

# THE PERFECT VOICE



Attempts on to refrain Uddhav from holding rally at Shivaji Park ... pg 2



Tracking 'clicks' to understand the lives of dolphins in the Ganga ... pg 6



The Anand effect that's shaping a 'golden generation' ... pg 10

## Badlapur sexual assault

# Police shoot Shinde to death

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** The main accused of sexually assaulting two girls at a school in Badlapur town of Maharashtra died in retaliatory firing by police after he snatched a cop's gun and opened fire, an officer said. Akshay Shinde, who worked as a sweeper in the school, snatched the revolver of one of the policemen taking him from Taloja jail to Badlapur on Monday, the officer said.



The Central Crime Unit officials of Thane city police had obtained a transfer warrant to take charge of him in an FIR registered against him at Badlapur police station under Indian Penal Code sections 377, 324, 323 and 504, an officer said late in the evening. "The police team took charge of him at 5:30 pm. While the police vehicle, while returning, was at Mumbra Bypass between 6pm and 6:15pm. Akshay Shinde (24) snatched the service revolver of API Nilesh More and fired three rounds at the police

party. One of the bullets hit the lap of More. Two others got fired elsewhere," he said. "In self-defence, another officer from the police party fired one round at the alleged accused, injuring him. API More and Shinde were rushed to Kalwa civic hospital where doctors referred More to Jupiter hospital. Shinde was declared dead by the doctors at Kalwa civic hospital. His body will be sent to JJ Hospital in Mumbai for post mortem," the release from the force said. Massive protests erupted

on streets and at local railway station last month after two minor girls were allegedly sexually assaulted by Shinde at the toilet of the school in Thane district.

Opposition leaders expressed shock over the "encounter" and called for a detailed probe into the incident.

Congress leader Prithviraj Chavan claimed the "encounter" was done to save "some other" people.

Leader of Opposition in the state assembly Vijay Wadetiwar said, "This is shocking. There should be a judicial probe into this incident."

Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole wondered if this "encounter" was done to save trustees of the school who have not been arrested so far.

Akshay's uncle told a Marathi TV channel that he met Akshay at Taloja jail on Monday and was told that police were beating him up on a regular basis.



Artists prepare effigies of the demon king Ravana for the upcoming Dussehra festival in Nagpur on Monday.

Pic: PTI

## We are together at home: Pawar on Ajit

**Mumbai:** NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar on Monday said that he and nephew Ajit Pawar are together as a family, but made it clear that the latter was heading a different political party. "Gharat tari ekatrach ahet (we are together at home at least)," the veteran politician said at a press conference at Chiplun in coastal Konkan region. He was responding to a query about the demand from "various quarters in the state" that the uncle-

nephew duo should come together once again. In July last year, Ajit Pawar broke away from his uncle to join the Eknath Shinde-led government in the state as deputy chief minister. Of late, there has been speculation over his continuation in the ruling alliance. Asked about Ajit Pawar's recent remarks the decision to make his wife Sunetra Pawar contest the Lok Sabha polls against Supriya Sule in Baramati was a mis-

take, the veteran politician said, "He is in a different party. Why should we comment on decisions taken by another party?" When elections were held after the Emergency, Morarji Desai's name as PM candidate was not disclosed before polling, he added. "Our (MVA) attempt is to give a progressive alternative in Maharashtra with help of other parties like Samajwadi Party and Peasants and Workers Party," he said. "Our observation is that

the people of Maharashtra have made up their mind to give us (MVA) a chance in the ensuing elections," he said. Asked about Andhra CM Chandrababu Naidu's claim that sub-standard ghee with 'animal fat' was used to make prasad laddoos at Tirupati temple during Jagannathan Reddy's tenure as CM, Pawar said, "If anything was mixed, it is very wrong and action should be taken against those involved". -PTI

## Second tiger found dead

**Gondia:** The partly decomposed carcass of a sub-adult tiger was spotted in the Nawegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve (NNTR) in Maharashtra's Gondia district on Monday, forest department officials said, a day after another big cat was found dead nearby.

With all body organs intact and presence of several injury marks on neck, shoulder, abdomen and other places of the feline, it is assumed the sub-adult tiger, aged 20 to 22 months, may have died in infighting.

The sub-adult feline was said to be a cub of tiger named T4 and its carcass was found in the morning in compartment No. 99 of south-east Nagzira area of NNTR during patrolling by reserve staffers, said the officials. The place where the carcass, about a couple of days old, was found is just 3 to 4 kilometres away from the spot where a tiger, T9, was found dead on Sunday.

After completing formalities as per guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), the carcass was consigned to flames.

## Possession of child porn offence under POCSO

**New Delhi:** In a path-breaking judgment, the Supreme Court on Monday held mere possession of any child pornographic material will constitute offences under the POCSO and the IT laws even if they are not disseminated further.

Observing that "sexual exploitation of children is a pervasive and deeply rooted issue that has plagued societies worldwide and has been a matter of serious concern in India", the top court termed as "egregious" the verdict of the Madras High Court on the issue and set it aside.

On January 11, the high court had quashed the criminal proceedings against a 28-year-old man charged with downloading pornographic content involving children on his mobile phone, saying mere possession and downloading of such pornographic materials did not constitute offences under the



Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Information Technology (IT) Act.

"We have reached the conclusion that the High Court committed an egregious error in passing the impugned judgment. We are left with no other option but to set aside the impugned judgment... and restore the criminal proceedings... to the court of

Sessions Judge, Mahila Neethi Mandram (Fast Track Court), Tiruvallur District," the top court said.

While passing a slew of directions and suggestions on the sensitive issue, a bench comprising Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and Justice J.B. Pardiwala asked Parliament to seriously consider bringing an amendment to the POCSO Act for substituting the term "child pornography"

Sexual exploitation of children is a pervasive and deeply rooted issue that has plagued societies worldwide and has been a matter of serious concern in India. -The Supreme Court

with "child sexual exploitative and abuse material" with a view to reflect more accurately the reality of such offences.

In the meanwhile, the verdict put all the courts "to notice that the term 'child pornography' shall not be used in any judicial order or judgment, and instead the term 'child sexual exploitative and abuse material' (CSEAM) should be endorsed".

## Humanity not on battlefield: PM Modi

**United Nations:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said that the "success of humanity lies in our collective strength, not on the battlefield" as he addressed the UN's Summit of the Future held against the backdrop of raging global conflicts.

Addressing world leaders from the iconic podium of the UN General Assembly hall, Modi, beginning his speech with a "Namaskar", said that he brings the voice of 1.4 billion Indians or one-sixth of humanity to the UN.

A day after world leaders adopted by consensus the Pact of the Future along with the annexes the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations on the opening day of the Summit of the Future, Modi told the UN in his 5-minute address that "when we are discussing Global Future, we must accord the highest priority to a human-centric approach."

## Israeli strikes kill 100 in Lebanon



**Jerusalem:** The Israeli military said it struck 300 targets Monday in Lebanon in one of the most intense barrages of airstrikes in nearly a year of fighting against the Hezbollah militant group.

The Lebanese Health Ministry said 100 people were killed and more than 400 wounded in what would be the deadliest day in Lebanon since the conflict started in October.

Before the escalation beginning with the wave of pager explosions last Tuesday, around 600 people had been killed in Lebanon since October, mostly fighters, but also more than 100 civilians.

The Israeli army announced the action on so-

cial media, posting a photo of what is said was the military chief, Lt Gen Herzi Halevi, approving additional attacks from military headquarters in Tel Aviv.

Halevi and other Israeli leaders have promised tougher action against Hezbollah in the coming days.

Hezbollah said in a statement that it fired dozens of rockets at an Israeli military post in Galilee. It also targeted for a second day the facilities of the Rafael defence firm, headquartered in Haifa.

As Israel carried out the attacks, Israeli authorities reported a series of air-raid sirens in northern Israel warning of incoming rocket fire from Lebanon.

-AP

## Saints in focus as Maharashtra election inches closer

By Aditi Pai

**Pune:** On Monday, the Maharashtra government decided that the Pune airport will be named after Sant Tukaram Maharaj, the 17th century saint who is revered for his teachings and abhang. It is unlikely that the near future will see many of them take a flight out of Pune's swanky airport but for the millions who follow the revered saint Tukaram Maharaj, the new announcement is certainly a reason to cheer.

The naming is a smart political move especially at a time when political battlelines in Maharashtra are drawn on the basis of caste

and reservations. In contrast, the saints, Sant Tukaram, Sant Dnyaneshwar and others created a community that professes equality, spirituality and a society bereft of discrimination. The warkari sampradaya is a religious movement that finds its roots in the bhakti tradition where people are urged to worship God without any restrictive rituals and rules and are urged to follow a lifestyle committed to duty and moralistic behaviour.

The warkaris represent a slice of Maharashtra, quite literally. Their popular image is simple and consistent—white clothes, pastel hued cotton sarees, taal and

chipali (musical instruments) in hand, chanting mauli mauli (in praise of Vitthal) as they trudge through difficult terrain for 21 days to reach the shrine. The community encompasses people across caste, culture, gender, geography and socio-economic status who come together with the sole purpose of worshipping Vitthal through the poems and abhangs written by the saints. The saints themselves came from different castes and their writings reflected the pain of discrimination that was prevalent at the time.

Among the earliest revered saints was Sant Dnyaneshwar, a poet, philoso-



pher and saint who wrote the Dnyaneshwari or a commentary on the Bhagwat Gita in simple language for the unlettered peasants. Even today, the Dnyaneshwari is read and taught in several Marathi-speaking households breaking barriers of caste and status. "The wari existed even before Sant Dnyaneshwar. In

fact, his grandfather was a warkari himself so the tradition of the wari is definitely more than 800 years old. Even the worship of Vitthal goes back several centuries," says Dr Sadanand More, writer, historian, lecturer and a scholar of sant sahitya or the literature of the saints. Maharashtra's rich lega-

cy of saints has found a place in the sun in this season of sops and polls. And it's no wonder given their numbers. This year on Ashadi Ekadashi, 15 lakh warkaris joyously walked to Pandharpur for a glimpse of their deity and that's only a small percentage of the total community. Appealing to them doesn't need bal-

ancing fine caste equations. But amid the piety and sacrifice of the devotees, politicians across parties saw an opportunity waiting to be explored—getting the attention of these men and women who follow Maharashtra's bhakti tradition.

Earlier this year, the Maharashtra government announced a pension scheme to the seniors in the warkari sampradaya and Chief Minister Eknath Shinde announced setting up the Mukhya Mantri Varkari Sampradaya Mahamandal, a corporation with an initial fund of Rs 50 crore to provide facilities to kirtankars, warkaris and bhajani mandals besides managing

the Palkhi routes. The corporation will serve the pilgrims well as they undertake the arduous journey through the scorching heat and intermittent downpours. Another good initiative was the Nirmal Wari that provided portable toilets to the pilgrims along their route.

The infrastructure, too, has got a boost with the multi-crore Palkhi Marg or the highways built for easy movement of devotees to Pandharpur, near completion. With 42000 shade-giving trees planted along the route, the road promises to turn into a 'green highway' that will also offer resting spots for the warkaris.

Code of Conduct Likely Before Dussehra Attempts on to refrain Uddhav from holding rally at Shivaji Park



BY Vivek Bhavsar

Mumbai: The Mahayuti is reportedly going to make a request to the Election Commission to impose the model code of conduct before Dussehra, thereby denying any leverage that the Shiv Sena (UBT) Thackeray might have before the polls. As Dussehra pose a significance for Shiv Sena (UBT) its chief Uddhav Thackeray might face several difficulties in holding the annual Dussehra rally at the iconic Shivaji Park.

call to the Shivsainiks from this very iconic ground had witnessed a regime change in Maharashtra. If the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is enforced due to impending elections, it could restrict certain political activities. These restrictions include limitations on new announcements, inaugurations, or public gatherings that are perceived to influence voters. According to a source, the Mahayuti is going to place its request before the Election Commission of India (ECI) during its visit to Mumbai from Friday. Dussehra falls on October 12. If the source is to be believed Chief Minister Eknath Shinde is drawing up strategy to corner Uddhav Thackeray. As part of it, moves are afoot to ensure that the Dussehra rally does not happen and the poll dates are announced either on October 10 or October 11 itself.

The state government apparently has urged the ECI to hold polls in two phases. For the assembly elections, the ECI earmarks about 35 days for election campaigning. If the ECI agrees to a two-phase polling, then voting could take place on November 13 and November 16. If the ECI decides on a single day polling, then voting could take place on November 16 and counting of votes and declaration of results could take place on November 20.

Three Kunbi sub castes in OBC

By Correspondent

Mumbai: The Maharashtra cabinet on Monday cleared a proposal to include three Kunbi sub castes in the Other Backward Classes segment. The move comes ahead of assembly polls, likely to be held in November, and amid stirs from the OBCs as well as Marathas over reservation. The Eknath Shinde also decided to continue a subsidy of Rs seven per liter for cow milk producers in the state.

A total of 24 decisions were taken in the cabinet meeting chaired by Shinde, an official said.

These include the inclusion of Tilor Kunabi, Tilor Kunabi and Ti-Kunabi sub-castes of the Kunbi community in the OBC bracket, and continuation of Rs 7 per litre subsidy to milk producers, with the new rate coming into effect from October 1. It will put burden of Rs 965.24 crore on the state treasury.

The cabinet also approved changing the names of the existing Industrial Training Institutes across the state.

While most of the names are of social reformers such as Babasaheb Ambedkar, Shahu Maharaj and Annabhau Sathe, the proposal includes the name of the RSS ideologue late Dattopant Thengadi, which will be given the ITI in Arvi in Amravati district.

Similarly, the cabinet cleared a proposal to set up the Vir Shiromani Maharashtra Pratap Economic Development Corporation for the Rajput community.



Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud on Monday laid the foundation stone of the Bombay High Court's new complex in Mumbai's Bandra region. Stones from the existing HC building in south Mumbai are to be included in the foundation. Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, deputy chief ministers Devendra Fadnis and Ajit Pawar, senior Supreme Court judges and HC Chief Justice D.K. Upadhyaya attended the ceremony.

EY employee's death

Labour official inspects firm's office

By Correspondent

Pune: A Maharashtra labour department official on Monday inspected the office of Ernst & Young (EY) here on the directions of the Central government over the death of a woman chartered accountant.

Anna Sebastian Perayil (26) allegedly died due to work stress four months into joining the firm in Pune. Following her death, Sebastian's mother wrote to EY India chairman Rajiv Memani alleging that the workload and extended working hours took a toll on her daughter. The firm, however, denied the

allegations. The Keralaite, who passed her CA exams in 2023, died in July.

Additional labour commissioner Shailendra Pol said, "As per the directions from the Central government, an inspection was conducted today to assess the working conditions and factual situation at the EY Pune office."

A government labour officer visited the office for the inspection, he said.

"We requested details about the company's policies regarding office operations, employee welfare, and handling of extra working hours, including



Anna Sebastian Perayil

compensation to employees. The company has to furnish this information within seven days," Pol said.

"We reviewed the victim's appointment letter, including its terms and

conditions. From the appointment letter, it was determined that she (her job profile) does not fall under the legal definition of 'labour'," he said.

However, since Sebastian was an employee, the matter must be addressed from the perspective of employee welfare and well-being, the official said.

"Once the firm furnishes the details requested, a report will be sent to the Central authorities, who will then determine the next course of action," he said.

Union Minister for Labour Mansukh Mandaviya had recently said that the matter is being probed.

CRIME WATCH

Minor girl molested by relative

Thane: Police have registered a case against a 21-year-old man on charges of molesting his cousin brother's 18-month-old daughter in Thane district of Maharashtra, an official said on Monday. The child's father has also been booked for threatening his wife after she complained to him about the incident which took place in Bhiwandi area on May 8, an official from Narpoli police station said. The First Information Report (FIR) did not mention any reason for the delay in filing of the complaint on Sunday. The man allegedly stripped the child and molested her. When the child's mother complained to her husband, he and the accused threatened her with dire consequences.

