

# THE PERFECT VOICE



Why does Jarange always target only Fadnavis? ... pg 2



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## SC stays police probe in Isha case

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday effectively halted the police probe into the alleged illegal confinement of two women at spiritual leader Jaggi Vasudev's Isha Foundation ashram at Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu.

Transferring to itself a habeas corpus petition of a man alleging that his two daughters were held captive inside the premises of the Foundation, a bench headed by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud directed the Tamil Nadu Police to not take any further action in pursuance of the Madras High Court's direction asking it to inquire into the alleged illegal confinement of the women.

"You can't let in the Army or the police into an establishment like this," the bench observed during the hearing. The bench, also comprising Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said the police shall file the status report, as directed by the high court in its September 30 order, before the top court.

The apex court passed the order after the Isha Foundation approached it challenging the high court's order directing the Coimbatore Police to collect all case details registered against the Foundation and produce them before the court for further consideration.

Woman says they are at centre by their own will... page 5

# Two Pune girls sexually assaulted in school van

POLICE CHECKING IF IT HAD A WOMAN ATTENDANT

Pune: Police have arrested the 45-year-old driver of a school van for allegedly sexually assaulting two six-year-old girl students in Pune, an officer said on Thursday.

The incident took place on September 30 on board the van when the kids were returning home after attending school in the Wanwadi area of the city. Police are trying to find out if a woman attendant was present in the van at the time, the official said.

"The accused allegedly touched the private parts of both girls. One of the girl students later narrated the incident to her mother who then informed the police and a case was registered," the official from the Wanwadi police station said.

A police complaint was lodged on Wednesday and the accused, Sanjay Reddy, was booked and arrested. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Zone V) S Raja said they acted after the mother of one of the minors approached the police. "The accused have been arrested and a probe is underway to



ascertain whether any other girl students were similarly targeted in the past," he said.

Asked if a woman attendant was present in the van, the official said police are investigating it with the school. "We are also checking with the school whether the vehicle belongs to it or they have taken it on contract," he said. In Maharashtra, school buses or vans must have a woman attendant.

Rupali Chakankar, chairperson of Maharashtra State Commission for Women, said they have sought a detailed report from the police about the incident. Stern action will be taken against the ac-

A few other reports claimed that Reddy used to make the two girls sit next to him and while driving he indulged in the objectionable acts of 'sexually touching' them.

The incident came to light after one of the girls narrated the incident to her mother who then informed the school authorities.

The accused was arrested under sections 64 (punishment for rape) and 65 (2) (punishment for rape on woman under twelve years of age) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), and under sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

Protests erupted in the area with local people and activists of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) shattering the windscreens of the van and damaging its body.

Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis alleged that the accused got help from some local politician to flee, but he has been caught by the police.



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

After the safety of the daylight fades, women are seen as easy prey by the predators of the night. We mark the nine nights of Navratri, the festival of the goddess, by celebrating the dedication and valour of nine real-life women who brave the challenges of the night to pursue their dreams.

PART - 2

# Safety Gloves On!

A DOCTOR NARRATES WHY SHE DOES NOT FEEL UNSAFE IN MUMBAI

By Anand Mishra

Avoiding public transport when out late at night and driving home in her own car is how Dr. Mrudul Randive manoeuvres her way around the city.

They say there's safety in numbers and in a city that never sleeps-Mumbai-it is the numbers even in the dead of the night that offers its women a relative safety net. It's not hard to find people and cars on the roads at any time of the night.

Dr. Mrudul Randive, a 44-year-old doctor works at Sion Hospital and commutes to her place of work from Thane, where she lives, covering a distance of around 30 km every day. Being a doctor, emergencies come calling when she's least expecting them. There are times when she is in hospital attending to patients well post-midnight, after most people have returned to their homes.

Her way of staying safe is to drive herself around the city instead of taking autorickshaws where the drivers, more often than not, pass "nasty comments" on women. It's something many women complain of but not all have an alternate mode of transport. "In Mumbai, I've never felt unsafe, no matter the time. It's a city where I can rely on the environment to be relatively secure," says Dr. Randive.

