasters in forest areas.

The guidelines were issued after Uttarakhand's

chief secretary wrote to the ministry and the National Disaster Management Authority, asking them to explore and evolve effective measures for areas prone to frequent forest fires.

The letter also called for mock drills to prepare forest staff before the fire season and requested permission for government departments to conduct soil and water conservation work in forest areas.

The issue was discussed in a meeting of the ministry's Forest Advisory Committee on August 27.

In a letter to states and

Union territories on Tuesday, the ministry said that according to the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, and related guidelines, certain forestry activities can be carried out in forest areas in emergency situations, such as natural disasters where immediate action is needed to protect wildlife, human lives, and property.

These activities include establishing and maintaining fire lines and building structures for soil and water conservation, such as check dams, water tanks, trenches, and pipelines.

## Over 4,000 rare turtles smuggled

**Chennai:** More than 4,000 exotic small turtles that were allegedly smuggled from Malaysia were seized at the international airport here, the Customs department said on Tuesday.

Two individuals were arrested under the relevant sections of the Customs Act, 1962.

Acting on specific inputs that some exotic wildlife animals were being smuggled into the country, the Customs department officials on suspicion intercepted two passengers who arrived here, from Kuala Lumpur on September 27.

-PTI

## NITI Aayog to prepare roadmap on 'energy transition'

**Hyderabad:** NITI Aayog which is working with states to develop a roadmap for green energy transition and a pathway to achieve a net zero carbon emissions target, will be giving its report next month, said BVR Subrahmanyam, CEO of the central government's think tank on Tuesday.

Addressing reporters on the sidelines of the launch of Telangana chapter of Women Entrepreneurship Programme (WEP), a flagship initiative of NITI Aayog, he also asserted that 9 per cent aspirational growth is possible backed by the overall sectoral growth.

"Wait for one month.

NITI Aayog has got the best group in India working on energy transition, Climate Change, net zero and circularity. We will be coming out with reports in November. We will be actually giving the roadmap for net zero by 2070," he said.

Subrahmanyam further said NITI Aayog is working on green transition to set up a green transition ecosystem for "Hard-to-abate" industries including categories such as steel, cement, and petrochemicals and circularity can be brought in very easily in Lithium ion batteries, electronic components, vehicles, rubber (tires), and steel (metals).

## UP plants 36.51 cr saplings in a day

**Lucknow:** The Uttar Pradesh government has set a historic record by planting 36.51 crore saplings in a single day on July 20, an official statement issued here said on Wednesday.

The state has planted over 36.80 crore saplings between July 20 and September 30, it said.

According to the data revealed by the government, the Rural Development Department led the efforts by planting 13.53 crore saplings, closely followed by the Forest Department with 12.92 crore saplings.

-PTI

## Kaziranga National Park opens for tourists

**Guwahati:** Assam's Kaziranga National Park, home of the one-horned rhino, opened for tourists this season on Tuesday, after being closed during monsoons.

State Forest Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary declared the park open for the 2024-25 season at a function at the western range, Bagori, exuding confidence that it will be able to draw more tourists this year.

"We already have adequate infrastructure in Kaziranga and several more attractions, like additional boats for tourists. We are hopeful that more tourists will visit this year, improving upon the last season's record of over 3.27 lakh visitors," he said.

Patowary emphasised on help and cooperation of all stakeholders, including park officials, locals and media, in attracting more tourists and ensuring that

they have a pleasant stay.

"The visit of dignitaries such as the president and the prime minister of our country, Bhutan's king and others also helped in bringing more tourists," he said.

The minister also stressed visit by tourists from different countries helps in spreading the fame of Kaziranga, besides bringing in more revenue.

State ministers Atul Bora and Keshab Mahanta and local Kaziranga MP Kamakhya Prasad Tassa were among those present at the opening ceremony.

Jeep safari has been opened for tourists now, with elephant safari to be allowed later.

Among other attractions in the park are hiking, trekking, birding and cycle trials.

The Kaziranga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site, remains closed from around May

every year with the onset of monsoons.

Indian Oil Corporation Ltd presented an animal rescue vehicle to support the park's efforts in wildlife rescue and rehabilitation, an official release said.

A book titled 'A Practitioners Guide to Photographic Monitoring of Asian Elephants for Science and Conservation', authored by Dr Varun Goswami, Dr Divya Vasudev and Parvathi K Prasad, was launched, providing insights into the park's rich biodiversity and conservation journey.

A unique wildlife-themed eco shop with over 50 products and souvenir items was also inaugurated at the Bagori Range campus. The sale and proceeds from this unique shop will support the forest staff welfare society and the eco-development committee around Kaziranga. -PTI

## Devanahalli gets 640 kL water through project

**Bengaluru:** Devanahalli, a small town about 40km to the north of Bengaluru, which exploded into an industrial hub after the international airport was established here, is now getting 6,40,000 litres of potable drinking water per day, adhering to BIS-10500 drinking water standards, through indirect potable water reuse project.

Traditionally, the town, with about 45,000 residents, had to rely on deep borewells for its water needs. The project, done in collaboration with Boson Whitewater, a water utility company that converts STP-treated water into potable water, and Bengaluru-based Biome Environmental Trust, an initiative that facilitates and fosters environmentally and socially responsible practice, including rainwater harvesting, is managed through aquifer recharge.



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla participates in a cleanliness drive on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti at Parliament House complex in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Pic: PTI

# Genetic study tracks migration history of Indian elephants

By Krishna

**New Delhi:** A genetic study has charted the migration history of elephants in India from north to south, revealing multiple bottlenecks encountered along the way that threatened their existence and likely caused a "dilution of genetic diversity".

Genetic diversity is important for a resilience to disease and long-term survival, including an ability to adapt to environmental changes.

The findings can help shape the future of elephant species in India by informing conservation strategies, researchers from the National Centre for Biological Sciences and the Indian Institute of Sci-

ence in Bengaluru, said.

The Asian elephant has been listed as 'Endangered' species on the IUCN Red List since 1986. The list was established by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in 1964.

Elephants in India -- known to make up 60 per cent of the global Asian elephant population -- started migrating about 1,00,000 years ago, eventually settling in different parts of the country.

The researchers analysed 34 whole genome sequences, obtained from blood samples taken from wild elephants across the country's landscapes.

The analysis, published in the journal Current Biology, identified five ge-

## THE STUDY FINDS 'DILUTION OF DIVERSITY'



netically distinct populations, as opposed to

previously reported three or four, "emphasising their

Of the five distinct breeds, two are located in north and central India, and three in the south, separated by the Palghat and Shencottah Gaps or 'breaks' in the Western Ghats. The Palghat Gap lies between Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu and Palakkad in Kerala, while the Shencottah Gap connects Tamil Nadu's Madurai with the district Kottayam, Kerala.