Cab driver thrashed after tiff over Rs.5

Thane: Three persons allegedly beat up a 32-year-old cab driver after a dispute over Rs 5 at a petrol pump in Maharashtra's Thane district, police said on Monday. The incident took place on Saturday night when the driver working with a cab aggregator service went to a petrol pump in Bhiwandi for re-fuelling his vehicle after ferrying a passenger, they said. He paid Rs 300 for his fuel bill of Rs 295 and asked for return of the balance Rs 5. An official from Nizampura police station said. The fuel pump operator got angry over being asked for the balance amount. He and two of his associates present there allegedly beat up the driver.

Premature baby found dead near lake

Thane: The body of a premature baby has been found lying near the banks of a lake in Thane city of Maharashtra, police said on Monday. Some passersby spotted the body of the male child near the Siddheswar Talao on Saturday and alerted the police. After receiving information, the police rushed to the spot and sent the body to a government hospital for postmortem, an official from Naupada police station said. The child was apparently stillborn prematurely in the eighth month of pregnancy, he said. An FIR was registered on Sunday against an unidentified person under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita section 94 (concealment of birth by secret disposal of dead body).

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"If reservations are being treated as development, then there is a developed class and an undeveloped class. And if there is an undeveloped class in the country, what is the government doing to bring it on par with others?"



Prakash Ambedkar, Chief, Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi

Waqf Bill JPC Rijju hails huge number of responses received

Pune: Union Minister Kiren Rijju on Monday said the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill has got recommendations in "crores" and asserted wrong information was being spread by some about the bill.

Sources on Sunday said the parliamentary panel examining the Waqf (Amendment) Bill had received a staggering 1.2 crore email responses. The panel, led by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Jagadambika Pal, had also received 75,000 responses with documents to support the respective views.

The bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on August 8 and was then referred to a JPC after a heated debate.

"No one ever thought a JPC would receive recommendations in crores. Even if 1,000 recommendations or representations were



1.2 crore No of email responses the JPC received 75,000 No of responses the JPC received with documents

made, we used to consider it a big number," Rijju told reporters on the sidelines of a 'Viksit Bharat-Yuva Connect' event here.

"Some misleading information is being spread about the bill. These people are spreading lies that prop-

Two killed as tractor-trolley overturns

Buldhana: Two labourers were killed and three other persons seriously injured after their tractor-trolley loaded with concrete poles overturned in Maharashtra's Buldhana district, police said on Monday.

The accident took place on Sunday afternoon on Borakhedi-Vadgaon road, they said.

Out of the three injured persons, a 22-year-old man was an Agniveer aspirant and had cleared its recruitment exam, his relative said.

The five persons were sitting on the tractor-trolley which was carrying concrete poles used to install electric cables.

The vehicle suddenly toppled at a turn near Punhai village and the cement poles fell on the five persons, causing serious injuries to them, an official from Borakhedi police station said.

After receiving information, the Borakhedi

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to general public that my client VJAY RAMRATAN SHARMA is an owner of the Industrial Gala No. 109, First Floor, PRESTIGE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE CO-OPERATIVE PREMISES SOCIETY LIMITED., B.P. Road No.3, Bhaji Galli, Bhayander (East), Tal & Dist. Thane 401105. By Deed of Release of dtd. 12/10/2022 my client acquired the said Industrial Gala. Now my client has requested me to issue no claim certificate. While scrutiny of the documents it is found that the original agreement of dtd. 9th Feb. 1985 between M/s. SANGAM CONSTRUCTION CO. & M/s. SHARDA ENGINEERING CO., is misplaced and not traceable. So, any person having any right, title, and interest, on the above referred original agreement, or on the Industrial Gala, its share certificate then please write to the undersigned with necessary documents within 14 days from the publication of this notice, failing which No Claim Certificate will be issued to my client which please be noted.

JOHN M. RODRICKS ADVOCATE

Office No. 2, First Floor, New Shanti Ganga Apt., Opp. Bhayander Rly. Stn., Bhayander (E), Thane -401105 Mob.9892401349

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is HEREBY given on behalf of my client Smt. ALPA JAYESH MAKWANA who is the current owner of Industrial Unit No. D-129, First Floor, 'JAI BONANZA INDUSTRIAL ESTATE PREMISES CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY LTD.', Ashok Chakravati Road, Kandivali East, Mumbai -400101 along with shares of society on 20/08/2021 to his daughter in law under transfer No. 155, distinctive from 1146 to 1150 dated 20/01/1988. Originally the said unit was purchased by late Arjunbhai Mohanlal Makwana & Kirtikumbar Arjunbhai Makwana, on demise of Arjunbhai Mohanlal Makwana, the said unit along with shares of society on 12/08/2010 under transfer No. 590, transferred in name of Mr. Kirt A. Makwana (Kirtikumbar Arjunbhai Makwana) AND on demise of Kirt A. Makwana the said unit along with shares of society on 20/08/2021 to his daughter in law under transfer No. 719, transferred in name of Mrs. Alpa Jayesh Makwana and since then she has been in peaceful possession of the said unit. I, Adv. Rajat K. Singh hereby invites claims or objections from claimants or objectors for the transfer of the said right, interest or title in the said unit along with transfer of shares of society, within a period of 7 days from the publication of this notice, with copies of documentary proofs to support the claim/objectors or claims/objections are received within the period prescribed above, it will be presumed and/or deemed that there are no such claims/objectors and if any, the same have been waived or abandoned and the undersigned shall proceed to issue a No Claim Certificate in respect of the same and no claims shall be entertained thereafter.

Adv. Rajat K. Singh Office No. 138, 1st Floor, Ostwal Ormate, Bldg. No. 2/A, Near Jain Mandir, Jessal Park, Bhayander East, Dist. Thane -401105 (Mob. No.8169875195) Place : Mumbai Date : 23/09/2024.

Bag stuffed with Rs 20 lakh found on local train

Mumbai: A bag containing Rs 20 lakh cash was found abandoned in a coach of a local train in Mumbai, police said on Monday.

Some passengers spotted a bag lying unattended in a second-class compartment of the Asangaon-CSMT local train at 10 PM on Sunday, an official said.

"A woman member of a group of passengers travelling on the train told others to inform the railway police while alighting at Kalyan station, following which the bag was handed over to police at Kalyan GRP station," he said. Police have launched a search to trace the rightful owner of the bag.

Canara Bank advertisement for possession notice regarding Matunga Bazar Branch property. Includes details of the property, the borrower, and the bank's terms and conditions.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given through my client SMT. RASHMI JAGDISH PATIL to the public that MR. JAGDISH PADMAN PATIL & SMT. RASHMI JAGDISH PATIL are the joint owners of a Flat in Flat bearing No. D/201, on the Second Floor, in "D" Wing, admeasuring 37.63 Square Meters (Carpet area), in the building known as "KISHOR KUNJ NO. 7", in the Proposed Society known as "KISHOR KUNJ NO. 7 CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING SOCIETY LTD D.", constructed on N.A. Land bearing Survey No. 354 D, Plot No. 1 to 4, Hissa No. 6, Survey No. 354, Hissa No. 7 & 4, lying being and situated at Village BOLINJI, Tal. Vasai, Dist. Palghar, within the area of Sub-Registrar of Vasai 1 to 6. The said MR. JAGDISH PADMAN PATIL, died on 05/06/2021, Leaving behind him Widow/Wife & Co-owner of the said flat namely SMT. RASHMI JAGDISH PATIL & SMT. RASHMI JAGDISH PATIL & MISS. RIDDHI JAGDISH PATIL, they are the legal heirs as per Succession Act. Any Person or Persons having any right title or interest by way of inheritance or Claim against the said flat and shares should send their claims in writing to the undersigned along with the documentary evidence in support of the said claim thereof within 14 days of publication of said Notice, failing which claims of any shall be deemed to have been waived. Dated: Mr. Ranjan Hasha Patil, advocate, Shop No. 102, First Floor, Kunti Sadan, Veer Savarkar Marg, Virar-(E), Tal-Vasai, Dist-Palghar.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given through my client Smt. GEETA DEEPAK JOSHI to the public that MR. DEEPAK ASHOK JOSHI, who is the owner of a Flat in Flat bearing No. 202, on the Second Floor, in "A" Wing, admeasuring 530 Square Feet i.e. 49.256 Square Meters (Super Built up area), in the Building No. B, known as "SAI SRUSHTI COMPLEX", in the Society known as "SAI SRUSHTI COMPLEX B-WING CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING SOCIETY LTD.", Kopari, Sai Hill Nagar, Virar (East), Taluka Vasai, Dist. Palghar 401305, bearing registration No. PLR/ (VSI)/HSG/(TC)/167/12/2022, holding share Certificate No. 010, Ten shares face value of Rs.50/- each bearing No. 091 to 100, constructed on N.A. Land bearing Survey No. 114A1, (old Survey No. 3), Hissa No. 6 (Part), lying being and situated at Village KOPARI, Taluka Vasai, District Palghar, within the area of Sub-Registration of Vasai 1 to 6. The said MR. DEEPAK ASHOK JOSHI, died on 09/05/2021, leaving behind him Widow/Wife namely SMT. GEETA DEEPAK JOSHI, Two Minor Sons namely KUSHAL DEEPAK JOSHI & TEJAS DEEPAK JOSHI, & One Minor Daughter namely DIKSHA DEEPAK JOSHI they are the legal heirs as per Hindu Succession Act. Any Person or Persons having any right title or interest by way of inheritance or Claim against the said flat and shares should send their claims in writing to the undersigned along with the documentary evidence in support of the said claim thereof within 14 days of publication of said Notice, failing which claims of any shall be deemed to have been waived. Dated: Mr. Ranjan Hasha Patil, advocate, Shop No. 102, First Floor, Kunti Sadan, Veer Savarkar Marg, Virar-(E), Tal-Vasai, Dist-Palghar.

# Political slugfest over Akshay Shinde's encounter

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his deputy Devendra Fadnavis on Monday said police shot dead Badlapur school sexual assault case accused Akshay Shinde in self-defence.

Akshay Shinde, accused of sexually abusing two girls in the school where he worked as an attendant, was being taken to Badlapur from Talaja jail for investigation when he snatched a policeman's gun and fired at an assistant inspector when the police vehicle reached Mumbra bypass.

He was killed in retaliatory firing by a police officer who was part of the escort team.

However, the incident

drawn condemnation from the opposition parties who questioned the chain of events and also asked if it was a move to destroy evidence in a case that had triggered national outrage.

There is no action against the "BJP-linked" school management but an arrested accused is shot dead in suspicious circumstances, he said, adding "we have no trust in Badlapur police".

Shiv Sena (UBT) spokesperson Sushma Andhare equated the incident with the gunning down of four rape accused in Telangana in 2019.

CM Shinde said, "Earlier, the opposition parties demanded that Akshay Shinde be hanged. Now,



"Akshay Shinde's ex-wife had accused him of sexual violence and the police was taking him for a probe regarding these allegations. He snatched the gun of a police personnel opened fire. Police fired back in self-defence."

**Eknath Shinde,**  
Chief Minister



"Is it an attempt to destroy evidence? Were Akshay Shinde's hands not tied by the police during the transit? How could he reach for the gun, and how come the police were so careless? We demand a judicial probe in this matter."

**Vijay Wadettiwar,**  
Leader of Opposition



"Police opened fire in self-defence. The opposition raises questions on every issue. They had wanted him to be hanged. It is wrong to say such things when the police tried to save lives."

**Devendra Fadnavis,**  
Home Minister



"The accused should have been hanged as per the legal provisions, but the actions of the Home Department, while transferring him (from Talaja Jail) are questionable."

**Sharad Pawar,**  
Chief, NCP (SP)



"Was Akshay Shinde killed as he was hiding something more sinister? Why is the school management still on the run? How come Akshay Shinde managed to snatch a gun despite being handcuffed and how did he know to operate the firearm. It shows the state home minister's inability to handle critical cases."

**Sushama Andhare,**  
Shiv Sena (UBT)



Two chargesheets were filed against Shinde, and I was the public prosecutor in both cases. Going by the submitted documents, there was sufficient evidence against Shinde. Maybe because of that, Shinde tried ending his life. We cannot rule out this possibility. A judicial probe will bring out the truth in this case."

**Ujjwal Nikam,** Special Public Prosecutor

they are taking his side and questioning the integrity of Maharashtra po-

lice. Such act of the opposition leaders is condemnable and

unfortunate."

When asked about the opposition's allegation

that the accused was killed to gain political sympathy, the Chief Minister said

the opposition parties are rattled by the success of his government's flagship

Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin scheme run for the women.

## School chairman, secretary move for pre-arrest bail

**Mumbai:** The chairman and secretary of a school in Badlapur, where a male attendant sexually assaulted two girls, have moved the Bombay High Court seeking pre-arrest bail.

A case has been registered against the duo under relevant provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act for not reporting the incident to the police immediately and for negligence.

### Badlapur sexual assault case

They approached the high court after a special court denied them anticipatory bail. Their pleas came up for hearing on Monday before a single bench of Justice R.N. Laddha, and the court posted the matter for October 1.

Two girls, aged four and five, were sexually assaulted inside the washroom of the school by a male atten-

dant last month. The accused has been arrested.

The Badlapur police were initially probing the case, but the Maharashtra government set up a special investigation team (SIT) following a public outcry over serious lapses in the police investigation.

The school's chairman and secretary have not been apprehended yet.



Evening walkers at Marine Drive on Monday.

Pic: Bhushan Koyande

## Man's identity used in illegal transactions of Rs 383 cr

**Thane:** A case has been registered against three persons for allegedly defrauding an estate agent by carrying out illegal transactions of more than Rs 383 crore in his name in Thane.

The Kasarwadavli police registered a first information report (FIR) on Saturday based on a complaint by the 38-year-old man, who was allegedly unaware of the fraudulent activities till he started receiving notices from banks, an officer said.

He said the complainant claimed the accused approached him with a job offer in May 2022 and took his

identification documents, including his PAN and Aadhaar cards.

The trio allegedly used the complainant's details to open two bank accounts and created fictitious shell companies, linking their mobile numbers and email addresses to the accounts, he said. The official said the accused executed illegal financial transactions of more than Rs 383 crore till May 2023. While a case has been registered against the accused, Deepak Shukla, Rahul Patwa, and Chetan Khade, no arrests have been made.

## 'Laapataa Ladies' entry for Oscars

**Mumbai:** Kiran Rao's "Laapataa Ladies" has been picked as India's official entry for Oscars 2025, the Film Federation of India announced on Monday.

The Hindi film, a light-hearted satire on patriarchy, was chosen from a list of 29 films, including Bollywood hit "Animal", Malayalam National Award winner "Aattam" and Cannes winner "All We Imagine As Light". The 13-member select committee headed by Assamese director Jahnu Barua "unanimously" decided on "Laapataa Ladies", produced by Aamir Khan and Rao, for reckoning in the best international film category at the Academy Awards.

## Gavaskar's plot allotted to Rahane

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** The Maharashtra cabinet on Monday approved the transfer of a 2,000 square meter land parcel in the upscale Bandra area of Mumbai on lease to ace batsman Ajinkya Rahane to develop a sports complex.

The plot was originally allotted to cricketer Sunil Gavaskar in 1988 for setting up an indoor training academy but the cricketer could not utilise it for more than 30 years.

The Maharashtra cabinet has cleared a proposal by the Revenue Department to hand over the land parcel to cricketer Ajinkya Madhukar Rahane on a 30-year lease to develop state-

of-the-art sports facilities, an official said.