An M.D. in Microbiology, Dr. Randive's sense of safety isn't without exceptions. One recurring issue that she points out is her encounters with local rickshaw drivers. "Sometimes, rickshaw drivers behave nastily. They make personal comments instead of stopping for a ride. It catches you off guard, and you don't really know how to react in that moment," she says. She



DR MRUDUL RANDIVE, Sion Hospital

emphasizes that her own experience has been largely positive, especially compared to the challenges that others may face while commuting late at night. Her story reflects the dual nature of Mumbai-where safety is often perceived, but

necessary is a concern she feels strongly about. While she personally hasn't faced any immediate threat during her travels, the absence of police in certain areas, especially during the night, is something that lingers on her mind. She, however, advises caution despite the relative safety the city offers.

Mumbai is a city that's both, welcoming and challenging at the same time. The proverbial spirit of the city exists in the people who are helpful and willing to assist those in need, which adds to the safety quotient. "Mumbaikars are usually very cooperative," she says. She is more comfortable travelling during the day and has faced no trouble over the years.

All is largely well in Mumbai but Dr. Randive advises caution while taking public transport at night. If she needs to get to the hospital late at night or is returning home in the wee hours of the morning, her husband usually drives her to work. Or if she's travelling alone, Dr. Randive shares her ride details with him, just so that he knows where she is. It's a safety precaution most women in Mumbai take-of sharing their aggregator cab details or sharing their location.

All is well in Amchi Mumbai late at night but tread with little caution. Sometimes, rickshaw drivers behave nastily.

precautions are always necessary.

Her job isn't confined to the typical 9 AM to 5 PM schedule. Emergencies beckon her to the hospital at any time of the night. Despite the unpredictable hours, Dr. Randive, is comfortable navigating Mumbai's streets, although she expresses scepticism about the availability of the police on the streets at night. While travelling late, she rues that the police are barely seen on the streets. "They are mostly meant for VIPs," she says. This lack of visible law enforcement in areas where it might be

## Govt opposes pleas to criminalise marital rape

New Delhi: If sexual acts by a man with his own wife is made punishable as "rape", it may severely impact the conjugal relationship and lead to serious disturbances in the institution of marriage, the Centre has told the Supreme Court.

Opposing the criminalisation of marital rape, which is sought by many petitioners before the apex court, the Centre has filed its preliminary counter affidavit in the top court.

The apex court is seized of petitions raising the vexed legal question of whether a husband should enjoy immunity from prosecution for the offence of rape if he forces his wife, who is not a minor, to have sex.

Under the exception clause of Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), now repealed and replaced by the Bharatiya Nyaya

Sanhita (BNS), sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his wife, the wife not being minor, is not rape.

Even under the new law, Exception 2 to Section 63 (rape) says that "sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under eighteen years of age, is not rape".

"Furthermore, it is submitted that striking down the exception 2 of section 375 of IPC on the ground of its constitutional validity will have a far-reaching effect on the institution of marriage if sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife is made punishable as 'rape'," the Centre said in its affidavit.

"It may severely impact the conjugal relationship and may lead to serious disturbances in the institution of marriage," it said.



Kannada film actor Amrutha Iyengar poses with a doll during the Dussehra Doll festival, on the first day of Navratri at a mall in Bengaluru on Thursday.

Pic: PTI

## Marathi, Bengali classical languages

New Delhi: The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved the conferral of 'Classical Language' status to Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese, and Bengali.

With this new addition, the total number of languages with Classical Language status will nearly

double from six to eleven. The languages that already had this status were Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Odia.

"This is a historical decision and this decision goes very well with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the NDA government's phi-

losophy of taking pride in our culture, taking pride in our heritage and taking pride in all the Indian languages and the rich heritage that we have," Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said at a cabinet briefing.



An artist dressed as deities take part in a religious procession as part of the Navratri festival celebrations at Durgiana Temple in Amritsar on Thursday.

Pic: PTI

# Garba event cancelled over inclusion of Muslim in team

Indore (MP): A garba event in Indore was cancelled on Thursday, the first day of the Navratri festival, after a right-wing outfit objected to a Muslim man on its organising committee, said the organisers.

The Muslim man said he has been associated with the folk-dance programme since childhood.