**60 per cent** – No of elephants in India of the global Asian elephant population  
**34** – No of genome sequences the researchers analysed

antiquity and unique evolutionary histories", according to the authors.

Further, the northern breeds were found to be more genetically diverse and have low inbreeding -- where creatures having very similar genetic material breed -- compared to the southern ones, two of which had low diversity and were inbred, they said.

Co-lead author Uma Ramakrishnan, a molecu-

lar ecologist and a professor at the National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru, told PTI that the team observed a "dilution of diversity".

"Imagine an ink blot on a filter paper, dropped at the top right corner. The further we go from this, towards the bottom left, the less dark the ink is. Similarly, the diversity in southern western ghats is less than that in the north-east and north populations," she said.

Ramakrishnan added that the inbreeding in the southern populations suggested that "there has been either a bottleneck, or mating between relatives recently".

The researchers also found evidence of histori-

cal exploitation endured by the land mammals in the form of "bottlenecks". Wild elephants in India are known to be regularly exploited for military and domestic use, since they began to be tamed during Harappan times.

In this study, the samples from the populations in north India and those in the north of the Palghat Gap showed that both underwent a recent bottleneck around 1,500-1,000 years ago.

Ramakrishnan said, "Many endangered species have been through bottlenecks in the recent past. The nature of this bottleneck affects the distribution of genetic variation and the ratio of good versus bad mutations."

# Israel reports seven combat deaths, fears of wider war mount

**Deir Al-Balah (Gaza Strip):** Israel said Wednesday that seven of its soldiers were killed in southern Lebanon as troops battle Hezbollah militants on the ground after the start of an Israeli incursion into that country.

The region braced for further escalation as Israel vowed to retaliate for Iran's ballistic missile attack a day earlier.

The soldiers were killed in two separate events, military officials said.

In Gaza, where the nearly yearlong war that triggered the widening conflict rages on with no end in sight, Israeli ground and air operations in a hard-hit city killed at least 51 people, including women and children, Palestinian medical officials said.

Hezbollah, widely seen as the most powerful armed group in the region, said its fighters clashed with Israel

troops in two places inside Lebanon near the border.

The Israeli military said ground forces backed by airstrikes had killed militants in "close-range engagements" without saying where.

## Palestine says 51 killed

Israel launched ground operations and carried out airstrikes in a hard-hit city in southern Gaza overnight, killing at least 51 people, including women and children, Palestinian medical officials said.

Israel has continued to strike what it says are militant targets across Gaza nearly a year after Hamas' October 7 attack ignited the war in the Palestinian territory, and even as attention has shifted to Lebanon and Iran. Israeli ground troops have carried out incursions into Lebanon in last couple of days.



Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli airstrike in Dahiyeh, Beirut, Lebanon on Wednesday. Pic: AP/PTI



## Massive Israeli raid in Gaza

The Health Ministry in Gaza said at least 51 people were killed and 82 wounded in the operation in Khan Younis that began early Wednesday. Records at the European Hospital show that seven women and 12 children, as young as 22 months old, were among those killed.

Another 23 people, including two children, were killed in separate strikes across Gaza, according to local hospitals.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Residents said Israel had carried out heavy airstrikes as its ground forces staged an incursion into three neighbourhoods in Khan Younis.

Mahmoud al-Razd, who had four relatives among those killed, described heavy destruction and said first responders had struggled to reach destroyed homes.

"The explosions and shelling were massive," he told The Associated Press. "Many people are thought to be under the rubble, and no one can retrieve them."

## Israeli forces in Lebanon

Israeli media reported infantry and tank units operating in southern Lebanon after the military sent thousands of additional troops and artillery to the border. Israeli airstrikes and artillery have been pounding southern Lebanon as Hezbollah fires dozens of rockets, missiles and drones into Israel, where there have been few casualties.

The Lebanese army said Israeli forces had advanced some 400 metres across the border and withdrew "after a short period," its first confirmation of the incursion.

## Iran fires missiles into Israel

Iran launched at least 180 missiles into Israel on Tuesday in what it said was retaliation for a series of devastating blows Israel has landed in recent weeks against Hezbollah, which has been firing rockets into Israel since the war in Gaza began in solidarity with Hamas. Israelis scrambled for bomb shelters as air raid sirens sounded and the orange glow of missiles streaked across the night sky. The Israeli military said it intercepted many of the incoming Iranian missiles.

## India-US working on challenges: Blinken

By Lalit K Jha

Washington: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his US counterpart Antony Blinken met in Washington DC and discussed working together to address regional and global challenges.

Jaishankar -- on his first visit to the US capital since the third Modi government took office -- met Blinken on Tuesday at the Foggy Bottom headquarters of the US State Department.

Blinken said after the meeting, "Together, the US and India are working to address regional and global challenges. External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar and I met to discuss our continued cooperation on the climate crisis and ways we can promote regional security and prosperity."

Jaishankar, meanwhile, said, "Delighted to hold talks with Blinken in Washington DC. We followed up on the Delaware bilateral and the QUAD meetings. Our discussions also covered deepening bilateral cooperation, the situation in West Asia, re-

cent developments in the Indian subcontinent, the Indo-Pacific and Ukraine."

The minister was referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent bilateral meeting with US President Joe Biden.

The US president hosted Modi at his Delaware residence for a bilateral meeting on September 21. They were later joined by leaders from Australia and Japan for the QUAD Leaders' Summit in Wilmington, Delaware.

According to US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller, Jaishankar and Blinken "discussed the United States and India's enduring commitment to deepening bilateral ties, coordinating closely on regional and global challenges, and advancing cooperation on critical and emerging technologies."

"Blinken noted Prime Minister Modi's August visit to Kyiv and reiterated the importance of a just and lasting peace for Ukraine," he said and added that plans to expand collaboration on clean energy initiatives to address the global climate crisis were also discussed.



NSA Ajit Doval with Minister of Foreign Affairs of France Jean-Noel Barrot during a meeting

## World War II bomb explodes at Japanese airport

Tokyo: An unexploded US bomb from World War II that had been buried at a Japanese airport exploded Wednesday, causing a large crater in a taxiway and the cancellation of more than 80 flights but no injuries, Japanese officials said.

Land and Transport Ministry officials said there were no aircraft nearby when the bomb exploded at Miyazaki Airport in southwestern Japan.

Officials said an investigation by the Self-Defence Forces and police confirmed that the explosion

was caused by a 500-pound US bomb and there was no further danger. They were determining what caused its sudden detonation.