A Cabinet note stated that the plot was earlier allotted to cricketer Sunil Gavaskar to develop an indoor cricket training academy. The government reclaimed this plot due to the lack of development.

The government stated that the plot is in poor condition as slum dwellers have been using it for unwarranted work.

A resolution to hand over the plot on lease to Rahane was passed by MHADA (Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority), which was approved by the council of ministers.

Former state Housing Minister Jitendra Awhad in 2021 highlighted the non-

utilisation of the plot by Gavaskar.

"I had almost decided to cancel the allotment of the 2,000 sq metre plot located in Bandra. Despite its huge size and prime location, the proposed cricket academy has not yet been established. I did not cancel the allotment because of Gavaskar's stature and his great contribution to the game," Awhad had stated earlier. The plot was given to Gavaskar for setting up a cricket academy and he should utilise it for that purpose, he had said.

This plot, allotted to Sunil Gavaskar Cricket Foundation Trust, was returned to the state government by the cricket legend in May 2022.

## Air derosters three cabin crew members

**Mumbai:** Air India has derostered three cabin crew members for an erroneous approach in opening the door of a Boeing 777 aircraft that led to the auto-deployment of the emergency slides, according to sources.

The incident happened with the Boeing 777 plane at the Bangalore airport after it landed from San Francisco on September 15, they said.

An Air India spokesperson said a technical issue was reported with one of the doors not opening appropriately upon landing and the matter was attended to promptly.

-PTI

## Defamation: Uddhav's plea rejected

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** A special court on Monday dismissed the joint appeal of Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders Uddhav Thackeray and Sanjay Raut against a magistrate's order refusing to discharge them in a defamation case filed by former Lok Sabha MP Rahul Shewale.

Denying their revision application, special judge for cases against MPs and MLAs, AU Kadam, directed that the case be sent to the trial (magistrate) court for further proceedings.

Shewale, part of the Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, has sought action against Thackeray and Raut under Indian Penal Code section

500 (defamation) for publishing "defamatory articles" against him in the Marathi and Hindi editions of Shiv Sena (UBT) mouthpiece "Saamana".

Shewale has taken objection to articles, published on December 29, 2022, alleging he had hotel and real estate businesses in Karachi in Pakistan. As per Shewale's plea, filed in January last year through advocate Chitra Salunkhe, the articles were "concocted" and "devoid of any merit".

Claiming innocence and alleging they had been falsely implicated, Thackeray and Raut had filed a discharge application before a magistrate court.

The magistrate rejected

their pleas in October 2023 saying CrPC does not contain any specific provision for discharge of the accused after issue of process in summary cases.

In their revision petition against the magistrate's order, Thackeray and Raut claimed the article was based on the press conference of a woman, adding it was also published in other newspapers and posted on social media platforms.

Shewale selectively filed a case against Thackeray and Raut, the plea said. The petition cited Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution which gives fundamental rights of freedom of speech and expression and includes within its ambit freedom of press.

## Raj Thackeray meets CM

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray met Chief Minister Eknath Shinde at the latter's residence here on Monday.

The meeting assumes significance as the state assembly elections are just around the corner.

This was Thackeray's second visit to the Chief Minister's residence, Varsha, in two months. He had met the Shinde in the first

week of August to discuss civic issues concerning the sprawling BDD chawls in Mumbai and the development of colonies for police personnel.

Shinde has been endeavouring to gain Thackeray's support in the runup to the state assembly elections. Raj Thackeray on Sunday held a public meeting in Worli, where his party intends to nominate a leader Sandeep Deshpande.

## Preparing youth of tomorrow: Yadav

By Manisha Rege

**Mumbai:** By focusing on quality education, skill development, job creation, and nurturing entrepreneurial ambitions, the government is preparing the youth of today to build the progressive India of tomorrow, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupendra Yadav said here on Monday.

Addressing students at the "Yuva Shakti for Viksit Bharat" event at NMIMS Yadav spoke about youth power and its importance in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Viksit Bharat. "As we work towards environmental sustainability and climate resilience, Yuva Shakti must lead the charge in fostering a greener and more sustainable future," Yadav said. The goal of the government is to convert youthful energy into a powerful force that lights up India's sustainable future, he said. The minister spoke of measures that reduce carbon footprints and promote a better environment.

## 300-year-old Bandra village to get facelift

By Manisha Rege

**Mumbai:** As Mumbai, India's financial capital, witnessed vertical growth over the years with highrises dotting the skyline, some 'gaothans' (villages) have held onto their heritage and legacy.

Ranwar, in the heart of Bandra, is one such village that has resisted the urge to make way for towering structures.

Dwarfed by highrises, the East Indian-majority village has narrow streets lined with old quaint bungalows and crosses outside homes. With jazz music streaming in the air, walking around the area can transport you to a simpler time.

While Bandra developed rapidly and became home to Bollywood's elite and a burgeoning street shopping hub, residents of Ranwar maintained their old bungalows. The coexistence, however, has come at a price, causing traffic issues and crowding. And now, plans are afoot to give the 300-year-old village a facelift while preserving the past.

Talking to PTI, Johan



Dharmai, BJP secretary and a member of the East Indian community, said, "Locals want to preserve the heritage. One of the steps in the facelift plan is to close vehicle movement and build a walkway so that tourists can take a stroll and enjoy the architecture."

Though many houses in Ranwar are now being redeveloped, Veronica Street has maintained its old-world charm. It has a square erected in 1866. However, honking rents the air on this street, as motorists see it as a shortcut to Bandra Reclamation and other areas.

Mehboob Studio is just a stone's throw away, and senior citizens living on Veronica Street recall seeing actors Helen and Zeenat Aman around Ranwar.

A beautification, restora-

tion and conservation project is being initiated to improve safety, regulate traffic and create awareness about the centuries-old village.

Mumbai BJP president and Bandra West MLA Ashish Shelar recently met locals to discuss ways to move the project forward.

"The beauty of Bandra West is its 'gaothans'. The heritage needs to be protected and showcased. I have asked the government to allocate funds from the District Planning Development Committee (DPDC). Ranwar village will get a facelift. The work has begun on roads, CCTV cameras, street light illumination, parking and traffic plan will be in place with the help of locals and architects," Shelar told PTI.

Architect Samir D'Monte has been working with the

Ranwar Veronica Street Residents' Association since 2009, and they identified a range of problems that the area faced.

D'Monte said improvements were made to open spaces and common areas, roads, sewage and drainage systems, street signage, street lighting and traffic and parking management. Apart from this, individual houses were restored, and an innovative fire system was also introduced.

Locals say most residents are senior citizens and want to live peacefully without disturbances by motorists.

Kaevan Umrigar of Khaki Tours, who works to create awareness about Mumbai's heritage, said Bandra comprised 23 gaothans that housed fisher folk, Kunbis (a farming community) and the agris community who had salt pans.

He said preserving heritage comes at a cost, and if a 'gaothan' comes under heritage guidelines, it becomes difficult to upgrade a home in the area or live a modern life, Umrigar said, adding that heritage should be made attractive by tapping

**Ranwar was a farming village, and the area had paddy fields. Later, these paddy fields made way for urban settlements. These little villages are now trapped in the city. Now, only 10 to 15 gaothans in Bandra have survived.**

**-Kaevan Umrigar, Official, Khaki Tours**

the tourism potential of these areas.

'Gaothans' in Mumbai and the larger Mumbai metropolitan region (MMR) are urban villages that house the city's original inhabitants. The Mumbai suburban district collector and Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) have been roped in for Ranwar's facelift plan.

-PTI

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Let us all be clear and let's not be befuddled by our vision. On the judicial side, judges across the SC and HC exercise their functions with the fiercest sense of independence. But when it comes to 'the infrastructure and budgeting', we stand together with the government."

**Dhananjay Chandrachud, CJI**



# Google, Nvidia to enhance AI focus in India

**New York:** Technology giants Google and Nvidia will enhance their engagement in India with more focus on leveraging artificial intelligence technology in the country, top officials of the companies said on Monday after meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Graphics Processing Unit (GPU) major Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang said the Prime Minister has always been keen on learning about artificial intelligence, its potential and opportunities for India.

"I have enjoyed so many meetings with the Prime Minister. He's such an incredible student, and every time I see him, he wants to learn about technology, artificial intelligence, the potential and opportunity for

**Every IIT has an Nvidia AI Center of Excellence. We're teaching professionals. We're teaching students how to upskill into this new world of AI. AI is a very complicated technology, but in the end it enables a country to take advantage of the technology in a way that has never been possible before. AI really democratised computing. This is India's moment, you have to seize.**

Jensen Huang, CEO, Nvidia

India, the impact on India, society and industry," Huang said.

Huang's Nvidia is estimated to have 88 per cent market share in the GPU segment which is in huge demand for AI workloads across the world.

He said India is home to

some of the world's greatest computer scientists which is a great opportunity.

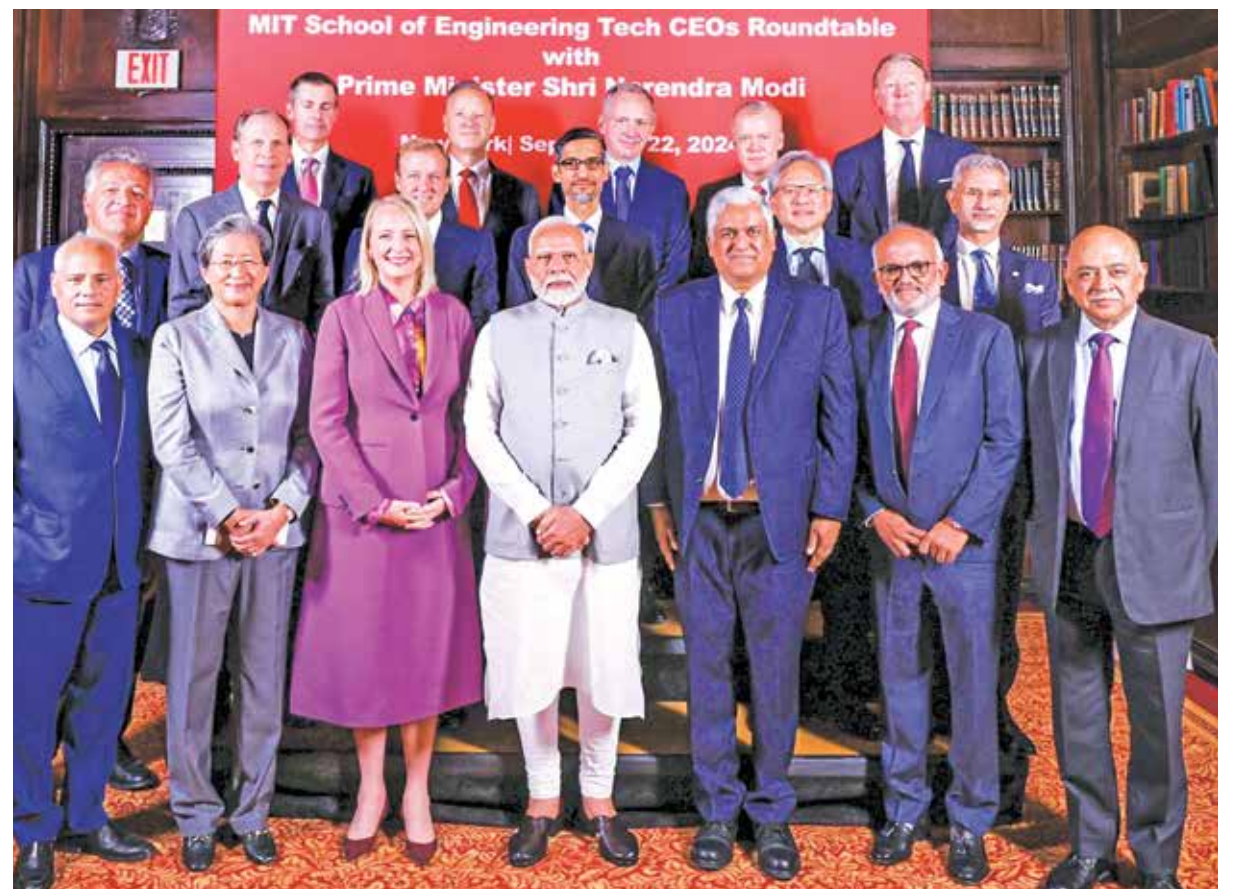
"Artificial Intelligence is also a new industry, a new manufacturing industry. I'm looking forward to partnering with India in a very deep way to make that

**Nvidia has partnered with Yotta Data Services which plans to scale up its GPU stable to 32,768 units by the end of 2025.**

possible. We have many partnerships with India. For one, we're helping India gain access to our most advanced technologies," Huang said.

Huang said India is the home of the third-largest startup economy and the work of all new generations of startups is based on AI.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai said the Prime Minister has been focused on transforming India with his Digital India vision and pushed the company to make in India and design in India. -PTI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a roundtable meeting with MIT School of Engineering Tech CEOs, in New York on Sunday. Pic: AP/PTI

## Mall retail space to be added in top 8 cities in next three years

**New Delhi:** Fresh supply of retail space in shopping malls during 2024-27 across eight major cities is expected to be 18 million sq ft, which is one-third of the projected requirement to meet the demand, according to Cushman & Wakefield (C&W).

Real estate consultant C&W in its latest report pointed out that "India's Retail Space Per Capita (RSPC) lags behind other South Asian countries, including Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam."

This underlines vast potential for expansion of retail spaces, it added.

At present, the total re-

tail space in top eight cities is around 60 million sq ft and 18 million sq ft is expected to be added during 2024-27.

In the first half of 2024, no new mall became operational. "To reach a 1.0 RSPC by 2027, comparable to Indonesia -- the closest relevant comparison owing to relatively similar per capita incomes -- there is a need to construct about 55 million sq ft of mall space over the next four years," the consultant said.

At present, the forecasted pipeline of Grade-A retail mall projects add up to merely 18 million sq ft through the 2024-27 period. Saurabh Shatdal, Man-

aging Director, Capital Markets, and Head Retail, C&W, said, "India's retail sector is at a pivotal moment. The rising consumer confidence and increasing discretionary spending are clear indicators of the sector's potential. To capitalise on this growth, it is imperative to address the supply-side challenges and ensure the availability of quality retail spaces."

There is a rapid expansion of malls happening in tier-2 and 3 cities, he said.

The top cities covered by Cushman & Wakefield in its report were Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Pune, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Ahmedabad.

## Panel on ending gas monopolies

**New Delhi:** Oil regulator has formed a committee under former SEBI chairman Ajay Tyagi to recommend ways of ending monopolies enjoyed by companies engaged in both transportation and marketing of natural gas and city gas retailing.

The eight-member committee has been asked to give its recommendations on splitting entities engaged in both transportation and marketing of natural gas, and ending the monopolies of city gas retailers where required, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) said in an order. The panel has been asked to submit its report in three months.

## Perfect alignment between PM, CEOs

By Yoshita Singh

**New York:** There is a "perfect alignment" between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and global technology CEOs' vision for India in areas like semiconductors, Artificial Intelligence and biotechnology, an eminent academician in the US has said.

Modi interacted with global technology CEOs at a roundtable here on Saturday. The roundtable was anchored by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), School of Engineering. Professor Anantha Chandrakasan, Chief Innovation and Strategy Officer at the Institute and Dean of the MIT School of Engineering,

chaired the roundtable.

"It is my deep honour to convene and host this roundtable with Prime Minister Modi and the CEOs of some of the most impactful tech companies in the United States and globally," Chandrakasan told PTI in an exclusive interview here on Sunday after the tech roundtable.

He said the roundtable focussed on a "broad-based set of topics", including biotechnology, pharma, Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing and semiconductor technology.

"What was really impressive to me was that the CEOs talked about their technical and leadership directions, but also what

they're doing in India today and what they would like to do more of. It's truly impressive that there was an eagerness to work between the US and India. So that was striking," Chandrakasan said.