Bajrang Dal had submitted a memorandum to Bhanwar Kuan police claiming that the 10-day event had been planned at Ganesh Nagar to promote "love jihad" and spread obscenity, Vishva Hindu Parishad local leader

Rajesh Binjwe said.

He said Bajrang Dal, the youth wing of VHP, had urged police to ban the event organised by 'Shikhar Garba Mandal' saying one Feroz Khan was associated with it.

'Love Jihad' is an unofficial term used by right-wing groups to refer to an alleged campaign by Muslim men to convert Hindu girls under the pretext of love and marriage.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Rajesh Dandotia confirmed that they have received a memorandum from Bajrang Dal against the proposed Garba event.

He said the organisers have not sought police permission for the event.

"If anyone contacts us for permission for this Garba event, it will be looked into as per the law," he added.

Khan claimed the police had given them the permission to hold the folk-dance programme but some people mounted "undue pressure" on the owner of the land where the Garba event was to be held. As a result, it has been cancelled, he said.

"We have been organising Garba events at Ganesh Nagar for the last 36 years. I have been serv-

ing in the Garba pandal since childhood. But for the first time, some people have a problem with this Garba programme because I am a Muslim," he lamented.

Khan appealed to those objecting to the event to allow them to hold the programme so that the 250 to 300 women, who have been preparing for it for the past many days, get an opportunity to perform.

"If people have a problem with my name, I won't set foot on the garba pandal," he said.

Khan said he is the only Muslim in his locality and

celebrates Diwali with as much enthusiasm as Eid.

Another organiser, Deepak Hardia, said, "Our pandal was decorated and ready."

We had also decided on the place to install the idol of Goddess Durga on the pandal. But as we don't want to trigger any controversy in a religious event, we have dismantled the pandal and cancelled the event."

Hardia said Khan is the lone Muslim man on their committee and he has been participating in Hindu events since he was eight.

-PTI



Why does Jarange always target only Fadnavis?

By Abhijit Mulye

Mumbai: Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange-Patil once again slammed Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday. The Maratha community had been trying to organize Dasara rally at Beed, but the state administration hasn't given necessary clearances for the rally.

the only political leader in the state who ensured that the Maratha community gets a quota by identifying them under a separate class.

According to many of the Maratha quota activists the solution worked well and would have benefited the community had it not been struck down by the Supreme Court. Jarange-Patil accuses Fadnavis of instigating people to challenge the quota after being ousted from the power himself. But there has been no substantive evidence to corroborate the charges.

This leads some to argue that the handlers of Jarange-Patil want to gain political mileage by targeting Fadnavis, who belongs to a miniscule

grassroot level was mostly "Maratha politics" until very recently. The community, primarily from Western Maharashtra, held almost all power centres in the state for a long time. This led to development of agriculture and industry in Western Maharashtra and also the development of the community.

However, the members of the community from other regions like Marathwada and Vidarbha primarily depended on agriculture and hardly any other means of development reached the regions tilting the balance of power as well as development heavily in favour of Western Maharashtra.

After coming to power, Fadnavis began systematic efforts to bring the Maratha community closer to the BJP by granting quota to it under a new class. The Maratha lobby realized that the decision would erode the political base of the Congress and the NCP. The OBCs had already alienated them and the Marathas too had started seeing their true friend in Fadnavis. The realization led to ouster of Fadnavis in 2019 and when he managed to return to power and managed to get even Ajit Pawar on his side, Jarange-Patil started vitriolic verbal attacks against Fadnavis. This clearly indicates who Jarange-Patil's real handler is.

Jarange-Patil started making demands that were impossible to fulfill. His demand to grant quota to Maratha community under the OBC class was squarely aimed at breaking the BJP's hold on OBC communities. The rising support to the demand within the Maratha community disturbed the OBC communities and they started agitation in Nagpur. Fadnavis was quick to address them and assured them that the Maratha quota won't affect the existing OBC quota. Surprisingly no other prominent leader within the government was seen publicly uttering the stand. They remained concerned only about the Maratha stir and ignored OBC and other social groups. This hit the alliance hard during the Lok Sabha elections.

upper caste that has little significance in the politics of numbers. Though, Jarange-Patil has time and again made it clear that he doesn't have any political ambitions and that he just wants the implementation of Maratha quota the way he has been insisting, he has always insisted that not listening to the Maratha community would be the biggest blunder of Fadnavis.