A video recorded by a nearby aviation school showed the blast spewing pieces of asphalt into the air like a fountain. Videos broadcast on Japanese television showed a crater in the taxiway reportedly about 7 meters in diameter and 3 feet deep. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said more than 80 flights had been cancelled at the airport.

## Two boats sink in Red sea, 45 killed

Djibouti: Two vessels carrying migrants from Africa sank in the Red Sea off the coast of Djibouti, killing 45 people, the UN migration agency said on Tuesday.

The boats had departed from Yemen carrying 310 people, the International Organization for Migration said. Thousands of migrants from African, Middle Eastern and South Asian countries seeking a better life in Europe attempt irregular migration every year. Smugglers pack vessels full of desperate people willing to risk their lives to reach continental Europe.

The UN agency, which was assisting search and rescue efforts, said on the social media platform X that 32 survivors were rescued.

Djibouti's coast guard said the tragedy struck some 150 metres off a beach near the northwest Khor Angar region. It said a joint rescue effort was under way, which began early on Monday. It said 115 survivors were rescued.

"We remain committed to finding the missing persons and ensuring the safety of the survivors," the agency said.

## Biden administration shifts its message

Washington: The Biden administration says there is a significant difference between Israeli actions that have expanded its war against the Iranian-backed militant groups Hamas and Hezbollah and Iran's retaliatory missile attack against Israel, which it condemned as escalatory.

In carefully calibrated remarks, officials across the administration are defending the surge in attacks by Israel against Hezbollah leaders in Lebanon, while still pressing for peace and vowing retribution after Iran fired about 200 ballistic missiles at Israel on Tuesday.

President Joe Biden praised the U.S. and Israel militaries for defeating the barrage and warned, "Make no mistake, the United States is fully, fully supportive of Israel."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken called the Iranian missile attack "totally unacceptable, and the entire world should condemn it."

There was little criticism that Israel may have provoked Iran's assault. "Obviously, this is a significant escalation by Iran," nation-



al security adviser Jake Sullivan said.

Just a week after calling urgently for an immediate cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah to avoid the possibility of all-out war in the Middle East, the administration has shifted its message as Israel presses ahead with ground incursions in Lebanon following a massive airstrike Friday in Beirut that killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Iranian Revolutionary Guard Gen. Abbas Nilforushan.

U.S. officials stress that they have repeatedly come out in support of Israel's right to defend itself and that any change in their language only reflects evolving conditions on the ground. And, officials say the administration's goal-a cease-fire-has remained constant.

The U.S. has been quick

to praise and defend Israel for a series of recent strikes killing Hezbollah leaders. In contrast to its repeated criticism of Israel's war in Gaza that has killed civilians, the U.S. has taken a different tack on strikes that targeted Nasrallah and others but also may have killed innocent people.

At the Pentagon, Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder made it clear that while the U.S. is still "laser focused" on preventing a wider conflict in the Middle East, he carved out broad leeway for Israel to keep going after Hezbollah to protect itself.

"We understand and support Israel's right to defend itself against Hezbollah," Ryder said. "We understand that part of that is dismantling some of the attack infrastructure that Hezbollah has built along the border."

He said the U.S. is going to consult with Israel as it conducts limited operations against Hezbollah positions along the border "that can be used to threaten Israeli citizens." The goal, he said, is to allow citizens on both sides of the border to return to their homes.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"His (Imran Khan) performance was zero and despite his party's government in Khyber Pakhtunkwa, they fail to meet the expectations of the people. Their only focus is on protests and street riots."



Nawaz Sharif, former PM, Pakistan

## Chinese dancers, children perform during Gandhi Jayanti

By K J M Varma

Beijing: Gandhi Jayanti was celebrated on Wednesday at China's sprawling Chaoyang Park with local school children reciting his teachings in Mandarin and an Odissi dance was performed by Beijing-based dancers on his favourite bhajan.

Beijing's picturesque Chaoyang Park where Gandhi's statue, sculpted by famous Chinese sculptor Prof. Yuan Xikun, was installed in 2005 came alive with recitation of his teach-

ings in Mandarin by a group of Chinese school children.

It was followed by a graceful Odissi dance performance on 'Vaishnav Jan To' by noted Beijing-based Odissi dancer Zhang Jinghui and her troupe.

The Indian community came together to stage a play, "Ahimsa: The Gandhi Way", directed and written by Ketke Thakar and Ayushi Sugandhi respectively.

A host of Indian diplomats led by Ambassador Pradeep Kumar Rawat, be-



sides Chinese Ambassador to Maldives, Dr Fazeel Najeel, Beijing-based Indian diaspora and local admirers of Gandhiji paid floral tributes to the widely-ad-

mired statue.

Rawat in his speech conveyed his deep appreciation to Prof. Yuan Xikun for creating the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, the first statue

in the Chaoyang Park honouring great leaders of the world. He also recalled Prof Yuan mentioning to him that he is deeply inspired by the vision of Gandhiji.

The installation of the Gandhi statue in the Chinese capital has its own political significance as Gandhiji and the founder of the People's Republic of China (PRC) Mao Zedong headed their respective national liberation movements with contrasting ideologies.

While India became independent from British rule in 1947, the People's

Republic of China (PRC) headed by Mao was formed in 1949.

"Gandhiji was not just a leader of the Indian independence movement; he was a visionary who championed the values of truth, non-violence, and social justice. It is only fitting that Gandhiji's birthday is observed worldwide as the International Day of Non-Violence," Rawat said in his speech.

Prof Yuan could not attend the event as he was unwell.

## EDITORIAL

## Idol Uproar

The removal of Sai Baba idols from temples in Varanasi city has ignited a fresh wave of religious contention in India. Saffron groups and senior Hindu seers, led by the Sanatan Rakshak Dal (SRD) and the Brahmin Sabha, have successfully campaigned for the removal of Sai Baba idols from over ten temples in this revered Hindu pilgrimage city. They argue that Sai Baba's worship deviates from traditional Hindu doctrine and that he should not be included in the pantheon of Hindu gods.

The SRD and Hindu leaders in Varanasi clarify they are not against Sai Baba but oppose his idols in temples due to his absence from ancient scriptures. While they present this as a matter of doctrinal purity, critics view it otherwise. But this is no simple doctrinal dispute. The controversy highlights a fundamental tension between religious orthodoxy and eclectic devotional practices that often flourish in India's diverse spiritual landscape, between North Indian orthodoxy and Maharashtra's syncretic traditions. Sai Baba's home is not in North India but in Shirdi, Maharashtra, where he has been venerated for over a century. To the millions of his followers, Sai Baba is a saint and a divine incarnation. Yet in Varanasi, India's religious heartland, he is an 'outsider.'