Chandrakasan added that "equally important was the fact that when Prime Minister Modi described his vision for India, he talked about skilling, semiconductors, artificial intelligence and the ethical use of artificial intelligence, biotechnology. So very similar types of goals and I saw a perfect alignment between what the CEOs of the tech companies were saying and what Prime Minister Modi's vision was," he said.

Chandrakasan said that many of the CEOs talked about how they're going to expand their footprint and collaborations in India.

"So I see that individually, but what I heard from the CEOs was even more exciting, was the fact that there's a lot of similar goals. And I believe collectively between industry and academia, there could be tremendous partnerships between the United States and India," he said.

Chandrakasan said he "a little bit struck by" how much the companies are "deeply invested in India, and how they see this tremendous growth opportunity, and that many of them had similar goals," he said. -PTI

## SEBI imposes Rs 1 cr fine on Anmol Ambani

**New Delhi:** Markets regulator SEBI on Monday imposed a penalty of Rs 1 crore on Anmol Ambani, son of industrialist Anil Ambani, for his failure to exercise due diligence while approving general-purpose corporate loans in Reliance Home Finance matter.

Additionally, the regulator levied a fine of Rs 15 lakh on Krishnan Gopalakrishnan, who was the Chief Risk Officer of Reliance Housing Finance.

Both have been directed to pay the amount within 45 days, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) said in its order.

The order came after Sebi, in August, barred Anil Ambani and 24 others from the securities market for five years in a case pertaining to diversion of Reliance Home Finance Ltd's funds. Also, a fine of Rs 25 crore was levied on him.

In its order on Monday, SEBI noted that Anmol Ambani, who was on the board of Reliance Home Finance, had approved general-purpose corporate loans or GPCL loans, and that too after the company's board of directors had given clear direction not to go ahead with any approval of such loans. -PTI

The approval for loan of Rs 20 crore to Accura Productions Private Limited was provided by Anmol Ambani on February 14, 2019, despite the board of directors in their meeting on February 11, 2019, had directed the management to not issue any further GPCL loans.

"The noticee 1 (Anmol Ambani), as non-executive director of the company, has taken the company in his own direction and has gone overboard in his role as director. Noticee 1 in doing so, gives a hint of being motivated and definitely not in the interests of the shareholders and has not acted with due care and diligence, and has not maintained high ethical standards, SEBI said.

Anmol, who was on the board of Reliance Capital and Reliance Home Finance and also a director in the other Reliance ADAG group companies where the funds were onward lent, "did not exercise reasonable due diligence with respect to the entire GPCL lending and the onward lending by these GPCL entities to other Reliance ADAG group companies, including Reliance Capital", it added.

-PTI

## BANKING MATTERS

# The bold reforms to turn around PSBs



By Sudhakar Atre

Last time, I analysed the status of PSBs when NDA took over the reins in 2014. The Government immediately initiated the bold reforms to turn around PSBs. The results surprised the financial and political circles as PSBs earned a record profit of Rs. 1.41 Lakh Crores in FY24 from massive losses of Rs 85,390 Crores. This doom-to-bloom story of PSBs was achieved through consistent efforts by the government during last 10 years.

Government initiatives to revive PSBs after 2014 The government implemented a comprehensive 4R strategy: Recognising NPAs transparently, Resolution and Recovery, Recapitalising PSBs, and Re-

forms in the financial ecosystem.

1. The first step was Recognising NPAs transparently by unearthing the NPAs hidden under the carpet by previous regime. The painstaking Asset Quality Review (AQR) Exercise was undertaken for this. The amount of Rs. 2.27 Lakh Crores shown as total Gross NPAs of PSBs on 31 st March 2014, ie 4.7 per cent of gross advances, became Rs. 5.4 Lakh Crores as on March 2016 Rs.8.95 Lakh Crore as on 31 st March 2018 after the Asset Quality Review Exercise unearthed the hidden NPAs. This shows that

huge quanta of NPAs were buried under the Carpet.

2. A massive Resolution and Recovery initiative was undertaken. To strengthen this The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code was (IBC) introduced on 28 th May 2016. It gave a clear legal framework for banks to recover large NPA amounts from defaulters and allowed eligible companies to close down bad businesses. The IBC, among different channels, is the key mechanism for banks to recover stressed assets. IBC accounted for the greatest recovery mechanism, as in 2022-23, 43 per cent of the total

amount recovered was through IBC alone. These clean up measures started showing results; GNPA's of PSBs dropped to Rs.4.28 Lakh Crores ie 5 per cent of Gross Advances. The Gross NPA ratio reached a historical multi-year low of 2.8 per cent, with net NPA at 0.6 per cent of Gross Advances by March 2024. The stern measures were initiated to prevent defaulters from taking new loans to pay back old ones. Willful defaulters were stopped from starting new businesses. They were not even allowed to raise money from stock markets. This prevented the repetition of the disaster by again creat-

ing new NPAs.

3. The third step was Strengthening of PSBs by infusing capital which is called as Recapitalisation. This builds confidence in the ability of these banks to stay afloat. As part of the strategy, the government infused an unprecedented amount of Rs 3,10,997 crore to recapitalise PSBs during 2016-17 to 2020-21. For this Rs 34,997 crore were sourced through budgetary allocation and Rs 2,76,000 crore through issuance of recapitalisation bonds.

The recapitalisation programme provided much-needed support to the PSBs and prevented the possibility of any default on their part.

4. All these measures started showing results. The total outstanding credit of PSBs has surged by over 90 per cent during last 10 years and reached to Rs. 87.55 lakh crore in FY24.

5. Simultaneously the Government initiated the Banking Sector reforms and addressed issues of

credit discipline, ensured responsible lending and improved governance. Besides, there was the adoption of technology, and amalgamation of banks, and the general confidence of bankers was maintained. Banks Board Bureau (BBB) was established on April 1, 2016 as an autonomous body tasked to search and select appropriate persons for the Board of Public Sector Banks for professionalising their management and recommend measures to improve Corporate Governance. BBB was replaced by Financial Services Institution Bureau (FSIB) on July 1, 2022 with chairman and mandate remaining the same. However instead of lauding these remarkable achievements of Government, political critics are attributing a motive of government to privatize these PSBs by strengthening them. In the next article this aspect will be discussed.

(To be continued...) (The writer is a Freelance Author and Speaker on Banking. Views personal.)

## India's biggest oil, gas bid round gets four bidders

**New Delhi:** India's biggest oil and gas bid round attracted four bidders that included state-owned ONGC and OIL and private sector Vedanta Ltd, with most blocks getting just two bids, according to Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH).

The OALP-IX bid round, where 28 blocks or areas spread over 1.36 lakh square kilometre were offered for finding and producing oil and gas, for the first time saw Reliance Industries Ltd-bp plc com-

bine bidding together with ONGC for one block in Gujarat offshore.

Reliance and its super-major partner bp plc had bid in just two of the past eight oil and gas bid rounds since 2017. Reliance-bp combine had bid and won the two blocks they had bid for in the previous rounds and this is the first time they have teamed up with ONGC to bid for a shallow water block in the Gujarat-Saurashtra basin.

In the previous eighth round of Open Acreage Li-

**ONGC bid for 14 blocks alone and with partners such as state-owned Oil India Ltd (OIL) and Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) for four other blocks. After considering its bid with Reliance-bp, ONGC in all bids for 19 out of the 28 blocks on offer.**

censing Policy (OALP-VI-II), state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) had not bid for the ultra deep-sea Krishna Godavari basin block that Reliance-bp combine had sought. The DGH on Mon-

**Mining billionaire Anil Agarwal-owned Vedanta Ltd bid for all the 28 blocks on offer while Sun Petrochemicals Ltd bid for seven areas. Of the 28 blocks on offer, four blocks got three bids each while the rest had two bidders, one being Vedanta Ltd.**

day released the names of the bidders for the 28 blocks offered under the OALP-IX round, bids for which closed on September 21.

Blocks are awarded to firms offering the highest share of revenues generat-

**28 - No of oil and gas blocks or areas available for auction**  
**1.36 lakh sq km - Area of to be auctioned oil and gas blocks**

**USD 222 billion - India's oil and gas import bill**

ed from oil and gas produced from the blocks and the work programme they commit to.

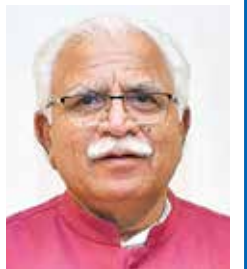
Of the 28 blocks offered in OALP-IX, nine are on-shore blocks, eight shallow-water blocks and 11 ultra-deepwater blocks across

eight sedimentary basins, with an area of 136,596.45 sq km. The government introduced the OALP in 2017 to attract oil and gas firms to develop upstream sector.

In 2016, it brought in an open acreage policy which moved away from the previous practice of government identifying and bidding out blocks to one where explorers were allowed the freedom to identify any area outside of the ones that are already with some company or other, for prospecting of oil and gas. -PTI

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

**"Till the supply of renewable energy does not matches the demand, it seems necessary to increase the capacity of thermal plant in the country, and reduce its installation gradually. But till 2030-35, We have to take these (thermal projects) ahead."**



Manohar Lal, Union Minister for Power

Woman Cut Into 50 Pieces

# Prime accused identified, from West Bengal: HM

**Bengaluru:** The prime accused in the gruesome murder of a 29-year-old woman, whose body was chopped into 50 pieces and stored in a refrigerator, has been identified and is from West Bengal, Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said on Monday and assured that the culprit will be nabbed soon.



**“The owner of the building informed me that there was foul smell coming from the house. When I came and opened the door I saw the body of Mahalakshmi cut into pieces. I saw her for the last time on Rakshabandhana festival. Since then her phone was switched off. Who cuts a woman into pieces like this? I saw her a year ago. Now I saw her in pieces.”**

**Meena Rana, Mahalakshmi's mother**

In the case that has brought back memories of the infamous Shradha Walker killing, Mahalakshmi's body was found on Saturday in the refrigerator in her flat at Vyalikaval here.

“Already some information has been collected, which I cannot reveal now...but we will soon nab those involved in it...an individual- they say is the one (involved), but unless we have more information, we can't really confirm. He is from West Bengal, they say. As early as possible we will secure (those involved),” Parameshwara told reporters.

Later, talking to the media, City Police Commissioner B Dayananda said, “the suspect has been identified and he is an outsider”. The maggot-infested body of Mahalakshmi was discovered by her mother and elder sister at her home on Saturday.

Responding to a question about reports that one person was already taken into

custody in connection with the case, Parameshwara said, “police bring in suspects and inquire them. If somebody confesses (to the crime), then they will be taken into custody.”

The deceased woman's estranged husband has expressed suspicion about a man known to her. “As far as the Vyalikaval case (Mahalakshmi murder case) is concerned, we are investigating it from all angles. The prime suspect who is likely to have committed this ghastly offence is identified. The only thing is we are yet to apprehend him. As and when the person is caught and the interrogation is done, then we will be able to provide further details,” Dayananda said.

Several investigation teams have been formed to trace the culprits. Some teams have fanned out to various parts of India to arrest those involved in the crime. Meanwhile, Ma-

halakshmi's family demanded justice.

The incident is a stark reminder of the brutal murder of Shradha Walker (27) by her live-in partner Aftab in Delhi in 2022. Walker's body was cut into 35 pieces and stored in a refrigerator in the accused's residence for almost three weeks before being dumped across the city.

-PTI

## Rs 85,000 meagre, consider Rs 10 lakh

**Kolkata:** In a sarcastic remark, the Calcutta High Court on Monday said the West Bengal government may consider giving Rs 10 lakh as dole to each Durga Puja committee, maintaining that the current Rs 85,000 appears to be meagre.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee recently announced that the dole for Durga Puja organisers, which was Rs 75,000 in 2023, would be raised to Rs 85,000 this year.

Hearing a petition seeking a stop to the disbursement of dole to Durga Puja organisers by the state, the court directed the state government to file an affidavit on the petitioner's prayer for an audited report of the CAG on disbursement of funds to clubs and NGOs and utilisation of the money by these organisations.

Chief Justice T.S. Sivagnanam told Advocate General Kishore Dutta, representing the West Bengal government, that the state should consider giving Rs 10 lakh to each organiser as that would be commensurate to conducting the puja, saying that Rs 85,000 is nothing compared to the expenditure required to celebrate the Durga puja.

The Chief Justice said that he visited several Durga Puja pandals in the two previous years and felt that Rs 85,000 is nothing compared to the expenditure made in organising it, and those are probably utilised for the expenses of the organisers.

The court noted that the West Bengal government gives a paltry Rs 1,000 to a person suffering from disability owing to muscular dystrophy.

-PTI



Delhi Chief Minister Atishi takes charge of the office in New Delhi on Monday. She has kept a chair empty for Arvind Kejriwal. Pic:PTI

## Sexual Assault In Police Custody Majhi orders judicial inquiry

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi has ordered a judicial inquiry into the alleged torture of an army officer and the “sexual assault” of his fiancée at a police station here.

The state government is committed to taking strict action against all persons or officials who are found guilty, Majhi said.

According to a statement released by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), the judicial inquiry will be presided over by Justice Chittaranjan Das, and the report will be filed within 60 days.

The state government also requested the Orissa High Court to supervise the investigation being carried out by the Crime Branch of the Odisha Police.



While emphasising on rule of the law, Majhi said his government respects the Indian Army. “The state government is fully concerned about the dignity, safety and rights of women,” the CMO statement said on Sunday evening.

Meanwhile, the Odisha government has suspended five personnel of the Bharatpur police station, and registered a case against them for “torturing the army officer and sexually harassing his

fiancée”.

The alleged incident took place on September 15 when the army officer posted in West Bengal and his fiancée approached Bharatpur police station to lodge a complaint of road rage in which they were allegedly harassed by some local youths.

However, a verbal altercation took place between the duo and some policemen following which the officer and his fiancée were allegedly assaulted at the police station.

BJD president and Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik had demanded a court-monitored SIT probe and a judicial inquiry into the incident.

The opposition party has also called for a Bhubaneswar bandh on September 24.

-PTI

## Bike borne gang cuts youth's janeu

**Tirunelveli (Tamil Nadu):** A 24-year-old man's sacred thread was cut and thrown away here by three motorcycle-borne men and they mocked at him for wearing it and a case has been registered, police said on Monday.

The incident occurred at Palayamkottai here on the evening of September 21, while Akilesh was walking towards the local Astika Samaj run by Brahmins to take part in a bhajan, they said. While he was on his way to the event, wearing a dhoti and without a shirt, the three men on the motorcycle stopped him and cut and threw away his sacred thread (called Poonool in Tamil) and after mocking at him, told him to not sport Poonool again.

Astika Samaj functionaries along with Hindu Munnani office-bearers lodged a complaint.

-PTI

## 'Akhilesh's wish fulfilled', says father of killed robber

**Amethi:** “Akhilesh Yadav's wish has been fulfilled, a Thakur has been encountered,” said the father of the second Sultanpur jewellery store robbery case accused who was gunned down in an encounter.

Expressing his anger and grief, Dharm Raj Singh alleged political motives behind his son Anuj Pratap Singh's death. “My son has become a victim of politics. He only had one or two cases against him, yet he was encountered.”

Anuj Pratap Singh was a resident of Janapur village in Amethi district and an accused in the August 28 robbery at a jewellery store in Sultanpur. He was gunned down in a pre-dawn encounter with the Special Task Force (STF) of the Uttar Pradesh Police in Unnao district, officials said.

Dharm Raj Singh told reporters that he learned of his son's death through the media and had not been officially informed yet.

He also criticised the

“selective action” of law enforcement.

“There are people with 30 cases against them, yet they remain untouched, but someone with only one or two cases is being encountered. This government can do anything,” he alleged.

Dharm Raj Singh also claimed that his son had visited their home on May 3 and left on June 4.