To make sense out of Jarange-Patil's outburst one will have to have a bit of the background in Maharashtra politics. Though the state had always been lauded as the most progressive state of India, the politics on the



Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his deputy Ajit Pawar both belong to the Maratha community. Yet, whenever there is any issue related to Maratha quota, Jarange-Patil is always seen targeting Fadnavis. Apparently, that is because he perceives Fadnavis as the sole hurdle in implementation of Maratha quota.

One of the reasons behind Jarange-Patil's ante against Fadnavis might be that the department under Fadnavis was responsible for the lathi-charge against the Maratha quota agitators at his village Antarwali-Sarati. Fadnavis has already tendered an unconditional apology for that. Also, he is

Missing complaint unfolds rape case

Mumbai: A 46-year-old man lodged a kidnapping complaint after his teenager daughter went missing, but later it turned out he had been allegedly sexually assaulting her for the last five years and she left home in Mumbai to escape the ordeal, police said on Thursday.

Police arrested the accused on Thursday and booked him under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, an officer said.

The 17-year-old girl, fed up with her father's brutality, left home in Central Mumbai's Mahalaxmi area on Wednesday, the officer said. Unable to trace her, the man approached the Tardeo police station and lodged a complaint alleging his daughter has been kidnapped. Based on his complaint a case of kidnapping was registered against an unidentified person and a search launched for the teenager, he said.

During the search, a crime branch team found the girl at Mahalaxmi station on the Western Railway network. The girl was taken to a crime branch office, where during questioning, she revealed a shocking tale of repeated sexual abuse by her own father, said the official.

According to the official, the teenager told the police her father had been sexually assaulting her for the last five years.

Based on her complaint, a case of rape and other offences under the BNS and the POCSO Act was registered at the police station.

A crime branch team led by Police Inspector Sadan and Yerekar then started a search for the girl's father, who was tracked down in the Saat Rasta Circle area and subsequently nabbed, he said.



Devotees carry an idol of Goddess Durga to a pandal during Navratri festival celebration, in Nagpur on Thursday.

SIMI behind 2008 Malegaon blast: Pragma's lawyer

Mumbai: The 2008 Malegaon blast could have been carried out by the banned Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), the lawyer of prime accused and BJP leader Pragma Thakur argued before a special court here on Thursday.



where bombs were allegedly made, and they could be transporting explosives using the two-wheeler when there was an accidental explosion, the lawyer argued. The investigators had claimed that the motorcycle belonged to Thakur. Mishra will continue his arguments on Friday.

Local people prevented police from reaching the site immediately after the blast and it could have been done to shield the accused, said Thakur's lawyer, advocate J.P. Mishra.

Malegaon, a town about 200 km from Mumbai in north Maharashtra, on September 29, 2008.

Whenever there is an incident such as this, people help the police. However, in this case, immediately after the incident a huge number of people gathered at the spot and pelted stones at police, preventing them from reaching the blast site, advocate Mishra claimed.

This could have been done to protect "their people" (belonging to SIMI), he said. A SIMI office was located near the blast site

CRIME WATCH

19 booked for fraud

Thane: Police have registered a case against 19 members of a family in Thane for allegedly duping a man and his brother of Rs 1.17 crore under the pretext of high returns on investment in a cryptocurrency scheme, an officer said. Based on the complaint lodged by the 42-year-old man, the case was registered at the Rabodi police station. The accused, Sabir Yakub Ghachi (50), Shaker Yakub Ghachi (45), Ruhika Shaker Ghachi (39) and several other family members convinced the victim to invest in a cryptocurrency scheme, promising up to 12 times the returns on the invested amount, the police officer said.

Politician gets parcel with threat note

Thane: A Thane-based leader of a ruling political party in Maharashtra has complained of receiving a parcel containing a bullet and a note in which he was given a death threat, police said on Thursday. The sender of the note is yet to be identified, an official said. "According to the complaint, the leader received the parcel on Tuesday afternoon at his public relations office in Wagle Estate area. On opening it, he found a box of pencil sharpeners, inside which a bullet was wrapped in two pieces of cloth. There was a note in Hindi, which read - "This time I am placing it in your hand, next time it will be in your head. This is just a small gift. Next time, it will be bigger," he said. Police have registered a case under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and sections of the Arms Act at the Wagle Estate police station and investigation into the case is underway.