The SRD's argument, which echoes a broader orthodox Hindu belief, is that only traditional deities such as Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha, and Shakti can be enshrined in temples. Sai Baba, who lived as a fakir, cannot be considered a Hindu god.

The historical ambiguity of Sai Baba's identity is at the core of this debate. Sai Baba's origins remain shrouded in mystery. Arriving in Shirdi as a young man, he became a spiritual guide whose teachings transcended religious divisions. Is Sai Baba Hindu or Muslim? He lived in a mosque, dressed as a Muslim, and spoke of Allah. Yet his message resonated with Hindus, and he permitted rituals from both religions, referring to Hindu deities as often as Islamic teachings.

For his devotees, these distinctions are irrelevant; he is simply God. But traditionalists insist that no mortal man, even one as venerated as Sai Baba, should be deified in Hindu temples. The SRD's campaign has resonated among traditionalists in Varanasi, but in Maharashtra, the move has struck a nerve. Sai Baba is a central figure in the state's spiritual life, his shrine in Shirdi attracting millions of pilgrims each year. The controversy has been rapidly politicized. Meanwhile, Uttar Pradesh's Samajwadi Party has labeled the removal of Sai Baba idols a BJP 'stunt' aimed at creating division for political advantage. The BJP's emphasis on Hindutva may alienate voters in Maharashtra, where Sai Baba is widely revered.

Critics see the removal of Sai Baba's statues as a push towards religious exclusivity in a country celebrated for its diverse beliefs. The uproar raises questions on what it means to be Hindu in modern India and whether saints like Sai Baba, who defy categorization, still have a place - an answer that seems to vary by region.

# Maharashtra Leads India's Green Power Revolution



By  
Abhijit Mulye

Maharashtra has significant potential for renewable energy owing to its plentiful sunshine, large land mass, and proximity to coastal breezes. To reduce its dependence on fossil fuels, the state is actively pursuing various green energy sources, like solar, wind, biomass, and hydropower.

Although India's per capita waste levels are low, the country has become the world's largest global producer of plastic waste. Tackling this waste poses a huge challenge, and one way to do that is by setting up power plants that would use municipal waste for power generation. Incidentally, Maharashtra has taken several steps towards increasing its share of renewable power sources in the total installed capacity of the state and integrating it into the grid. These moves will certainly guide other states into adapting to green power in their own planning. With 5.13 gigawatts, or GW, of wind power, 4.98 GW of solar power, 2.64 GW of bio-fuels, and 382 megawatts, or MW, of small hydroelectric capacity, Maharashtra now ranks among the top states in terms of installed renewable energy capacity (13.14 GW). The state has seen a major increase in solar power capacity in recent years, primarily through an increasing number of solar parks, rooftop installations, and solar energy regulations that support the use of solar technology by both residential and commercial consumers. Additionally, the state has made significant investments in wind energy projects and has explored biomass energy options for con-

verting organic and agricultural waste into electricity.

However, Maharashtra's road towards a future powered entirely by renewable energy sources has not been without its share of challenges. These include the erratic nature of solar and wind resources, grid integration complexities, land acquisition issues, distribution companies, or discom-related constraints and vulnerabilities associated with climate change. These issues must be resolved to maximise renewable energy potential in Maharashtra. Nevertheless, the ruling alliance has remained committed to increasing the renewable energy capacity of the state and has made significant policy changes that have been attracting private sector investment and encouraging innovation in the industry.

Last year Tata Power signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Maharashtra government to set up two large pumped hydro storage projects in the state. The total capacity of the two projects is 2,800 MW. These projects will require an investment of Rs 130 billion and create jobs for over 6,000 people. In June 2023, NHPC Limited and Maharashtra's Department of Energy signed an MoU for the development of pumped storage schemes and other renewable energy source projects in Maharashtra. The MoU envisages the development of four pumped storage projects aggregating 7,350 MW of capacity, namely, Kalu (1,150 MW), Savitri (2,250 MW), Jalond (2,400 MW), and Kengadi (1,550 MW).

Last week, the state government took a further leap and signed three different MOUs for floating solar, wind energy, and green hydrogen. Through these MOUs, a total investment worth Rs 47,000 crore is expected to come to the state, and it shall bring along 18,000 jobs and 5,500 MW of green power to the state.

The state government has set an aim of having 50% of all its power usage come from clean sources and the current efforts are a step to achieve that target. The Mahayuti government has also set a tar-



get of making the state completely emission free by 2070. The current initiatives and policy making efforts are also aimed at that, DCM Fadnavis said during the ceremony to ink the MOUs.

The state government had earlier this year initiated a global partnership and entered into MOUs with institutions from Germany and Australia which are aimed at fly ash reduction and reducing the carbon footprint of the energy sector in the state. It is also aimed at adopting circular economy templates suitable for the state. The strategy also aims to implement 17.36 GW of transmission system-linked renewable power projects by 2025, comprising 12.93 GW of solar projects, including 2 GW of grid-connected rooftop solar projects. Maharashtra has placed a significant emphasis on solar energy due to its abundant sunlight. The state receives 250-300 days of strong sunlight on average each year, resulting in a generation of 4-6 kWh per square metre. In contrast, over the past year, the wind energy industry has not

experienced comparable growth.

Hurdles such as the inability to control the erratic nature of wind and solar resources block the state agencies from achieving targets of steady electricity supply to satisfy demand. Pumped storage projects and battery storage systems are hope of realising the green power dream for the state, but there are also potential technical difficulties. Integrating renewable energy sources into the grid will have to be ensured before moving ahead. Despite such challenges, Maharashtra aims to maintain its leading position and produce 40 per cent of its power from renewable sources by 2030. The strategy also aims to implement 17.36 GW of transmission system-linked renewable power projects by 2025, comprising 12.93 GW of solar projects, including 2 GW of grid-connected rooftop solar projects. This assures that the state is on the right track regarding its green power goals and adherence to sustainable development objectives.

## GLOBAL WATCH

## The Transformation of Iran-Israel Relations

With the Middle East already a simmering powder keg, Iran has further intensified regional tensions with a dramatic missile barrage aimed at Israel, unleashing nearly 200 ballistic missiles in retaliation for Israeli military strikes that had targeted leaders of the Tehran-backed militant faction Hezbollah. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps asserted that the assault was a direct response to the earlier assassinations of prominent figures, including Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah and Hamas's Ismail Haniyeh.

Israel's missile defense systems, including the Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow interceptors, effectively repelled the missile barrage, with support from American destroyers in the Mediterranean. Initial reports indicated no significant Israeli casualties or damage, highlighting the success of these advanced defenses.