Prior to this, the STF on September 5 gunned down another accused, Mangesh Yadav, sparking a political controversy, with the Samajwadi Party and the Congress calling the encounter “fake”.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, who had claimed that such encounters were motivated by the accused's “caste”, also dubbed the STF as “Special Thakur Force” and “Sar-e-aam Thoko Force”.

However, the ruling BJP had said Yadav's jibes were made out of “frustration” while the police denied his allegations.

-PTI



Upper Primary teachers' job candidates raise slogans during their demonstration, in Kolkata on Monday. Pic: PTI

## UPSC aspirant's decomposed body found

**New Delhi:** The decomposed body of a civil services aspirant was found hanging from a tree in a forest area in northwest Delhi's Mukherjee Nagar area, police said on Monday.

The body of Deepak Kumar Meena, who hailed from Rajasthan's Dausa, was recovered from the forest area near a coaching institute library on September 20. He had been missing for several days, they said.

A senior police officer said it was suspected that

Meena committed suicide.

“CCTV cameras have been checked and it is suspected to be a case of suicide. A probe is underway,” he said. Meena's father CL Meena told the police that his son arrived in Delhi in July to prepare for the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) mains exam after qualifying the preliminaries.

He used to call home every evening. The family last spoke to him on September 10, Meena's father said. When he did not call on September 11-13, CL

Meena reached Delhi and began a search for his son.

C.L. Meena also went to Meena's PG accommodation where his roommates told him that his son had not returned for two days. After this, he filed a complaint at Mukherjee Nagar police station. During the searches, Meena's body was found in a forest area near the institute where he attended classes. It is suspected that he had gone to the forest area after class.

Meena's bag was found hanging from the same tree.

## Portion of under-construction bridge collapses

**Patna:** A portion of an under-construction bridge collapsed in Bihar's Patna district, an official said on Monday.

No one was injured in the incident that occurred on Sunday night, he said.

The incident comes in the backdrop of more than a dozen bridges and causeways collapsed in several Bihar districts in the recent past.

The construction of the ‘Bakhtiyarpur-Tajpur Ganga Mahasetu’ has been supervised by the Bihar State Road Development Corporation Ltd

(BSRDCL).

“The incident took place during the replacement of bearings of girders of the Bakhtiyarpur-Tajpur Ganga Mahasetu. While placing the girders on the pillars, one of them collapsed. “Replacing the bearings is a routine exercise.

There are no reports of casualty. We are going to the spot to inspect the ongoing work,” BSRDCL Chief General Manager Prabin Chandra Gupta told PTI.

Sources said the construction of the project

has been going on for the last several years.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar laid the foundation stone for the construction of the 5.57-kilometre-long Bakhtiyarpur-Tajpur Ganga Mahasetu in June 2011. The total cost of the project was estimated at Rs 1,602.74 crore.

“A girder of the under-construction bridge fell on the Bakhtiyarpur side during routine work,” Patna District Magistrate Chandrashekhar Singh told

-PTI

## Policeman held over free liquor

**Kochi (Kerala):** A policeman was caught red-handed when he tried to run away with a liquor bottle without paying money from a state-run beverage shop at Pattimattam.

The embarrassing incident involving Gopi, who was serving as a driver in the police department, happened on Sunday, according to police. The CCTV visuals of the man who tried to run away from the counter without paying.

## JMM-led alliance patronising infiltrators

**Khunti (Jharkhand):** BJP president J.P. Nadda on Monday lashed out at the ruling JMM-led alliance in Jharkhand, accusing it of “patronising” infiltrators in the state for votes.

Nadda, who launched the BJP's ‘Pariwartan Yatra’ here, alleged that infiltrators were grabbing land and expanding their base in the state, reducing tribal population.

“Tribal population has declined in the state...it has reduced to 28 per cent from

44 per cent earlier. Infiltrators and Rohingyas are grabbing land here and marrying tribals, while the JMM is patronising them for votes,” he asserted.

He also attacked the Congress, dubbing it as “most corrupt”, which “encourages” separatists and anti-national forces.

“The Congress is the most corrupt party, encouraging separatists, anti-national forces and the JMM-alliance is following its footsteps,” said Nadda.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

**“Rahul Gandhi himself goes to Gurudwara Darbar Sahib so many times. Who stops him? Therefore, this is not a matter of the party, it is above the party.”**



**Ravneet Singh Bittu, Union Minister**

## Dry Bihar reported 156 hooch deaths in last 8 years

**Patna:** More than 150 people have died in Bihar because of consuming illicit liquor in the state ever since it went dry in April 2016, a senior official of the Prohibition and Excise department said on Monday.

However, ‘suspected hooch deaths’ reported from different parts of the state in the last eight years is 266, the official said. The sale and consumption of alcohol was banned in Bihar by the Nitish Kumar government in April 2016. “The state has witnessed

a total of 156 ‘confirmed hooch deaths’ from different districts since 2016. Total number of ‘suspected hooch deaths’ reported in the state in the last eight years is 266, out of which 156 are confirmed,” Prohibition and Excise department secretary Vinod Singh Gunjyal told reporters at a press conference here.

The districts which reported the maximum confirmed hooch deaths are Saran, Gaya, Bhojpur, Buxar and Gopalganj, he added.



The secretary said, “Till August 2024, a total of 8.43 lakh cases pertaining to violation of prohibition laws have been registered by the department in

which a total of 12.7 lakh people, including 234 from outside the state, have been arrested so far.

“Officials concerned have so far seized 3.46 crore

bulk litre liquor which includes country made liquor as well. Till August 2024, the department has destroyed 98 per cent of the seized liquor which is around 3.38 crore bulk litre liquor.”

The department also seized 1.24 lakh vehicles used in the transportation of liquor from different cities in the state. “The department collected Rs 327.13 crore from the auction of 71,727 vehicles seized by the officials. The department and police of-

icers are also using drones in certain districts in the state to nab those who violate prohibition laws,” said Gunjyal.

Bihar Prohibition and Excise Minister, Ratnesh Sada, who was also present at the press conference, debunked questions on Union Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi's recent comment that “only Dalits are being targeted in the Prohibition related violations.”

“What can I say in his (Manjhi) comments?” said Sada.

-PTI



# Tracking 'clicks' to understand the lives of dolphins in the Ganga

By Esha Lohia

**Mumbai** : We may soon know more about the behaviour of dolphins that live in the river Ganga as scientists are experimenting with the use of hydro-moths to map the lives of these beautiful mammals underwater.

We've adored the dolphins in popular movies like Flipper and Dolphin Tale and dolphin-watching cruises are a favourite pastime. But scientists are now delving deeper into the lives of these beautiful aquatic mammals using a new modern technology to understand how they navigate the waters of India's holy river, the Ganga.

Dolphins in the Ganga are known to be effectively blind and offer only brief glimpses above water. But what they do is make constant sounds called clicks. The mammal navigates the murky depths of the waters through a constant stream of echolocation clicks. Understanding these clicks is crucial to un-

locking the mysteries of their behaviour. For what could possibly be the first such experiment in India, scientists are now using the HydroMoth, along with the traditional method of passive acoustic monitoring, to study dolphins with greater ease.

"We have been working on Ganges river dolphin acoustics since 2013. So, we keep exploring new technology and options to ease data collection. Acoustic data from dolphins is very useful to understand their behaviour, so these methods have been part of our regular research and monitoring activities," says Nachiket Kelkar, head of Riverine Ecosystems and Livelihoods programme by the Wildlife Conservation Trust that is running the research programme with WildTech Project.

## The Ganga Dolphin's Lifeline

The holy Ganga is now a noisy river. The heavy sediments, the hums, grunts and growls of fishes and

turtles, cacophonous noises of cities and industries dumping their waste into the river, the constant din of boats and ships, and the clamour of heavy machinery dredging the riverbed are making the river a noisy world. These sounds stress the Ganga River's iconic dolphins (Platanista gangetica) and are changing how they communicate, finds a 2019 study 'Interacting effects of vessel noise and shallow river depth elevate metabolic stress in Ganges river dolphins'. This is deeply concerning for the aquatic life inhabiting the river.

A river dolphin produces non-stop echolocation clicks to survive in the generally tranquil that is now increasingly noisy river waters. They echolocate to map their environment and navigate, feed, rest, and respond to environmental signals. It is nearly impossible to see a dolphin underwater and the rare glimpses possible last for only for two seconds when it breaks the water surface

to breathe. Hence, technology can be used to study their behaviour patterns and sensory environment underwater.

## Traditional Methods

Until now, marine experts have been tracking these clicking sounds through Passive Acoustic Monitoring along with the use of underwater acoustic recorders and loggers which have been helpful in studying cetaceans which include whales, dolphins, and porpoises. PAM captures a wealth of information, from presence, feeding behaviour and movement patterns to social interactions, calls and responses to human-made noise in the water from ships, engineering activities, mining, etc.

An advancement in the field of passive acoustic monitoring to track dolphins acoustically is the device called Chelonian and Porpoise Detection (CPOD). It provides software to directly decode, classify, and extract ceta-

cean clicks or calls in files with analysable data. However, most such devices are quite challenging to deploy underwater and require physical strength to moor them in place. Data retrieval is often an elaborate process, and the high precision of these devices translates to a hefty price tag.

## New breakthrough

The HydroMoth, developed by Open Acoustic Devices, represents a revolutionary leap forward. Inspired by its terrestrial sibling, the AudioMoth which is used for bird and bat studies, the HydroMoth device offers a user-friendly and cost-effective solution for underwater acoustic monitoring.

This lightweight device requires minimal setup and can be easily deployed underwater. It can be deployed at a mere 10 percent of the price of conventional marine mammal hydrophones and PAM loggers, making the research more accessible. Researchers can customise the Hydro-

Moth to record for specific durations, at desired sampling rates, and other parameters. Acoustic recordings are interpreted by plotting it on a spectrogram, a visual representation of sound frequencies over time, allowing researchers to decipher the complex language of dolphin clicks.

"The HydroMoths are deployed by lowering them on a bamboo pole with weights to stay submerged in the water. We also continue to use loggers such as CPODs. Each device has distinct technological features that make the data they collect useful in different ways," says Kelkar. The HydroMoth may have a smaller recording range compared to traditional PAM systems, its strengths lie in its affordability and ease of use.

As the research continues, we may soon get more insights into the world and lifestyle of the mammals that are famed for their intelligence, playfulness and friendliness with humans.

## Rewa ultra mega solar power plant included in Harvard case study

**Bhopal**: The world's largest ultra mega solar power plant in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district has been included as a case study for the ideal management by the prestigious Harvard University, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said.

He said Madhya Pradesh is progressing rapidly to emerge as a solar energy-rich state under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi. "The world's largest Rewa ultra mega Solar Power Project has become functional. It has been included as a case study by Harvard University in terms of an ideal example of excellent management operations," the CMO stated.

Along with this, the world's largest floating solar project of 600 MW capacity is also being developed on the Narmada River in Omkareshwar, it said. Yadav said that many small and major solar energy projects are being constructed in different regions of MP.

The Rewa ultra mega solar power plant is not only the world's largest such facility but it is producing commercial energy at the lowest rate globally. From here, electricity will be available at Rs 3.30 per unit for 25 years. Power supply to Delhi Metro Railway Corporation started from this UMPP in April 2019. Commercial production began in January 2020, CMO stated.

An official on Monday said Madhya Pradesh has abundant solar energy and more than 300 sunshine days. He said the Rewa plant is the country's first solar project funded

through the World Bank's Clean Technology Fund. "Today, half of the world's 10 largest solar projects are in India. Rewa Solar Power Plant is one among them," the official added. Under the Union government's Solar Park Scheme, launched in 2014, solar projects with more than 500 MW capacity are included in solar parks and called ultra mega solar parks, he said.

The Harvard case study mentions that India has an estimated barren land of 4.67 lakh square metres where solar plants can be set up, the official said.

In a prelude to setting up



the Rewa solar power plant, the government allotted 275 hectares of land in Badhwar village in June 2014. The formal approval for the establishment of this facility was given in April 2015, the official added.

Two months later, Rewa Ultra Mega Solar Limited was established as a joint venture of 50 per cent each between the Madhya Pradesh Urja Vikas Nigam and Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI).

Subsequently, another tranche of 981 hectares of land was allotted in Barwar, Barseta Desh, Barseta Pahad, Itar Pahad, and Rannagar Pahad villages. By 2018-19, barren land available in more villages was allotted for the project. -PTI

## Campaign to eliminate mosquito-borne diseases in MP

**Bhopal**: The Madhya Pradesh government has launched a public awareness campaign to prevent malaria and dengue as part of the elimination of the mosquito-borne endemic diseases (EMBED) programme, an official said on Monday.

The state government has partnered with the Godrej Consumer Products Limited (GCPL) under corporate social responsibility (CSR) to launch a multi-city public awareness initiative to fight malaria and dengue as part of the EMBED Programme, said Dr Himanshu Jayswar, deputy director of MP's Directorate of Health Services.

Jayswar said the state government and GCPL have planned to fight the spike in mosquito-borne diseases during the ongoing monsoon season.

Proactive prevention is the key to controlling any epidemic, and this campaign across Madhya Pradesh will play an essen-

tial role in educating citizens about preventing malaria and dengue, he said.

The official said EMBED is an ongoing strategic effort towards reducing malaria and dengue cases and lowering the death rate to zero through a multi-pronged approach.

The programme aims to bring the death rate caused by malaria and dengue to zero by 2030, he said.

Jayswar said this partnership has enabled Madhya Pradesh to move from Category 3 to Category 1 state in malaria elimination since 2015. Ahona Ghosh, General Manager, Sustainability at GCPL, said the company has been partnering with the state government to fight vector-borne diseases through EMBED since 2015.

The programme has significantly impacted malaria and mosquito-borne disease control in India, reaching 2.7 million households across 39 districts, including 3,000 slums and 10,000 villages, she said.



People from Nakta Diyara area arrive on boats to reach safe places after rise in the water level of Ganga river in Patna on Monday. Pic: PTI

## Mild tremor hits Kutch, no loss

**Ahmedabad**: A tremor of 3.3 magnitude hit Gujarat's Kutch district on Monday morning, the Institute of Seismological Research (ISR) said. No casualty or loss of property was reported in the district due to the seismic activity, officials said.

The tremor was recorded at 10.05 am, with its epicentre located 12 km west-south west of Rapar, the Gandhinagar-based ISR said. This is the fourth

tremor of more than 3 magnitude recorded in the state's Saurashtra-Kutch region so far this month, the ISR data showed. Earthquake risk is very high in Gujarat.

It has suffered nine major earthquakes in the past 200 years, as per information provided by the Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA).

The 2001 Kutch earthquake was the third larg-

est and second most destructive earthquake in India over the last two centuries, it said. On January 26 in 2001, Gujarat was struck by an earthquake of 6.9 magnitude with its epicentre located near Bhachau in Kutch that affected the entire state.

The quake had left nearly 13,800 people dead and another 1.67 lakh injured, as per the information provided by the GSDMA.

## SBI to plant 18 lakh trees

**New Delhi**: In a bid to promote environmental sustainability, the country's biggest lender State Bank of India (SBI) plans to plant 18 lakh trees during the year.

The state-owned lender inaugurated a tree plantation drive - 'Ek Ped Maa ke Naam' in Hyderabad.

In addition, SBI Ladies Club donated essential items to Sai Seva Sangh under the CSR drive, demonstrating the bank's grit towards upliftment of underprivileged populace, SBI said in a

statement.

The CSR activity was followed by the inauguration of plantation drive 'Ek Ped Maa ke Naam', encouraging all the staff to undertake plantation as a tribute to mother and Mother Nature, it said.

SBI Chairman C.S. Setty emphasised the bank's contribution to sustainability as the bank has undertaken tree plantation of 1.8 million plants during this year.