Woman held for abducting toddler

Mumbai: A woman from Rajasthan was arrested and a one-year-old girl who was allegedly kidnapped by her from outside Churchgate railway station last month was rescued from there on Thursday, a police official said. The accused apprehended by the Mumbai Crime Branch team was identified as Payal alias Priti Laxman Singh (23), he said. "The child was abducted on September 10 when she was asleep with her parents on a pavement outside Churchgate station.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I will get involved in holding a Dussehra rally in Narayangad in Beed. The rally is being held on public demand to show our unity. No political inference must be made in this connection."



Manoj Jarange-Patil, Maratha quota activist



Shiv Pratishthan supporters participate in 'Durga Mata Daud' on the first day of the 'Navratri' festival, in Sangli.

Aaditya claims irregularities in infra works

Mumbai: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray on Thursday claimed irregularities in many infrastructure projects and warned the MMRDA chief he would face "inquiry" or even "jail" once Maha Vikas Aghadi returns to power in the state. Addressing a news conference, Thackeray claimed the bank guarantee furnished by the contractor of an ambitious twin-tunnel project, connecting Thane city with Borivali in the western suburb, is from a

bank located in a Caribbean country.

The former minister wondered if the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had approved this particular bank guarantee. Any official or politician involved in these irregularities will face action, he said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in July had laid the foundation stone for the twin-tunnel project, which will be executed by the Mumbai Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (MMRDA).

CM, DCM hail language decision

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his deputies Devendra Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar on Thursday hailed the Centre's decision to confer "classical language" tag on Marathi and thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Union Cabinet has approved conferring classical language status to Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese and Bengali languages. The move comes ahead of Maharashtra assembly elections, likely to be held next month.

state government led by him had taken up the issue of according the classical language status to Marathi with the Centre.

The present government, led by Eknath Shinde, also continued efforts in the direction, Fadnavis said.

Deputy CM Ajit Pawar said the decision was "historic", adding the struggle to ensure Marathi gets classical language status was going on for decades.

While NCP (SP) spokesperson Anish Gawande hailed the Centre's decision, he questioned why the Shinde government had failed to promote Marathi across the state.

Maharashtra's heritage is under threat as theatres, cultural centres and more than 700 public libraries have shut down in the last 10 years, he claimed.

The UPA government in 2012 had set up an expert committee under Rangnath Pathare for grant of classical language status to Marathi.

Avinash Sable gets Shiv Chhatrapati Award

PRADEEP GANDHE GETS LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Maharashtra government on Thursday declared the Shiv Chhatrapati Awards for the year 2022-23. The Paris olympic 3000 metre finalist Avinash Sable, who also broke a national record, has been chosen for the award, while veteran Badminton player and winner of Bronze Medal in 1982 Asiad, Pradeep Gandhe has been chosen for the Lifetime achievement Award. Sable, who hails from

Beed in Marathwada region couldn't bag a prize at the Paris olympics, but his game won several applause. Gandhe who is Badminton player of repute had been in various roles first as player then as selection committee member, administration of Badminton Association and Maharashtra Olympic Association (MOA).

While expressing happiness Gandhe recalled various successful campaigns of Indian Badminton, the glorious moment



of India winning Thomas Cup Tournament. "The success in the championship was due to a brilliant display of players backed by coaching staff and Administrators too. The Govt of India is backing various sports including Badminton. Our players

did well in the Paris Olympics 2024. We missed a few medals by whisker. 7/8 athletes finished in the 4th position, it being so near yet so far. This award will inspire me to work more for the field of sports," Gandhe said.