Historically, Israel and Iran's animosity stretches back decades, evolving from political tension to indirect military conflict through proxies. Iran, since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, has sought to challenge Israel's influence in the Middle East, supporting militant groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza.

And yet, this relationship between Israel and Iran was not always this way. It underwent a dramatic trans-



formation over the past few decades, evolving from strategic allies to bitter regional adversaries.

In the years following World War II and the establishment of Israel in 1948, Iran, under the Shah's regime, maintained informal ties with Israel. Though Iran never formally recognized the Jewish state, the two nations shared a mutual interest in counterbalancing Arab nationalism and Soviet influence during the Cold War. This was part of the broader 'periphery doctrine,' wherein Israel sought alliances with non-Arab states like Iran and Turkey to counter its Arab neighbours.

However, this covert cooperation came to an abrupt halt following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini's new regime not only cut diplomatic ties with Israel but also adopted a vehemently anti-Israel stance, branding it a "Zionist regime" that oppressed Palestinians. Iran positioned itself as a champion of the Palestinian cause, fundamentally shifting its foreign policy to confront Israel directly. From the 1980s onward, Iran's support for proxy groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and later Hamas in Gaza became a cornerstone of this policy.

In the decades that followed, the relationship only grew more hostile. Israel viewed Iran's nuclear ambitions with increasing alarm, particularly as Tehran made advances in its nuclear program throughout the

2000s. Israeli officials consistently labeled a nuclear-armed Iran as an existential threat, leading to a covert campaign of sabotage, assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists, and diplomatic efforts to isolate Iran internationally. This campaign reached its peak with Israel's vehement opposition to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, which it saw as inadequate in curbing Tehran's ambitions.

The Israeli-Iranian conflict has largely played out through proxy warfare, particularly in Lebanon and Syria. Hezbollah, heavily funded and armed by Iran, has fought multiple wars against Israel, most notably in 2006. Iran's involvement in Syria's civil war to prop up the Assad regime brought Iranian forces closer to Israel's borders, deepening tensions. Israel responded with hundreds of airstrikes against Iranian targets in Syria.

The animosity between the two powers is now part of a larger regional rivalry, with both sides expanding their spheres of influence. For Iran, its support for militant groups in Lebanon, Gaza, and Syria is part of a broader strategy to project power and counter Israeli and U.S. influence in the Middle East. For Israel, containing Iran is paramount not only to its national security but also to maintaining its strategic edge in the region.

## STATES WATCH

## BJP Faces Trial by Fire

With the keenly-contested Haryana Assembly elections just days away, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) appears to have changed its strategy by 'sidelining' Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar.

The absence of Khattar's face from the BJP's posters in Karnal, the former CM's political stronghold, speaks volumes. As CM for nine years, Khattar's diminished visibility in the current campaign raises questions about his standing within the party. His limited presence at public rallies, alongside the BJP's strategy to showcase Saini and Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the faces of the campaign, underscores the party's attempt to steer clear of the anti-incumbency sentiment associated with Khattar.

The electorate's dissatisfaction with Khattar's administration is palpable. Voters are increasingly vocal about their grievances regarding a perceived lack of progress and the administration's overreliance on bureaucratic solutions.

The BJP's change in leadership while retaining Khattar as Union Minister reflects a calculated move to rebrand its image in Haryana.

Meanwhile, the BJP has nominated Jagmohan Anand, a former media coordinator for Khattar, to contest against Congress's Sumita Singh Virk, a two-time MLA with established support in the region.

As the political landscape shifts,

In a shifting electoral landscape, the BJP faces scrutiny from Jat and Dalit voters even as it changes strategy to mitigate anti-incumbency sentiment.

the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) has formed an alliance with the Azad Samaj Party (ASP), indicating a possible new coalition aiming to regain traction among Jat voters. This alliance is a response to declining Jat support for the JJP, which is attempting to broaden its appeal across differ-

Congress and the BJP.

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which traditionally secured a share of Dalit votes in Haryana through its alliance with the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), now faces potential losses due to the ASP's rising popularity. The Jat-Dalit coalition is being actively promoted by regional parties such as JJP-ASP and INLD-BSP, in stark contrast to the more traditional alliances attempted by the Congress and BJP.

The decline of regional players like INLD and JJP can be traced back to missteps in strategy and changing voter dynamics. The INLD's internal conflicts and ineffective coalition decisions have eroded its influence. The JJP, which initially consolidated Jat support against the BJP, faced backlash after its alliance with the party in the last election, leading to a sense of betrayal among its Jat base.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is making only a minimal impact in Haryana, with its presence felt more through individual candidates rather than through a strong organizational backing.

Meanwhile, the Congress, too, is grappling with internal strife as it seeks to unify Jat and Dalit voters while navigating tensions within its ranks.

Effective engagement with pressing social concerns will be key to determining the electoral fortunes of the parties. As the election unfolds, it remains to be seen whether the BJP can navigate these turbulent waters or if a shift will herald a new chapter in Haryana's political landscape.

## Haryana

ent communities to remain relevant in Haryana's political arena.

The Jat community, historically a significant voting bloc in Haryana, has experienced a palpable decline in support for the BJP, partly due to the party's alliance with the JJP, which has alienated many in the Jat constituency. The JJP's earlier stance against the BJP's policies has lost its appeal as many Jats seek to consolidate their political power through new coalitions.

Meanwhile, Dalit voters are also in play, with rising figures like Chandrashekhar Azad of the ASP galvanizing younger Dalit voters, who are attracted by his dynamic presence and eloquence. However, the support he garners is uneven within the Dalit community, as marginalized segments still lean toward established national parties like





**KALEIDOSCOPE**

1. Indian Air Force (IAF) aircrafts during rehearsal for an air show as part of the upcoming 92nd Indian Air Force Day, at Marina Beach, in Chennai.
2. Devotees participate in the Tirupati Thirukudai procession organised by the Hindu Dharmartha Samiti in connection with the annual Brahmotsavam at Sri Venkateswara temple, in Tirupati in Chennai on Wednesday.
3. Models participating in the Miss Teen International competition pose for a group photo during a visit to the Taj Mahal, in Agra.
4. The site of junior doctors' protest against R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital incident in Kolkata on Wednesday.
5. An artist dressed like Goddess Durga on Mahalaya, in Dharmanagar, Tripura.