He also said SBI's vision is to lead India and the world in climate fi-

nance with a pathway to net zero (SCOPE 1, 2 & 3) for the bank by 2055.

Furthermore, Sreedevi Surya, President all India SBI Ladies Club, undertook a charity programme at SBI Enclave as a chief guest and handed over water dispensers, sewing machines, stationery items, fruits, snacks, groceries and other essential items to Sai Seva Sangh, Miyapur, Hyderabad as part of their support to the underprivileged populace, it added. -PTI



A house leans as a swollen river undermines the ground in Suzu in Japan.

## Address data challenges for slashing urban emission: Experts

By Krishna

**New Delhi**, Sep 22 (PTI) Indian cities can play a central role in reducing greenhouse gas emission and building resilient urban environments if data collection and "scenario modelling" were strengthened, according to experts working on urban emission and strategies on mitigation plans.

Using the Climate Action for Urban Sustainability (CURB) tool, up to 77 per cent of urban emission could possibly be tackled by 2050 by identifying sectors having the greatest poten-

tial in slashing emission, a team from Delhi's World Resources Institute (WRI) found.

However, the challenges are plenty, the authors said. These include a limited capacity of institutions for data-driven exercises. This will need to be addressed to slash greenhouse gas emission and create sustainable, resilient urban environments.

"Strengthening data collection, scenario modelling, and capacity-building frameworks will enable cities to set more ambitious and achievable climate targets, positioning them as

key drivers of India's overall greenhouse gas emission reduction efforts," Saransh Bajpai, associate director, climate, WRI India, and one of the study's authors told PTI.

Scenario modelling allows the exploration of a range of future possibilities while capacity-building frameworks aim to improve the technical infrastructure needed to use tools such as CURB.

According to Raghu Murtugudde, an Earth system scientist and a professor at IIT-Bombay, data is a severe limitation since pollution is a hyperlocal prob-



lem even within a city.

"Data can allow identification of hotspots and causes -- like traffic jams, waste incineration, local incinerators and so on. Seasonality can also be identified and these will help prioritise mitigation actions," said

Murtugudde, who was not involved in the study.

For a recent working paper, the WRI team used CURB, developed by the World Bank and collaborators, to devise emission mitigation plans for Surat, Indore and Ujjain, includ-

ing sector-specific strategies.

The cumulative impact of these plans was then measured under long-term scenarios, developed by involving city-level stakeholders and authorities.

The paper was released earlier this month during WRI India's annual flagship event, Connect Karo, which brought together leaders and policymakers involved in building sustainable cities.

Launched in 2016, the open-source, interactive CURB tool -- one of the many international ones available for devising miti-

gation plans -- uses local data, such as of buildings and public lighting, for providing a tailored analysis to help cities evaluate low-carbon actions.

If the data set is incomplete, the findings will not be as conclusive.

As urban population continues to increase, pollution in cities is driving rising trends in India's per capita greenhouse gas emission. While ambitious targets for cutting down emission have been laid out at the national and state levels, there is a lack of guidance for setting similar targets for cities, thereby

hindering effective planning for mitigating climate change at the urban level, the study found.

The authors wrote, "Under the business-as-usual scenario, the increase in emission across the three cities is between 1.5 and 2.7 times by 2050, compared to the 2019 values."

"However, in a relatively high-ambition scenario, cities could reduce the greenhouse gas emission projected for 2050 by an average of 70 per cent (Surat) to 77 per cent (Indore), compared with the business-as-usual scenario," they wrote. -PTI

# New Sri Lanka President pledges to clean public life

By Jayprakash Ramaiah

Colombo: Sri Lanka's new President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Monday vowed to preserve democracy and do everything to clean public life.

The remarks by Dissanayake, 56, came as he was sworn in as Sri Lanka's ninth president on Monday by Chief Justice Jayantha Jayasuriya at the Presidential Secretariat.

In his inaugural address to the nation, Dissanayake thanked his predecessor Ranil Wickremesinghe for respecting the people's mandate and facilitating a peaceful transfer of power.

"I assure you that I will do my best to preserve democracy and work towards restoring the honour of politicians as people have misgivings about their conduct," Dissanayake said in an address after taking the oath.

Dissanayake stressed Sri Lanka cannot remain in isolation and needed international cooperation.

He said he is not a magician, but his objective is to be part of a collective responsibility to elevate the economic crisis-stricken country.

"I want to be a contributor to that collective responsibility," he added.

Dissanayake, clad in a white long-sleeved tunic and black trousers, received blessings from the Buddhist clergy present after the ceremony.

Dissanayake, the leader of the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna par-



Supporters of Marxist lawmaker Anura Kumara Dissanayake cheer outside the president's office as he arrives to be sworn in as Sri Lanka's 10th president in Colombo, Sri Lanka on Monday.

Pic: AP/PTI

**"I'm not a magician. I'm an ordinary citizen born in this country. I have abilities and inabilities. I have things I know and don't know. My first task is to make use of people's talents and know-how and make better decisions to lead this country."**

Anura Kumara Dissanayake, President, Sri Lanka

Dissanayake won the election obtaining 5.74 million votes, with 105,264 preferences. Premadasa got 4.53 million votes with 167,867 preferences.

Dissanayake's anti-corruption message and his promise of a change in political culture resonated strongly with young voters who had been demanding system change since the economic crisis.

The NPP's popularity has risen sharply since 2022 after securing only around three per cent of the vote in the last presidential election in 2019. Dissanayake, who hails from rural Thambuttegama in the North Central province, is a science graduate from the Colombo suburban Kelaniya University.

He joined the JVP, the mother party of the NPP, in

Sri Lanka's new President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Monday said that he shares Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to strengthening bilateral ties.

Dissanayake said this in a post on X in response to Prime Minister Modi's post on Sunday in which he congratulated the Marxist leader for his victory in Sri Lanka's presidential election.

"Thank you, Prime Minister Modi, for your kind words and support. I share your commitment to strengthening the ties between our nations. Together, we can work towards enhancing cooperation for the benefit of our peoples and the entire region," Dissanayake said.

Modi in his post said he looks forward to working closely with him to further strengthen the Indo-Lanka multifaceted cooperation.

"Congratulations @anuradissanayake, on your victory in the Sri Lankan Presidential elections. Sri Lanka holds a special place in India's Neighbourhood First Policy and Vision SAGAR," Modi said on X.

"I look forward to working closely with you to further strengthen our multifaceted cooperation for the benefit of our people and the entire region," the prime minister said.

1987 at the height of their anti-Indian rebellion.

In the 2000 parliamentary election, he entered Parliament from the JVP. He has been an opposition livewire since 2001.

Dissanayake re-entered Parliament from the north-western district of Kurunegala after the 2004 election in an alliance with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

-PTI

## China blows hot, cold over QUAD

Beijing: China on Monday termed Quad as a tool used by the US to contain Beijing, asserting that interference by any external force will not shake its determination to uphold its "sovereignty and maritime rights" in the disputed South and East China Seas.

The Quad, identified as the premier regional grouping in the US Indo-Pacific strategy, is a tool used by Washington to contain China to perpetuate its hegemony, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a media briefing, fielding a spate of questions on the Quad summit.

Hosted by President Joe Biden, the Quad Summit took place on Saturday in his hometown Wilmington, Delaware. The summit was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Australia, and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan.

Lin accused the US of pooling together countries to muster military and security cooperation under the pretext of maritime issues to contain China by peddling the China threat narrative.

Ganging up to form exclusive groupings undermines the mutual trust and cooperation between the regional countries, Lin said. It runs counter to the overall trend of pursuing peace, development cooperation and prosperity in the Asia Pacific and it is bound to fail, he said.

Ever since the Quad started taking shape in 2007, China has been saying that the four-member grouping will be bound to fail. But much to the chagrin of Beijing, it picked up pace in the recent years.

## Event commemorating liberation of Haifa cancelled

The port was liberated by Indians

By Harinder Mishra

Jerusalem: An event planned for Monday to pay tribute to brave Indian soldiers who laid down their lives during World War I to liberate the northern Israeli coastal city of Haifa from Ottoman rule has been cancelled due to escalating tensions in West Asia.

Israel and Lebanese Shia group Hezbollah have carried out widespread strikes on each other, raising tensions, and prompting Israel Home Front command to issue precautionary advisory to citizens.

Outdoor gatherings of up to ten and indoor gatherings of up to a hundred people, close to protected shelters, are currently allowed.

"Due to the current situation, the Haifa Day commemoration, planned for September 23, 2024 in Haifa, by the Embassy of India, is being cancelled," an official communication said.

In what most war historians consider "the last great cavalry campaign in history", Indian cavalry regiments armed with spears and swords displayed the highest tradition of valour and cleared the Ottoman forces from the rocky slopes of Mount Carmel under all odds on September 23, 1918.

Captain Aman Singh Bahadur and Dafadar Jor Singh were awarded the Indian Order of Merit (IOM) and Captain Anop Singh and 2nd Lt Sagat Singh were awarded the

The Indian Army commemorates September 23 every year as Haifa Day to pay its respects to the three brave Indian Cavalry Regiments - Mysore, Hyderabad and Jodhpur Lancers - that helped liberate Haifa following a dashing cavalry action by the 15th Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade.

An event to pay tributes to the brave Indian soldiers is also organised every year at the Indian soldiers' cemetery in Haifa by the Indian mission and Haifa municipality, which coincidentally was also planned for September 23 this year.

74,000 - No of Indian troops laid down their lives during World War I

4,000 - No of Indian troops that laid down their lives in West Asia

4 - No of places in Israel that are memorials to Indian soldiers. They are Haifa, Jerusalem and Ramle

900 - No of Indian soldiers interred in cemeteries in these cities of Israel

Military Cross (MC) as recognition for their bravery in this battle.

Major Dalpat Singh, widely popular as the Hero of Haifa, was awarded a military cross for his bravery. Accompanied only by his trumpeter, Dalpat Singh charged an entrenched machine gun post, killing and scattering the crew.

Dalpat Singh was critically injured with machine gun bullets in his spine, which ultimately cost his life. -PTI

## Nepal PM, Palestine Prez on Modi's meet list

New York: Prime Minister Modi held separate talks with world leaders including his Nepalese counterpart KP Sharma Oli, and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, discussing various facets of bilateral ties and reaffirmed India's support for the Palestinian people.

Modi is in New York on the second leg of his three-day US visit and met the leaders on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session.

"Had a very good meeting with Prime Minister KP Oli in New York. The India-Nepal friendship is very robust and we look forward to adding even more momentum to our ties.

Our talks focused on issues such as energy, technology and trade," Modi said in a post on X.

"Deepening the warm and close friendship. PM @narendramodi met PM @kpsarmaoli of Nepal, on the sidelines of the UNGA today," the official

account of the Ministry of External Affairs said in a post on X.

"The two leaders discussed matters of mutual interest to strengthen cooperation in all areas of age-old, multifaceted and expanding partnership," it added.

Oli is in the US on his maiden foreign visit to attend the 79th Session of the UNGA, breaking the tradition of visiting a neighbouring country first.

Modi met with Palestine's President Abbas and reiterated India's support for the Palestinian people.

Modi also met Kuwait's Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khalid Al Sabah and discussed ways to deepen "historical linkages" and "people-to-people contacts".

Earlier in the day, Modi addressed the Indian diaspora at the packed Nassau Veterans Coliseum on Long Island in New York before it.

-PTI



Smoke rises from an Israeli airstrike on Khiam village, as seen from Marjayoun town in southern Lebanon.

Pic: AP/PTI

## Israel launches dozens of airstrikes on Lebanon

Jerusalem: The Israeli military on Monday called on residents of southern Lebanon to immediately evacuate homes and other buildings where Hezbollah stores weapons and said it was carrying out "extensive strikes" against the militant group.

It was the first warning of its kind in nearly a year of steadily escalating conflict and came after a particularly heavy exchange of fire on Sunday. Hezbollah launched around 150 rockets, missiles and drones into

northern Israel in retaliation for strikes that killed a top commander and dozens of fighters.

There was no sign of an immediate exodus from the villages of southern Lebanon. The escalating strikes and counterstrikes have raised fears of an all-out war, even as Israel is still battling the Palestinian Hamas in Gaza and trying to return scores of hostages taken in Hamas' Oct 7 attack. Hezbollah has vowed to continue its strikes in solidarity with the Palestin-

ians and Hamas, a fellow Iran-backed militant group, while Israel says it is committed to returning calm to the border.

Associated Press journalists in southern Lebanon reported heavy airstrikes targeting many areas Monday morning, including some far from the border. The strikes hit a forested area in the central province of Byblos, about 130 km (81 miles) north of the Israeli-Lebanese border, for the first time since the exchanges began in October 2023.

## Ukraine accuses Russia of illegality

The Hague: Ukraine on Monday accused Russia of seeking to illegally seize control of the strategically important Sea of Azov and Kerch Strait, as hearings opened in a high-stakes arbitration case between Kyiv and Moscow. The hearings at the Permanent Court of Arbitration are the latest in a string of international legal cases involving Russia and Ukraine linked to Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea.

## Pakistani Taliban deny attacking convoy of foreign ambassadors

Islamabad: The Pakistani Taliban on Monday denied involvement in a bombing attack on a police convoy that was escorting foreign ambassadors in the country's restive northwest, as authorities said they were still trying to determine who was behind the attack, which killed a police officer.

The ambassadors and senior envoys were travelling on Sunday to the Swat Valley, a former stronghold of the Pakistani Taliban,

when the attack occurred in Malam Jabba, one of Pakistan's two ski resorts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack, but Mohammad Khurasani, a spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, denied detonating the improvised explosive device that hit a police vehicle accompanying the convoy.

One police officer was

killed and four others were wounded in the attack, which drew strong condemnation from Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and other officials.

The envoys were all unharmed, but the attack suggested there was a security breach, analysts said. "For sure it was a security breach because the convoy's route was only known to police, and the bomb disposal unit had reportedly cleared the route," said Abdullah Khan,

a defense analyst and managing director of the Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies.

"Some insider (appears to have) leaked the information about the travel plans of the foreign ambassadors to the militants," he added. Khan said the attack signaled a shift in the approach of insurgents, who previously targeted security forces.

Pakistani defense analyst Syed Muhammad Ali said

there was a need for better coordination between federal authorities and police about such high-profile visits to the northwest, which has witnessed a surge in violence.

Those traveling in the convoy were ambassadors and officials from Indonesia, Portugal, Kazakhstan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Turkmenistan, Vietnam, Iran, Russia and Tajikistan. All of them later returned to the capital, Islamabad.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

**"Conservative austerity was a destructive choice for our public services — and for investment and growth too. We must deal with the Tory legacy and that means tough decisions. But we won't let that dim our ambition for Britain."**

Rachel Reeves, Chief, British Treasury



## US radio detective 'Johnny Dollar' returns to Iran

Tehran: While tensions remain high between the US and Iran, there's at least one American that state radio in Tehran invites on the air each week for its millions of listeners. It's just that he's a fictional insurance fraud detective who's been on the case since 1949.

"Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar," a radio programme created by CBS that later found a devoted listenership in Iran for a Farsi-language version under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in the 1960s, has returned to

Iranian radio.

It's not clear why exactly the network controlled by hard-liners have decided to bring back "the man with the action-packed expense account," but his reappearance harkens back to an era when Iran and the US enjoyed incredibly close relations.

And the newly produced episodes introduce younger generations to a character that many older Iranians still have a decades-old fondness for, their ears perking up with show's sig-



nature start with three gunshots and Johnny Dollar answering a ringing phone with its title.

"It is amazing, it reminds me of the 60s and '70s, when

I listened to the episodes with my parents through a vacuum tube radio," said Masoud Kouchaki, 73. "We did not have any worries except for guessing how

Johnny Dollar would find the murderer."