Pawan Bhoir (Gymnastics), Anil Bhoir (Kabaddi), Shubhangi Rokde (Archery), Rajaram Ghag (Guide for Divyang Sports), Dinesh Lad (Cricketer) and Suma Shirur (Shooting) are some of the other prominent names on the list.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given to the Public at large that my client MRS. ASHWINI ASHOK DEVLEKAR, She Purchased Below Mentioned Flat From M/S. JIVDANI CONSTRUCTION when my client purchase the said flat that time Society Issue the Share Certificate to the My Client For the Property bearing addressed at - Flat No. 407, on the Fourth Floor, Building No. 12, admeasuring area 28.62 Sq. Mt., Carpet area, in the Project Known as "SHREE SWAMI SAMARTH NAGAR" Society Known as "JAY JIVDANI SHAKTI CO.OP. HSG. SOCIETY. LTD.", Vavate Wadi, Phulpada Road, Virar East, Tal-Vasai, Dist-Palghar-401305, constructed on land being Survey No. 112, Hiss No. 1, 3, 4, & 5/2, Survey No. 113Part, Survey No. 114, Hiss No. 5, Survey No. 115, Hiss No. 3, lying, being and situate at Village- Virar, Tal- Vasai, Dist- Palghar. But my client has been lost/Misplaced the said share certificate.

जाहीर सूचना
याद्वारे सर्व संबंधितास कळविण्यात येते की, आमचे अशिल मे. रॉयल फार्मा या भागीदारी संस्थेतर्फे भागीदार १) श्री. मिलन के शाह, २) श्री अजय शाह, ३) श्रीमती चेतना एन. मोतागा, ४) श्रीमती हेमलता के. शाह हे गांव मोजे विकार जैन मंदिर रोड, तालुका वसई जिला पालघर येथील श्री सिद्धार्थ को ऑपरेटिव्ह हाऊसिंग सोसायटी लि. या सोसायटीमधील तळमजल्यावरील शांप नं. ३ क्षेत्र ३०२ चौ. फुट (सुपर बिल्डअप) या शांपचे मालक आहेत. सदरचा शांप मे. महावीर बिल्डर्स यांच्याकडून तारीख १७/०८/१९८५ रोजीचे करारने रमेश एल. सोपारवाला अॅण्ड ब्रदर्स यांनी कायमचा विकत घेतला होता. सदर शांप संदर्भातील मे. महावीर बिल्डर्स व रमेश एल. सोपारवाला अॅण्ड ब्रदर्स यांचेमधील तारीख १७/०८/१९८५ रोजीचा मूळ करारनामा गहाळ झाला आहे. तरी सरर शांपचेर कोणाली व्यक्तीचा कोणत्याही स्वरुपाचा दावा, आक्षेप असल्यास त्यांनी या सूनेच्या प्रसिद्धीच्या तारखेपासून चौदा (१४) दिवसांचे आत योग्य कायदोपत्री पुराव्यासह ए१०९ 'आरती अपार्टमेंट', वर्क रोड, विकार (पश्चिम), तालुका वसई, जिल्हा पालघर या पर्यवार कळवावा. अन्यथा तसा हक्क हिरसवंध नाही असे समजण्यात येईल. (श्री. एन. वी. देशमुख) वकील



# Mumbai under major overhaul

## IMPENDING ASSEMBLY ELECTION PUSH MACHINERY TO EXPEDITE THE WORKS, AGENCIES ON TOE

By Anand Mishra

**Mumbai:** The maximum city fondly called has always been witnessing maximum construction activities and therefore this is undergoing a massive infrastructure overhaul, with several projects aimed at transforming the city's landscape.

These infra projects are expected to improve connectivity, and reduce travel time within the city and its surrounding areas. Though construction on a huge scale is not new to this financial capital of India, the current scenario seems to be extremely different as assembly elections in the state have knocked the door and bugle of election can be sounded at any moment. Conspicuously, entire machinery has been placed on full throttle to execute the project to reap the benefits in the form of votes. All implementing agencies like Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), BMC, MSRDC, CIDCO, have put on war-footing even as the government didn't mind going the extra mile to issue the bottlenecks. Machinery made every effort to keep the momentum on to execute the project, ensuring fund crisis must not hinder the pace of execution.

It reflects abundantly in MMRDA's action plan which has not only secured a loan Rs 31,674 crore to fund various infrastructure projects across the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, but also has chalked out Rs 58,517 crore Ring Road project of 90.18-km-long stretch.