All Pictures PTI, AP



**TALKING SENSE**

# Bharatiya Antariksh Station Dream Takes Flight



By  
Chaitanya Giri

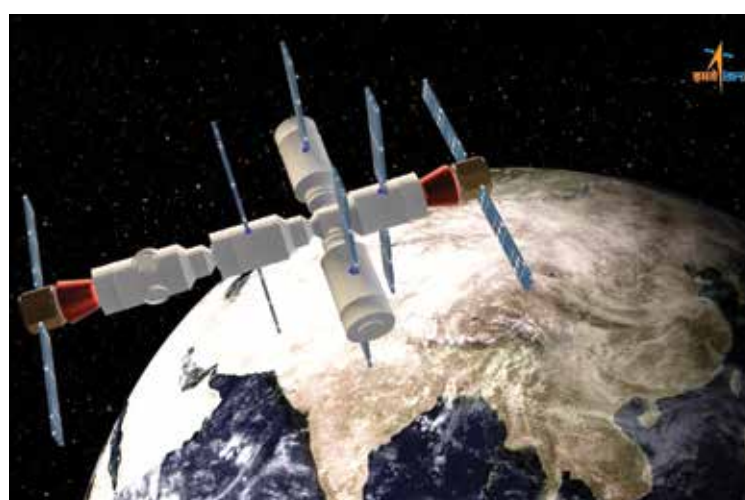
India's human spaceflight programme has progressed steadily in the last ten years. Call it the compounding effect of ISRO's brick-by-brick efforts over the past five decades. Also, due credit must be given to the Prime Minister's Office which brought about an enormous evolution in the space programme and has been unabashedly bullish about taking common Indians into space. This was even when the other side was content with Indian commoners glorified to Oscars as slum-dwellers. With the cabinet clearance for the Bharatiya Antariksh Station, our very own space station to be placed in the low-Earth orbit, India is entering into a haloed league of only four

India's human spaceflight programme is advancing with the Bharatiya Antariksh Station, positioning the country among global leaders. Collaborations, industry participation, and innovative research will drive future space endeavours.

countries, the other three being the US, Russia, and China. But then, we have a long way to go and lots to do.

Let me share with you a story of two "axioms"—Axiom Research Labs, more famously known as Team Indus, a startup that was established in 2010 in Bengaluru, and 'Axiom Space', now a major American space company, founded in 2016 in Houston. Both companies are connected to India-United States (US) space collaboration. The Indian Axiom was supposed to attempt India's first landing on the Moon. However, due to the scarcity of domestic opportunities for commercial space ventures, it eventually went for the greener commercial pastures in the US in 2017. The American axiom was best placed where it was formed. It was brought to life by American and international talent drawn to the maturing commercial space landscape in the US. An examination of the narratives and destinies of these two entities is necessary, especially as India approaches a significant milestone in its human spaceflight diplomacy.

Today, American Axiom Space is the same company that will ferry the first Indian astronaut Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, with Group Captain Prasanth Nair as the reserve candidate - to visit the International Space Station. This ferry arrangement was made possible through an agreement between ISRO and NASA. India is not a member of the International Space Station. However, all ISRO and Indian astronauts' learnings will help with the setting of the Bharatiya Antriksh Station. There will be a time, in the next 15 years, when the Indian national station will coexist with the Chinese space station and America's one or at most two commercial space stations. That makes India an extremely crucial player in the world's human spaceflight endeavours, including the efforts to take humans back to the Moon.



The US is one of many countries that assisted in our early human spaceflight steps. The French helped us with their superior space medicine knowledge, which is crucial for astronaut health. The Russians have trained our astronauts at their Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre and their experience using their experience. Partnerships with different space agencies are only going to help us. They are reason enough that India needs to boldly exercise its autonomy to decide who it wants to partner with. But this is not it. What have we learnt from the two axioms? Why do Indian companies, for the lack of domestic business opportunities and business sustenance, move overseas in the name of international markets? Is there a chance that this 'startup drain' akin to 'brain drain' will stop plaguing us?

To prevent the startup drain and ensure that no other Team Indus fades into obscurity, India must increase industry and startup participation in mission design. Yes, ISRO will lead these missions scientifically, collaborating with different academic institutions. Industry, too, will help build the space station, but that is not enough. India will only be able to accomplish the greater socio-economic benefit of raising a space

station if the Bharatiya Antariksh Station becomes an enabler of new science and a provider of business opportunities for the private space sector. New science can happen if new commercially crucial R&D experiments are carried out on the space station, with the BAS seeking rentals for the duration they are hosted. The new science can happen if there is continuous commercial supply of logistics and crew to the space station and back. The new science can happen only if the space station results in a bevy of cargo and human missions to the Moon, with the majority of hardware and software contributed by corporate R&D.

The Bharatiya Antariksh Station will be the nation's asset and will be operated by the Indian military, ISRO, scientific institutions, and private industries. These four will have to handhold each other as they build and commercially-run the station. It is their synergy that will help prepare the first Indians to land on the Moon to set up commercial R&D bases on the Moon. India must ensure that it keeps engaging its startups and private companies, which are the cornerstone of the four-way partnerships. Without them, the entire Indian space programme may not be sustained beyond a certain point; however, good ISRO is at its tasks.

**EXPLAINER**

## Why would Houthi rebels gain from conflict?

In the days since Israel intensified its campaign against Hezbollah in Lebanon, including the strike that killed the militant group's leader Hassan Nasrallah, Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels have been quick to show they are an important player in the complex conflicts convulsing the Middle East.

In a brazen attack on Saturday, the Houthis fired a ballistic missile at Israel's main airport as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was arriving back from New York, where he had addressed the United Nations. On Monday, they threatened "escalating military operations" to target Israel after apparently shooting down a U.S. military drone flying over Yemen.

And on Tuesday, an explosive-loaded drone crashed into one ship in the Red Sea as a missile exploded against another, the British military and private security officials said, the latest in the Houthi's assaults on commercial shipping in the key waterway.

The salvo of Houthi attacks has again drawn attention to the Yemeni rebels and raised questions about their goals and strategies.

### Who are the Houthis and why are they in this fight?

The rebels, armed by Iran, seized most of Yemen's north and its capital, Sanaa, a decade ago, pushing the country's internationally recognized government into exile.

A Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen's government entered the war in 2015 and the Houthis have since been fighting what has become a long-running but now largely stalemated civil war in Yemen.

However, when the Israel-Hamas war erupted in the Gaza Strip a year ago, the Houthis began targeting shipping throughout the Red Sea corridor — part of a campaign they say aims at pressuring Israel and the West over the war.

Analysts and observers say a widening conflict could boost the Houthi militarily and expand their already outsized role across the region — despite retaliatory strikes by Israel, the United States and the United Kingdom.

Ahmed Nagi, a senior Yemen analyst at the Crisis Group, says that before the war in Gaza, the Houthis were seen as an often-forgotten and less-prominent

faction in an axis that includes Iran, Syria's government forces, Lebanon's Hezbollah, the Palestinian Hamas and other groups in the region.