The original CBS radio show ran from 1949 until 1962 and focused on the cases of Johnny Dollar, an investigator from Hartford, Connecticut. The serial relied on the investigator's expenses account entries — like "\$10 deposit on the car I rented" or "one dollar, one drink for me" — to propel the story forward as Dollar interviewed witnesses and suspects in the transatlantic accent common to detective stories of the era.

For Iranians, state radio first went on the air in 1940, part of the efforts by then-ruler Reza Shah to rapidly modernise the country. His son, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, took over in 1941, and for several decades radio remained the key media consumed in his growing country, with the number of stations few and all state-controlled. Iran's version of "Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar" dropped the expense account format but kept the noir-light vibe, dramatic music and US location. -AP

## EDITORIAL

## Remarkable Reinvention

Few politicians in India have faced the kind of scepticism that Maharashtra's Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has encountered. Once an autorickshaw driver, his hardscrabble life earned him no special favours in the power corridors of the Shiv Sena, where he toiled for decades as a foot soldier. Yet, despite the odds, Shinde has managed to reinvent himself, transforming from a regional leader into the chief of India's richest state - a feat remarkable for its sheer implausibility.

When Shinde orchestrated a political coup in 2022, vertically splitting the Shiv Sena founded by Bal Thackeray and toppling the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government led by Uddhav Thackeray to form an alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), political pundits were quick to write him off. He was, and continues to be, labelled as a 'puppet' of the BJP.

Political Cassandra's assumed he would soon be overshadowed by the towering presence of Devendra Fadnis, the BJP's ambitious former chief minister and that his Shiv Sena would be routed in the Lok Sabha election this year. Yet, for a leader dismissed as an interloper, Shinde not only held his own but, against expectations, his Sena performed creditably in recent political contests, outdoing even the BJP's strike rate in the results.

From his birth in humble surroundings in Satara, Shinde entered politics through grassroots activism, rising through the ranks of the Shiv Sena in Thane. His journey from the street to the top echelons of power, mentored by firebrand late Shiv Sena leader Anand Dighe, has hinged on his populism and as a figure who embodies the aspirations of the common man.

Despite the onslaught from the opposition MVA and Uddhav Thackeray, who tried to paint him as a traitor to the Shiv Sena's original ethos soon after his revolt, Shinde has successfully rebranded himself as the protector of Sena's working-class voter base.

The recent launch of a biography highlighting Shinde's hard-fought journey, along with the release of 'Dharmaveer 2', a film about his mentor Anand Dighe and now the anticipated release of a stage play on Shinde, is part of this rebranding to strengthen his image as the true heir to the Sena's Hindutva legacy.

With the Maharashtra Assembly election approaching, these releases strategically promote Shinde as a humble, relentless worker aligned with Bal Thackeray's original vision - positioning him as a 'man of the people' in contrast to privileged Thackeray scion Aadiya Thackeray.

His close ties to Thane's industrial belt, where he has cultivated a loyal following, have served as a political bulwark against attacks from both the opposition and sections of the BJP eager to see him fail.

Shinde's story is one of resilience and reinvention. For a man who once ferried passengers in an autorickshaw, he has come far indeed. Yet, as Maharashtra's Chief Minister, his journey has only just begun. Whether he can maintain his grip on power in the volatile years ahead will depend on his ability to evolve - as he has done so often in the past.



By  
Sumant Vidwans

On September 10, 2024, the United States witnessed a pivotal moment in its political history as former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris faced off in the first presidential debate of the 2024 election cycle. The event, held in Philadelphia and broadcast by ABC News, marked a significant shift in the American political landscape.

This debate was not the matchup many had anticipated even a few months ago. In a stunning turn of events, President Joe Biden was forced to withdraw from the race in July, following mounting pressure from within the Democratic Party. The catalyst for this dramatic shift was Biden's poor performance in a June 27 debate against Trump, which raised serious doubts about his mental acuity and stamina. Ultimately, Biden announced his

Earlier this month, Trump and Harris squared off in the first presidential debate after Biden's withdrawal. Immigration, the economy, and key issues dominated discussions as both sides claimed victory.

withdrawal on July 21, paving the way for Vice President Kamala Harris to become the Democratic nominee.

For those readers in India who may not be familiar with the tradition, presidential debates have been a cornerstone of American elections since 1960. These televised events offer voters a chance to see candidates discuss key issues face-to-face, often influencing the election outcome.

#### The Birth of Televised Debates

The modern era of presidential debates began in 1960 with the historic face-off between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. This series of four televised debates marked a turning point in American politics, showcasing the power of television to influence public opinion. An estimated 66 million viewers tuned in to watch the first debate, making it one of the most-watched broadcasts in U.S. television history at the time.

The Kennedy-Nixon debates highlighted the importance of appearance and presentation in politics. While radio listeners reportedly favoured Nixon, television viewers were swayed by Kennedy's charismatic on-screen presence. This disparity underscored the significant impact visual media could have on shaping public perceptions of candidates.

#### A Hiatus and Revival

Following the 1960 debates, there was a 16-year hiatus before presidential debates resumed. In 1976, Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford reignited the tradition of debating at the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. This revival set the stage for presidential debates to become a regular feature of election cycles.

#### The Commission on Presidential Debates

In 1987, the Commission on Presidential Debates was established as a bipartisan, non-profit organisation to organise and oversee presidential debates. This commission has since played a crucial role in standardising the debate format and en-



suring fair representation of candidates.

In recent years, presidential debates have continued to evolve. The 2016 debates between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton drew record-breaking audiences, with the first debate attracting over 84 million viewers. On the other hand, the 2020 election cycle saw unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to the cancellation of one debate and the implementation of new safety measures.

#### The Latest Debate

Last week's debate covered a wide range of topics crucial to the American electorate. Immigration, always a contentious issue, took centre stage early on. Trump reiterated his hardline stance, while Harris advocated for a more compassionate approach, emphasising the contributions of immigrants to American society.

Another hot-button issue was the economy, which saw heated exchanges. Trump touted his previous administration's tax cuts and deregulation policies, claiming they would "bring back American jobs." Harris countered with proposals for an increased minimum wage and expanded social programs, arguing they would "lift all Americans."

#### Public Response

The public response to the debate was

mixed, with supporters of both candidates claiming victory. Social media buzzed with reactions, memes, and fact-checking in real-time, reflecting the deeply polarised nature of the electorate. Media outlets offered varied interpretations, with some praising Harris for her poise and others commending Trump's forceful defence of his policies. Political analysts noted that while the debate was unlikely to change the minds of staunch supporters, it may have swayed some undecided voters who were looking for clarity on key issues. Early polling data suggested a near-even split in public perception of the candidates' performances, indicating a tightly contested race.

As the dust settles on this debate, the race to the White House continues, with the next presidential election scheduled for November 5th. With only weeks remaining, both campaigns will focus on mobilising their bases and reaching out to undecided voters. Further debates and key campaign events are expected to follow, offering additional opportunities for the candidates to present their visions for America's future. In the meantime, the world is closely watching the US presidential election, as its outcome could have a global impact for many years to come.

(The writer is an IT professional. Views personal)

## GLOBAL WATCH

## A Red Dawn in Sri Lanka

The election of Anura Kumara Disanayake as Sri Lanka's president signals a tectonic shift in the politics of the island nation long dominated by dynastic politics, be it the Bandaranaike or the Rajapaksa families. Once an insurgent with Marxist leanings, Disanayake's victory marks the first time a leader from the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) has risen to the country's highest office.

Disanayake's triumph is not merely a personal victory but a reflection of the disillusionment of Sri Lankans with mainstream parties after the economic collapse in 2022, which saw the country plunge into bankruptcy, triggering mass protests and the eventual ousting of Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The electorate, craving reform, turned to the JVP, which has always positioned itself as a staunch defender of the working class, promising sweeping economic changes that resonate with a nation grappling with inflation, corruption and a public debt crisis.

Once a fringe party, the JVP has long projected strong anti-imperialist impulses, having led protests against the U.S. during the Vietnam War and even going underground after being banned in the 1970s and 1980s. After emerging from the shadows in the 2000s, it shifted to mainstream politics. Disanayake's rise reflects Sri Lanka's deep frustration with the political establishment. His predecessor, Ranil Wickremesinghe, came to power in 2022 following the resignation of Gotabaya Rajapaksa amid an economic collapse and mass protests.

The leftist A.K. Disanayake's victory in Sri Lanka adds a new dimension to the shift in South Asian geopolitics and is likely to expand China's foothold in the region.



Anura Kumara Disanayak

Wickremesinghe, despite stabilizing the country to an extent, could not overcome the popular desire for more radical change.

While Disanayake's victory is seen by some as an endorsement of populist policies, others charily view it as a 'red flag' for Sri Lanka's fragile economic recovery.

For India, the ascension of Disanayake, a pro-China leader who has often voiced scepticism of the Indian influence in Sri Lanka, will be a matter for concern. Over the past decade, Beijing has invested heavily in Sri Lanka, securing key infrastructure projects as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. In addition to Hambantota, China has financed Colombo's port city, a massive urban development project that further cements its economic footprint on the island. The rise of a leftist government in Sri Lanka offers Beijing an opening to deepen its ties with Colombo, particularly if Disanayake continues to seek financial assistance to shore up the country's battered economy in despite proclaiming that Sri Lanka would not "be used" by any power.

India now finds itself surrounded by a swath of leftist governments. Nepal, governed by the Communist

Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), already tilts towards Beijing. The leftist turn in Sri Lanka could nudge Colombo closer to China which would be a troubling development for Indian strategists.

Historically, India has wielded considerable influence over its island neighbour, exerting pressure on matters like the Tamil question and maritime security. However, Disanayake's JVP, rooted in Marxist and anti-imperialist rhetoric, may complicate these relations. The JVP has been critical of India's involvement in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflicts, especially during the 1980s when India's intervention through the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was viewed as overreach.

However, despite Disanayake's ideology suggesting a shift towards a more assertive nationalism and potentially leftist economic policies, Sri Lanka's desperate need for economic recovery may temper his stance on India. After all, New Delhi remains a crucial creditor and trading partner.

One hopes that Disanayake will allow economic pragmatism, and not ideology, to guide Sri Lanka's foreign relations, particularly with India.

## STATES WATCH

## It is Naidu vs Reddy in the Battle for the Laddu

In Andhra Pradesh, a confection revered as sacred has now transformed into a lightning rod for political warfare. The Tirupati Laddu, offered as prasada at the illustrious Tirumala Venkateswara Temple, found itself at the center of a storm that now engulfs the state's two dominant political forces: Chief Minister Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and former CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy of the Yuva Jana Samika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP).

Last week, lab reports from the National Dairy Development Board's Centre of Analysis and Learning in Livestock and Food (CALF) confirmed the presence of animal - beef tallow, fish oil, and lard - in the iconic Tirupati laddu, distributed as prasadam at the Sri Venkateswara temple in Tirumala, one of India's most visited religious sites.

With the findings deeply wounding Hindu sentiments, the outrage has been swift and intense. Despite the YSRCP's denials, dismissing the allegations as politically motivated, the

lab findings have forced the party onto the defensive.

Chandrababu Naidu has seized upon this explosive revelation to

blame the previous administration led by Reddy's YSRCP for the scandal, alleging that lax oversight under the YSRCP had allowed such adulteration.

At a recent National Democratic Alliance (NDA) meeting, Naidu claimed his government had rectified the situation by reinstating the use of pure ghee, contrasting his approach with that of Reddy's administration.

The scandal also brought into sharp relief concerns about the appointment of non-Hindus to positions of authority within Hindu religious institutions. The controversial appointment of Karunakar Reddy, a Christian, as former chairman of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) at the time of Reddy's government, was viewed as a needless provocation by the TDP and the BJP. Critics alleged that placing a non-Hindu in charge of Hindu affairs reportedly undermined religious integrity.

Naidu announced the formation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the procurement of ghee and any irregularities associated with temple operations. The SIT, to be led by an officer of Inspector General rank, is tasked with investigating the

lapses that allegedly allowed such adulteration to occur. Naidu has emphasized a commitment to stringent action to restore faith in the temple's offerings. Amidst this political slugfest, the central government has sought a report from the Andhra Pradesh administration. Union Food Minister Pralhad Joshi called for a thorough investigation, reflecting the seriousness of the allegations.

The TTD, in a bid to be proactive in addressing concerns, has announced a sensory panel to evaluate the quality of food offerings which aims to restore the devotees confidence. Meanwhile, the police have acted against misinformation campaigns on social media, targeting individuals who falsely claimed that the compromised ghee was sourced from the well-known Amul brand.

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan has also expressed his distress over the findings, advocating for the establishment of a national board to address temple-related issues, suggesting that such scandals highlight broader concerns about the treatment of sacred spaces.

As things stand, for the TDP, which resoundingly defeated Reddy's YSRCP in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly election held earlier this year, the issue is not merely about laddus; it was about framing the Reddy government as incompetent, neglectful, and disrespectful toward Andhra's religious institutions.

The row has given Naidu, on whom the BJP is dependent at the Centre as a major NDA ally, a chance to champion Hindu traditions, galvanizing his voter base and casting himself as the protector of the state's cultural and religious identity.

For Chandrababu Naidu, the Tirupati laddu scandal has provided a potent narrative to frame Reddy's YSRCP as a party that not only mismanaged state resources but also desecrated the spiritual sanctity of Hindu temples.



## Andhra Pradesh

blame the previous administration led by Reddy's YSRCP for the scandal, alleging that lax oversight under the YSRCP had allowed such adulteration.

At a recent National Democratic Alliance (NDA) meeting, Naidu claimed his government had rectified the situation by reinstating the use of pure ghee, contrasting his approach with that of Reddy's administration.

The scandal also brought into sharp relief concerns about the appointment of non-Hindus to positions of authority within Hindu religious institutions. The controversial appointment of Karunakar Reddy, a Christian, as former chairman of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) at the time of Reddy's government, was viewed as a needless provocation by the TDP and the BJP. Critics alleged that placing a non-Hindu in charge of Hindu affairs reportedly undermined religious integrity.

Naidu announced the formation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the procurement of ghee and any irregularities associated with temple operations. The SIT, to be led by an officer of Inspector General rank, is tasked with investigating the

lapses that allegedly allowed such adulteration to occur. Naidu has emphasized a commitment to stringent action to restore faith in the temple's offerings. Amidst this political slugfest, the central government has sought a report from the Andhra Pradesh administration. Union Food Minister Pralhad Joshi called for a thorough investigation, reflecting the seriousness of the allegations.

The TTD, in a bid to be proactive in addressing concerns, has announced a sensory panel to evaluate the quality of food offerings which aims to restore the devotees confidence. Meanwhile, the police have acted against misinformation campaigns on social media, targeting individuals who falsely claimed that the compromised ghee was sourced from the well-known Amul brand.

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan has also expressed his distress over the findings, advocating for the establishment of a national board to address temple-related issues, suggesting that such scandals highlight broader concerns about the treatment of sacred spaces.

As things stand, for the TDP, which resoundingly defeated Reddy's YSRCP in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly election held earlier this year, the issue is not merely about laddus; it was about framing the Reddy government as incompetent, neglectful, and disrespectful toward Andhra's religious institutions.

The row has given Naidu, on whom the BJP is dependent at the Centre as a major NDA ally, a chance to champion Hindu traditions, galvanizing his voter base and casting himself as the protector of the state's cultural and religious identity.





1



2



3



4

**KALEIDOSCOPE**

- 1 Tourists participate in river rafting in Manali on Sunday.
- 2 Veteran filmmaker Adoor Gopalakrishnan felicitates Kathakali artist Kalamandalam Balasubramanian during an Indian classical dance festival in Thiruvananthapuram.
- 3 Democratic presidential nominee Vice President Kamala Harris arrives at Andrews Air Force Base, MD on Sunday.
- 4 Telangana CM A. Revanth Reddy with film actor Mahesh Babu and wife Namrata Shirodkar in Hyderabad. On Monday, Babu donated Rs. 50 lakhs to Chief Minister's Relief fund.
- 5 Dancers present 'Mahishasur Mardini' in Kolkata on Sunday.