**MMR to get five Ring Roads**

Apart from executing 7 metro networks across MMR, the town planning and infra arm of the state MMRDA has also done preliminary work on a mega road network across the MMR that will span from Vadodara, Gujarat border up North to Alibaug in the Konkan belt of Maharashtra down South and towards Navi Mumbai/Thane. This 90.18 kilometers of road network, with an estimated cost of Rs 58,517 crore will be a vast network of roads, flyovers, bridges, coastal roads and underwater tunnels aimed at decongesting Mumbai by 2029.



**1st Ring Road:** Nariman Point to Coastal Road to Worli Sewri Connector to Eastern Freeway to Orange Gate Tunnel to Nariman Point.

**2nd Ring Road:** Nariman Point to Bandra Worli Sea Link to WEH to Santacruz Chembur Link Road to EEH to Eastern Freeway to Orange Gate Tunnel to Nariman Point

**3rd Ring Road:** Nariman Point-Bandra Worli Sea Link-WEH-JVLR-Kanjurmarg Junction-Eastern Freeway Extension-Eastern Freeway-Orange Gate Tunnel-Nariman Point

**4th Ring Road:** Nariman Point to Bandra Worli Sea Link to Versova Dahisar Link Road to Goregaon Mulund Link Road to Eastern Freeway Extension to Orange Gate Tunnel to Nariman Point

**5th Ring Road:** Nariman Point to Bandra Worli Sea Link to Versova Dahisar Link Road to Bhayander to Fountain Hotel Connector to Gaimukh to Ghodbunder Tunnel to Thane Coastal Road to Eastern Freeway Extension to Orange Gate Tunnel to Nariman Point

**Impetus to CM's den Thane**

MMRDA has secured a loan Rs 31,674 crore to fund various infrastructure projects in Thane city and district which is home to the chief minister Eknath Shinde. This amount will be allocated for the Thane-Borivali Twin Tunnel Project and eight other projects including construction of the Thane Coastal Road Phase I, extension of the Eastern Freeway from Ghatkopar to Thane, and an elevated road from National Highway 4 to Katali Naka. Other projects involve building a creek bridge and access roads from Kolshet Thane to Kharbao in Bhiwandi, a creek bridge between Kasarvadavali, Thane, and Kharbay and an elevated road from Kalyan-Murbad Road to Badlapur Road. Additionally, an elevated road will be constructed on Eastern Express Highway from Anand Nagar to Saket in Thane city, alongside a creek bridge from Gaimukh to Payegaon. Besides, the Navi Mumbai airport's first terminal is set to partially resolve the city's airport woes, and the completion of the missing link on the Mumbai-Pune Eway will significantly reduce travel time between the two cities.

**Existing and upcoming roads in the making**

- Mumbai Coastal Road
- Bandra-Versova link
- Powai-Kanjurmarg Junction through JVLR (open to traffic)
- Chheda Nagar Junction to Anand Nagar Eastern Freeway Extension
- Orange Gate Tunnel to Mumbai Coastal Road to Nariman Point
- Uttan Link Road (extension of Versova-Bhayander Link Road)
- Alibaug-Virar Multi Modal Corridor (About 100 km long -Rs 60,000 crore)
- Thane Coastal Road Phase 1 (Kharegaon to Gaimukh)
- Mumbai-Pune Missing Link
- Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor

**Projects set to open by this year-end**

- Metro 3: On October 4 or 5
- SCLR Extension: In October
- Full Coastal Road: in December
- New Vashi Creek Bridge: In October
- Samruddhi Mahamarg: In October

**Projects to see the light of the day in 2025**

- Navi Mumbai International Airport: March 25
- Metro 3: Phase 2: March 2025
- Mumbai-Pune Missing Link - June 2025
- New Vashi Creek Bridge: Full part in February

**Ongoing Railways Projects**

- 5th & 6th line between Dahisar-Virar
- 3rd & 4th line between Virar-Dahanu
- 5th & 6th line between Parel-Kurla
- Panvel-Karjat Corridor
- Badlapur-Titwala Corridor
- Bullet Train Between Ahmedabad to Mumbai

## Defamation Case

# Court says, Raut did not take care, caution

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut, despite being an MP from whom "high degree of responsibility" is expected, did not take "care and caution" while making certain statements, a Mumbai court said while convicting him in a defamation case filed by BJP leader Kirit Somaiya's wife Medha Somaiya.