That changed when the Houthis began hitting ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden making their way to the Suez Canal, suddenly posing a much wider threat.

"Over the past year, the Houthis have taken center stage," Nagi said.

### What is the Houthis' link to the Palestinians?

After Hamas attacked southern Israel on October 7, 2023 killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostages, Israel responded with a blistering offensive on the Gaza Strip, a coastal enclave run by the Palestinian militant group.

Meanwhile, the Houthis see the Yemenis' prevailing solidarity with Palestinians as a useful tool for recruiting new fighters and swelling their ranks, Nagi said. In June, the Houthis unveiled a new, solid-fuel missile in their arsenal that resembles aspects of one earlier one displayed by Iran, which Tehran described as flying at hypersonic speed.

### What comes next?

The extent of the Houthi's actions was a surprise to some, mainly because of their limited resources and Yemen's own costly civil war.

Nagi described their strategy as one of "gradual escalation" towards Israel. As their prominence grows, the Houthi — who have for years relied on portable missile launchers and hit-and-run tactics — will likely be eager to get their hands on more advanced weapons, he added.

The Houthi initially targeted vessels claimed to be linked to Israel and later expanded their campaign to include all commercial shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. They used small boats, short-range missiles and drones to carry out those attacks.

Their campaign prompted a response by an international coalition, led by the U.S. and U.K., which in February launched strikes on "sites associated with the Houthis' deeply buried weapons storage facilities, missile systems and launchers, air defense systems and radars," U.S. defense officials said.

# Women officers on global voyage

**Panaji:** Two women officers of the Indian Navy on Wednesday embarked from Goa on a challenging expedition to circumnavigate the globe covering 21,600 nautical miles spread over an eight-month period.

The two officers - Lt Commander Dilna K and Lt Commander Roopa A - are expected to return to Goa in May 2025.

The historic voyage was flagged off from the Naval Ocean Sailing Node, INS Mandovi near Panaji, as both the officers sailed on the Indian Naval Sailing Vessel (INSV) Tarini.

Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi flagged off the historical journey in presence of Chief of the Southern Naval Command Vice Admiral V Srinivas and others.

Talking to reporters after the ceremony, Admiral Tripathi said, "It is a proud moment for all of us in the Indian navy that two sailors will be demonstrating the skills, sense of adventure, fearlessness and focus and ability to fight the tough situations."

"Indian Navy would be monitoring their adventure. We wish them all the best as they commence their journey today," he said.

The adventurous journey will take the two women officers through some of the most treacherous waters, including the perilous passage around the three great capes -- Cape Leeuwin, Cape Horn and Cape



Indian Navy women officers - Lt Cdr Roopa A and Lt Cdr Dilna K would be embarking on the extraordinary expedition of circumnavigating the globe. Pic: PTI

of Good Hope, he said.

There are only two crew members but the mission is one to fly high the Indian flag, Admiral Tripathi said.

They have sailed for 38,000 nautical miles and also undergone a three-year-long training, he said.

Over the period of eight months, the duo will navigate more than 21,600 nautical miles without any external assistance, relying solely on wind power, a Naval spokesperson said.

The two officers, as part of a six-member crew, participated in a trans-oceanic expedition from Goa to Rio de Janeiro via Cape Town and back last year.

Thereafter, they undertook a sailing expedition from Goa to Port Blair and back in double-handed mode.

Further, the duo successfully undertook a sortie from Goa to Port Louis, Mauritius again in dual-

**Lt Commander Dilna K, who hails from Calicut, was commissioned into the Indian Navy in June 2014. Her father, late Devadasan, served the Indian Army.**

**Lt Commander Roopa A, a native of Puducherry, joined the Navy in June 2017. Her father, Alagirisamy GP, was part of the Indian Air Force.**

handed mode early this year.

The expedition was conceived by the Indian Navy with the inaugural Navika Sagar Parikrama, the first ever Indian circumnavigation of globe by an all women crew of six officers in 2017.

The second edition of the expedition will be an exceptional one as the sailors will become the first from India to accomplish such a feat in double-handed mode, the Navy said.

The expedition is being conducted under the aegis of Indian Naval Sailing Association based at Naval headquarters, New Delhi, and Ocean Sailing Node, Goa, under the Southern Naval Command.

Both the nodal centres will be coordinating the voyage in liaison with international maritime agencies and authorities.

"Sometimes we are happy, sometimes worried," said Alagirisamy, who was in Goa to witness the flag off ceremony.

"When she broke the news about the voyage, I was happy as an ex-serviceman. But as a father, I was a little worried," he said.

-PTI



Simone Bolelli (second from right) and Fabio Fognini (right) of Italy holds their trophy after winning their men's doubles finals match against Harri Heliövaara of Finland (left) and Henry Patten (second from left) of Britain at the China Open tennis tournament, National Tennis Center in Beijing on Wednesday. Pic: AP/PTI

## India add five more gold medals in ISSF

**New Delhi:** Divanshi and Mukesh Nelavalli clinched gold medals in their respective women's and men's 25m pistol as India added another five gold medals on day four of the ISSF Junior World Championship in Lima, Peru.

The added haul took India's overall tally to 14 with the country's shooters claiming 10 gold, one silver and three bronze medals so far in the competition.

USA (10) and Italy (8) are placed second and third respectively.

Divanshi shot a score of 35 to pip Italian Cristina Magnani by two points in the final as France's Heloise Fourre was third.

Divanshi bagged another gold on the fourth day as she teamed up with Tejaswini and Vibhuti Bhatia to win the junior women's



Divanshi (L) and Mukesh Nelavalli

25m pistol team with a combined tally of 1711 ahead of Czechia and Germany.

Divanshi had a tough road to winning the gold medal after missing seven of her first 15 targets in the final, which put her in sixth position initially.

However, Divanshi staged a fine recovery to hit 16 of her next 20 to move up to second with three more series of five shots remaining in the 10-series final.

The silver winning Magnani, who had led from the beginning, found herself tied with Divanshi on 31-hits after the ninth series as the Indian nailed a four when it mattered most, while the Italian missed three.

France's Heloise Fourre, who had piped Divanshi to second after the eighth series, had to settle for bronze after missing three shots in the ninth series.

In the 10th and final series, Divanshi repeated her four-hits score from the ninth series to seal the deal, as the Italian went down missing three targets yet again.

Earlier in the day, Divanshi reached the final by finishing fifth in qualification with a score of 577 over the precision and rapid-fire rounds of 30-shots each.

Tejaswini (569) was 13th, Vibhuti (565) was 22nd and Naamya Kapoor was 40th with 552.

Nelavalli also added two more golds to take his tally to three for the championship so far.