5

All Pictures PTI, AP

**US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

How is AI helping shape 2024 presidential race?

With the 2024 election looming, the first since the mass popularization of generative artificial intelligence, experts feared the worst: social media flooded with AI-generated deepfakes that were so realistic, baffled voters wouldn't know what to believe.

So far, that hasn't happened. Instead, what voters are seeing is far more absurd: A video of former President Donald Trump riding a cat while wielding an assault rifle. A mustachioed Vice President Kamala Harris dressed in communist attire. Trump and Harris sharing a passionate embrace.

AI is playing a major role in the presidential campaign, even if the greatest fears about how it could threaten the U.S. presidential election haven't materialized yet. Fake AI-generated images regularly ricochet around the web, but many of them are so cartoonish and absurd that even the most naive viewer couldn't take them seriously.

Still, even these memes can be problematic. Eye-catching AI-generated photos and videos, some striving to be funny, have become useful tools for spreading false, sometimes racist messages with a clear political bent — and candidates and their supporters are among those sharing them on social media.

For example, Trump and many of his allies not only repeatedly promoted the unfounded conspiracy theory that Haitian migrants are stealing and eating cats and dogs in Springfield, Ohio, they also spread related AI-generated memes. One

shared by Trump's Truth Social account showed him on a luxury jet, surrounded by cats and white ducks. Another showed a group of kittens holding a sign that read, "DON'T LET THEM EAT US, Vote for Trump!"

**Not just Trump supporters**

Trump and his supporters aren't the only ones creating AI memes, but they appear to be using AI image generators more than their Democratic counterparts. Some left-leaning users have posted AI images making fun of billionaire Elon Musk, the owner of X and an outspoken supporter of Trump's campaign. Democrats also posted AI-generated images of Trump in handcuffs and being chased by police when he was in court in Manhattan last year.

But Kamala Harris' campaign has not leaned into amplifying AI-generated content, sticking instead to TikTok trends and other memes that don't require AI models to create.

"Currently, the only authorized campaign use of generative AI is for productivity tools, such as data analysis and industry-standard coding assistance," said Harris campaign spokesperson Mia Ehrenberg.

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung did not respond to specific questions from The Associated Press but said its strategy had not changed since May, when he provided an emailed statement saying the campaign did not "engage or utilize" tools supplied by any AI company.



Using fake, entertaining, often preposterous images to score political points is hardly new. But unlike cobbled-together Photoshop images or political cartoons, AI-generated images pack a stronger punch with their hyperrealism and can draw new attention to a political message.

While some of the images related to pets in Springfield were cartoonish and silly, many felt they perpetuated a damaging conspiracy theory about a community that has since received bomb threats prompting evacuations of schools and government buildings.

"Memes that are obviously parody are one thing. It's another where it's obviously intended to deceive," said Rep. Adam Schiff, a California Democrat and vocal Trump critic. "And we already see the Trump campaign really blurring the line."

**AI makes it easy**

The speed and accessibility of generative AI tools make it easy to create outlandish political content that

can drive clicks and likes. With AI image generators accessible to anyone with an internet connection, they are a cheap and convenient way for campaigns to respond to online trends and hammer home a

message. "Campaigns have had to deal with disinformation and misinformation for a very long time. ... It's not a new problem. But obviously what AI allows is for this stuff to do done more rapidly, perhaps more convincingly, and in a more targeted environment," said Teddy Goff, the digital director of Barack Obama's 2012 reelection campaign.

Paul Ingrassia, a New York-based political commentator and lawyer, said he spun up a viral image of Trump emerging from a lion's den in seconds by prompting Grok, then dropped it into his newsletter and sent it to Trump campaign staffers. Trump's Truth Social account posted Ingrassia's newsletter, including the image, that day.

"I got a message from my point of contact with the president and they said: The president loved the image, how did you make it? Who created it?" And I said: Oh, I did. I made that for the article," Ingrassia said. "And he said, Keep up the great work, he loves it."

More sinister deepfakes also have sought to influence races around the world. In Slovakia last year, AI audio clips impersonated the liberal party chief talking about rigging the vote days before parliamentary elections. In New Hampshire's primary in January, audio deepfakes of President Joe Biden were sent in robo-calls to Democratic voters, urging them not to vote. The incident was quickly publicized and resulted in criminal charges.

Trump's embrace of AI-generated images counters some of his past commentary. In an interview on Fox Business this year, Trump called artificial intelligence "very dangerous" and "so scary" because "there's no real solution" to the issues created by the advancing technology.

**The memes that are amplifying this claim are anything but humorous. When you have elected officials who are utilising this imagery as a way of perpetuating racism and xenophobia, that's a huge problem.**  
 - Francesca Tripodi, Sociologist, University of North Carolina

The use of AI for political satire and propaganda isn't limited to the U.S. and has been observed in elections from Indonesia to the Netherlands.

And some Republicans have fretted about how Trump and the GOP are using AI to create political memes.

"I don't engage in memes. I never have. I never will," said Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, a Pennsylvania Republican in a competitive district outside Philadelphia. "I just don't believe in it."



# The Anand effect that's shaping a 'GOLDEN GENERATION'

**New Delhi:** "If you had to roll the dice, these are pretty good teams to roll them with." Viswanathan Anand had a strong hunch that India would go on to be more than within "smelling" distance of gold at the Chess Olympiad this time.

And much to the delight of the revered Grandmaster, who played a key role in shaping some of the brightest youngsters in Indian chess right now, the country swept both the men's and women's gold at the 45th Olympiad in Budapest, Hungary.

World Championship challenger D Gukesh, R Praggnanandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi, Vidit Gujrathi, and P Harikrishna decimated competition to clinch the gold in the open section, finishing ahead of top seeds USA and Uzbekistan.

Then Harika Dronavalli, R Vaishali, Divya Deshmukh, Vantika Agrawal, and Tania Sachdev claimed the top honours in the women's event ahead of Kazakhstan and USA to complete an Indian sweep.

It was a first for the country and it was fitting that Anand, its original superstar of the game, had a role.

Both the teams had fetched bronze medals in the previous Olympiad, which was held on home turf in Chennai. Anand knew they "were smelling the gold" at that time but let it slip in the closing stages.

However, the 54-year-old



five-time world champion, in an interview to PTI before the Olympiad, put his faith in both the teams' ability to go the distance in Budapest and it was icing on the cake that he was there to witness history being made by them in the Hungarian capital.

"You know, if I had to roll the dice, these are good teams to roll them with," he had said.

Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa, Erigaisi and Vaishali have trained at the Westbridge Anand Chess Academy (WACA) that the respected chess wizard set up four years ago in Chennai.

The 18-year-old Gukesh and the 19-year-old Praggnanandhaa have often stated that they would not be where they are without "Vishy sir".

## CHESS WORLD CHAMPIONS

So, it was hardly a surprise that the International Chess Federation (FIDE) addressed him as the "father of Indian chess boom". This was after the great Garry Kasparov paid tribute to his genius by saying that the "children of Vishy

Anand are on the loose!" after Gukesh won the Candidates in April to become the youngest world title challenger.

Anand prefers to share the credit with the parents and formative coaches of the players but does say that his idea of a chess academy, which was inspired by schools he had seen in the Soviet Union more than three decades ago, did play its part.

"The aim was very simply, to help. Indians were consistently getting to the top 200, but not quite in breaking into the top 100 in the same way. So the idea

was, you know, can we support the most talented youngsters and see if we can just help them get past that stretch? I think we have been successful now," he had said before the Olympiad.

"I mean, obviously, there are lots and lots of people involved. Not only, you know, WACA, but also their parents, their own coaches, we try to integrate and make sure that we can fit in nicely. But I think, you know, we definitely played our part."

In his interaction with FIDE during the Olympiad, Anand did admit to being



It feels like a magical time for India. As I said, with such players, you know that you will have a certain amount of results, but they consistently exceeded (expectations). It's very nice to have it all at the same time.

- Vishwanathan Anand

surprised at the pace with which the likes of Gukesh and Praggnanandhaa have risen.

"I took all the youngsters who had become Grand-

master before the age of 14. To be honest, the idea was to support them from being top juniors to becoming world beaters," he said.

"My initial group was Praggnanandhaa, Gukesh, Arjun joined a bit later. In the girls, Vaishali was there. Did I expect it to go this fast? Not really. Did I suspect this could happen? Yes. But somehow this is unbelievable," he added.

"This is not a coincidence but at the same time, exceeds my expectations."

The affable, semi-retired player, who still manages to win tournaments for fun, the last being the Leon Masters in Spain a couple of months back is quite content with what he has managed to achieve as a mentor given the challenges that WACA faced before taking off.

## Modi hails Indians for winning gold

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday hailed the men's and women's Chess teams for winning the gold medals at the Chess Olympiad, saying the remarkable achievement marks a new chapter in India's sports trajectory.

India on Sunday scripted history in the Chess Olympiad as its men's and women's teams clinched their maiden titles in a rare clean sweep of gold medals after beating their respective opponents in the final round in Budapest.

Only China and erstwhile Soviet Union had won both men's and women's gold medals in the same edition of the Chess Olympiad.

Indian men had earlier won two bronze medals -- in 2014 and 2022 -- in the tournament, while the women had bagged a bronze in the 2022 edition held in Chennai.

Congratulations to our incredible Men's and Women's Chess Teams. This remarkable achievement marks a new chapter in India's sports trajectory. May this success inspire generations of chess enthusiasts to excel in the game.

- Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

# That nice feeling

## Gukesh and Co. stress on team spirit

**New Delhi:** A dream come true, a nice feeling. The maiden Chess Olympiad gold meant different things for the members of the five-strong Indian men's team, spearheaded stupendously by the youngest ever challenger to the world title -- D Gukesh.

The 18-year-old issued a statement of sorts ahead of his eagerly-anticipated world championship clash in November against Ding Liren of China by registering one of the best ever individual performances in the just-concluded 45th Olympiad.

"I am just super happy right now," Gukesh said after winning his final round game against giant-killer Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia on Sunday.

It was a sensational display by the teenager on the top board for India as he notched up nine points out

of his 10 games conceding just a couple of draws besides eight victories.

This phenomenal performance helped the team clinch gold as India scored a dominating 21 points out of a possible 22, winning 10 and drawing just one match against last Olympiad winners Uzbekistan.

"It was a very nice experience for me personally and for the team...this was basically a dream (come true)," Gukesh said in the final press conference of the Olympiad. The women too won gold and both the teams were seen jumping in joy at the podium.

With a rating of 2797 currently, Arjun is just three points shy of the magical 2800 mark and totally five behind Nakamura. Carlsen, on 2830, is still some distance away.

Humble as he is, Erigaisi quickly pointed out that it

did not matter too much.

On why he played on board three despite being the highest rated player in the Indian team at the start of the Olympiad, Erigaisi said it was part of strategy.

"We thought Gukesh would do well on board one and I would do good on board three, because it worked out well, obviously no regrets," he said.

While both Gukesh and

Another key contributor to the men's success was Arjun Erigaisi, who scored 10 points playing all the 11 games in the event. He has now elevated himself to number three in live world rankings behind Magnus Carlsen of Norway and American Hikaru Nakamura.

Erigaisi won an individual gold for their best performances on board one and three respectively, one player who missed out on personal glory by a whisker was Vidit Gujrathi who scored 7.5 points from his 10 games but could only finish fourth in performance rating on board four.

R Praggnanandhaa's performance might not have been up to his own lofty expectations but he played the perfect anchor especially till the ninth game giving the much-needed stability to the team. His lone loss against American Wesley So was followed by a final round victory that speaks volumes about the strong character of the young man possess.

Team captain N Srinath was obviously delighted.

"I don't have to give them a lot of advice as these guys are professionals, they know what to do. Basically it was



Indian teams at the presentation ceremony of the 45th Chess Olympiad in Budapest on Sunday.

Pic: AP/PTI

some preparation, bringing them together but mostly just sitting back watching them flow," he said.

As the team returns home on Monday, the real celebrations might have to wait a couple of days but it has proved beyond any doubt that India can now be called the Chess powerhouse of the world.

"Yesterday we were in the team meeting, we were already in the celebrations mood. I was super excited

but I hoped there would be no game. We forced ourselves to focus and come here, do the job, and then celebrate," said Gukesh.

"I thought even if we lose the match, we still win on tie breaks. We wanted to win the match, of course. We were expecting a win. We were all pretty relaxed. But yeah, glad that me and Arjun got the job done."

Indian men had earlier won two bronze medals -- in 2014 and 2022 (held in Chen-

nai) -- in the showpiece.

"This tournament for me, especially since what happened last time, we were so close as the team to win gold. This time I thought no matter what I'm going to do, whatever it takes to win the team goal," Gukesh told Chess24 earlier.

"So I did not really think about the individual performance much. I just wanted the team to win this time."

He personally ensured that it happened. -PTI

It's a nice feeling but there are about 10-15 players with similar strength, so I don't want to care too much about being number three or number four.

- Arjun Erigaisi



D Harika



Divya Deshmukh



R Vaishali



Vantika Agrawal



Tania Sachdev

# Girls' power snatches the victory

**New Delhi:** Veteran D Harika had to endure a long wait to realise her dream of winning the prestigious Chess Olympiad title but she was finally glad to have achieved it even though she was not satisfied with her performance in the event in Budapest.

India on Sunday scripted

history in the Chess Olympiad as its men's and women's teams clinched their maiden titles in a rare clean sweep of gold medals after beating Slovenia and Azerbaijan respectively in the final round of matches here.

For the women's team, Harika, 33, was at her technical best, striking on the top board, while the 18-year-old Divya Deshmukh outclassed Govhar Beydullayeva to confirm her individual gold medal on the third board. "Definitely for me it is much more emotional than these people (teammates), I have been playing for 20 years to see the gold medal and finally I am glad we saw it," Harika said.

"I am extremely happy

and proud of the girls, youngsters came up in the team and they did extremely well.

"May be my performance is not satisfactory but the team gold made me forget everything, I am glad that we managed to come back strongly after the setback," she added.

Divya, who won the World Junior Girls' chess championship in Gandhinagar recently, turned out to be the mainstay for the Indian women's team that bagged the historic gold medal.

"It started off quite well, but in the middle we had a few setbacks and I am really proud of the way my team and I handled it. We fought back with resilience and we are finally here with the gold medal," Divya said.

The last two rounds were very crucial, Divya and Vantika played extremely well. Vaishali had some setbacks towards the end. Harika was solid and Tania gave us a good start.

- Abhijeet Kunte, Grandmaster, Team Captain

"I am overwhelmed with emotions here, I am really happy. I had a good performance here."

Asked about how she could play all the games with such high energy, Divya said, "It was a do-or-die kind of situation, for your country you have to give it all."

Playing on the third board, Divya ended the event with a stupendous 9.5 points out of her 11 games and her performance also netted her the individual gold medal as the best performer on her board. Tania Sachdev, who did not get to play many games, helped the team get off to a good start playing on board five.

"This is the moment, I think we were meant for this, last time (when Indian got bronze in both sections, missing the gold narrowly) it did not happen. It was hard to celebrate the bronze

last time but I am just so happy right now," said an emotional Tania, who scored 3.5 points from her five games.

If Divya provided the Midas touch to the Indian team, Vantika Agrawal was in a class of her own scoring 7.5 out of nine and these two basically carried the side forward in almost every round when it mattered.

Vantika also won a gold medal for her individual performance on the fourth board.

For R Vaishali, sister of R Praggnanandhaa, the last four games she played gave her just one point but she had done her main job prior to that, scoring five points from the first six games that laid the foundation for the team's triumph.