He picked up the junior men's 25m Pistol gold with a score of 585, putting him two ahead of compatriot Suraj Sharma, who won India's first silver of the competition.

-PTI



Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus takes a selfie with fans after winning against Madison Keys of the United States during their women's singles match of the China Open tennis tournament. Pic: AP/PTI

## Sumit crashes out in first round

**Shanghai:** Indian tennis ace Sumit Nagal's campaign in the Shanghai Masters ended in a first-round exit after he suffered a 6-3, 6-3 defeat to China's Wu Yibing here on Wednesday.

The 27-year-old, who has been in the news recently due to his dispute with the All India Tennis Association (AITA) regarding his participation in the Davis Cup fixture against Sweden, went down in straight sets leading to his second straight first-round elimination.

In August, he had crashed out of the US Open in the first round after losing to Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands. Nagal was accused of demanding an annual fee of USD 50,000 by the AITA to represent India in the Davis Cup tie but the country's top singles player defended himself, saying it is "standard practice" for athletes across the world to be paid for their services.

"I think the India-Pakistan rivalry is more about the emotions of the fans than anything else. It's not like the players don't talk to each other; it's the emotions from both nations that make it so intense," Mandhana said.

"For me, every World Cup match is special, and we put the same amount of effort into each game. But there's definitely a lot of emotion attached to the India-Pakistan games," said the veteran of 141 T20Is.

Mandhana said

## Babar steps down as captain

**Karachi:** Babar Azam has tendered his resignation for the second time as Pakistan's captain with Mohammad Rizwan likely to replace him in limited-overs formats later this month.

Babar released a statement on X (formerly Twitter) around midnight on Wednesday announcing he had informed the Pakistan Cricket Board and team management about his desire to quit sometime last month.

While Babar did not state when he had informed the board and team management about his decision to quit, the 29-year-old said he wanted to focus on his batting while shedding off the workload as a skipper.

"I'm sharing some news with you today. I have decided to resign as captain of the Pakistan men's cricket team, effective as of my notification to the PCB and Team Management last month," Babar wrote.

"It's been an honour to lead this team, but it's time for me to step down and focus on my playing role," he



added.

Babar had quit Pakistan captaincy role after their dismal show in the ODI World Cup in India 2023 but he was reinstated as the skipper in white-ball formats in March this year.

However, his second stint had no change in fortunes for the team and Babar as the leader, as Pakistan performed abysmally in the T20 World Cup in the Americas in June, losing to USA and India and failing to make it to Super Eight stage.

Babar said captaincy had been a "rewarding experience" but also added a "sig-

nificant workload" for him.

"Captaincy has been a rewarding experience, but it's added a significant workload. I want to prioritize my performance, enjoy my batting, and spend quality time with my family, which brings me joy," he said.

"I'm grateful for your unwavering support and belief in me. Your enthusiasm has meant the world to me. I'm proud of what we've achieved together and excited to continue contributing to the team as a player," he added.

Babar was first made the T20 captain in 2019, before taking charge of the Test and ODI teams in 2020.

Babar's resignation adds more to Pakistan's woes as they are set to embark on three away assignments after hosting England for a Test series starting on October 7.

Pakistan will tour Australia for three ODIs and three T20Is in November followed by a tour to Zimbabwe for as many matches later in the month.

## With Australia, you can't afford to make mistakes, says Smriti

**Dubai:** There are no shortcuts to beating Australia and every team has to give its best if it aspires to overcome the six-time world champions, said India vice-captain Smriti Mandhana ahead of the Women's T20 World Cup which begins here on Thursday.

Australia's dominance in the global showpiece has been unrivalled with the team winning the last three editions of the tournament.

With charismatic former skipper Meg Lanning calling it a day following the victory in South Africa about 18 months ago, Alyssa Healy has taken over the captaincy as Australia aim

to maintain their dominance in global events.

"Every game in the World Cup is important, and you have to give your 100 per cent in each one. New Zealand and Sri Lanka are strong teams, but with Australia, you know you can't afford to make mistakes," said Mandhana as India gear up to take on New Zealand in a Group A match here on Friday.

"You have to bring your best game on that particular day to get the better of them. There's always excitement when facing Australia because they're such a

good team, and beating them is a great challenge," added the India vice-captain.

She added that the clash against Pakistan always brings out a lot of passion-

ate response from the players. The arch-rival will lock horns here on October 6.

"I think the India-Pakistan rivalry is more about the emotions of the fans than anything else. It's not like the players don't talk to each other; it's the emotions from both nations that make it so intense," Mandhana said.

"For me, every World Cup match is special, and we put the same amount of effort into each game. But there's definitely a lot of emotion attached to the India-Pakistan games," said the veteran of 141 T20Is.

Mandhana said

that playing Pakistan in the afternoon heat of Dubai would be a challenge and that her team had a couple of sessions lined up to acclimatise to the conditions.

"The afternoon game is going to be a challenge due to the heat, but when you play for India, there are no excuses. You have to prepare well, and I think we have a couple of afternoon sessions lined up to help us get used to the conditions.

"By the time we face Pakistan, I'm sure we'll be ready. Mentally, we need to stay strong and keep pushing, staying hydrated is key," she said.

-PTI

## Chess player to be compensated for wrongful denial

**Bengaluru:** The Karnataka High Court has ordered the state government to pay Rs 10 lakh in compensation to Sanjana Raghunath, an international chess player, after she was denied an MBBS seat under the sports quota despite being eligible.

A resident of Bengaluru and participant in the 2018 Asia Youth Chess Championship, she was wrongly placed in the P-5 category of the sports quota classification instead of the more prestigious P-1 in violation of rules, her legal counsel submitted. Sanjana, who has represented India in multiple national and international chess tournaments had filed a petition.

## Southee quits captaincy

**Auckland:** Tim Southee has stepped down from New Zealand captaincy ahead of the three-Test series against India and Tom Latham has been appointed in the veteran pacer's place.

Southee captained New Zealand in 14 Tests in which the Kiwis won six, lost six and drew two.

"I've always tried to put the team first throughout my career and I believe this decision is the best for the team," said Southee in a New Zealand Cricket statement.

"I believe the way I can best serve the team moving forward is focusing on my performances on the field and getting back to my best, to continue taking wickets and helping New Zealand win Test matches."

The 35-year-old right-



arm pacer has so far played 102 Tests alongside 161 ODIs and 126 T20Is. With 382 wickets, he is the second-highest wicket-taker for the Kiwis after legendary Richard Hadlee (431).

"I will, as I've always done, continue to support my teammates, especially the exciting young bowlers making their way on the international stage. I wish Tom all the best in the role and he knows I'll be there to support him."

-PTI