Judicial Magistrate (First Class) Aarti Kulkarni had last week convicted

Raut for an offense committed under IPC section 500 (defamation). The Rajya Sabha MP was sentenced to 15 days in jail and fined Rs 25,000. However, the court later suspended the sentence for one month, enabling him to challenge the order in a higher court.

In the detailed order made available on Thursday, the court said Medha Somaiya is a well qualified and reputed personality and that her image was shattered due the defama-

tion. "She has suffered mental agony." As an MP, a high degree of responsibility is cast upon Raut while expressing himself in public, the court said.

"The accused made statements through the media against the complainant without due care and caution. He, in spite of having knowledge that the complainant can be defamed, has not taken due care and caution and made defamatory statements and published them," court said.



A visitor at the newly opened Paradox Museum in Mumbai on Thursday.

Pic: Bhushan Koyande

## PM's Thane rally to strengthen Shinde

By A Correspondent

**Mumbai:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally in Thane would further strengthen Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, the local BJP leadership feels.

Thane, which was the stronghold of JanSangh since the days of Rambhu Mhalgi, was gradually lost to Shiv Sena over the past three decades. Moreover Shinde was strengthened by the state BJP leadership over past 10 years by choosing to enter into alliance with the Shiv Sena in Thane even while in most of the Municipal Corporation elections including that of Mumbai, the parties had contested independently.

On this backdrop, PM's Thane visit is being carefully watched by the local BJP leadership.

The Prime Minister will visit the city on Saturday, October 5 to launch a slew of infrastructure projects, including the first phase of the underground Metro 3 line. After the inauguration of Metro 3, Modi will go to Thane, where he will address a rally. With this rally, PM Modi will kick off

the Mahayuti's campaign for the Maharashtra Assembly elections. Normally the party's inaugural poll campaign rally takes off from Mumbai. But this time the venue is Shinde's home turf Thane.

Cracks have been appearing within the Mahayuti alliance over various issues for some time and the leaders have been trying to not let them grow deeper ahead of elections. PM Modi's rally in Thane too is likely to be an attempt on this front, though some of the local BJP leaders feel its contrary. The rally shall strengthen Shinde further and he will get all the credit for the Metro 3 line, for which Fadnavis had toiled a lot while he was the Chief Minister, the local leaders feel.

Thane MP Naresh Maske said, "In all there are a lot of projects which will be inaugurated by the Prime Minister Modi. Apart from this foundation stone laying ceremonies will also take place during the visit of the Prime Minister. CM Shinde has invited the Prime Minister to hold the rally in Thane which was accepted by him".

## Businessman jumps to death from Atal Setu

**Mumbai:** A 52-year-old businessman allegedly committed suicide by jumping off the Atal Setu sea bridge police said on Thursday.

The incident took place on Wednesday, the second such suicide on the Atal Setu in three days as a banker had ended his life in a similar manner on

Monday. "The businessman, Philip Shah, ended his life by jumping off the Atal Setu on Wednesday morning. Shah, a resident of Matunga in central Mumbai, drove his sedan car on the Atal Setu, parked it at some point and jumped into the sea." He was rushed to a hospital, but declared dead.

## Slabs collapse, one dead

**Mumbai:** A 36-year-old man died after multiple floor slabs collapsed in a five-storey building in south Mumbai's Grant Road area on Thursday.

A part of the second floor fell on the first floor, while a part of the first floor fell on the ground floor in the incident that took place at United Chambers building.

## 30 booked for protests

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** The Mumbai police have booked nearly 30 persons for holding a candlelight protest march without permission at the city's Govandi area after Israeli strikes killed Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon, an officer said on Thursday.

The protest march took place on Tuesday evening

between Imamwadi and Bainganwadi locality in violation of the prohibitory orders of the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Operations), which were issued on September 12, the official said.

A 36-year-old policeman received on WhatsApp a video of the protest, which showed that slogans were raised in support of Palestine and against Israel, he said. The protesters were also holding posters of Nasrallah during the candlelight march.

The Shivaji Nagar police registered a case on Wednesday evening against seven identified and over 20 unidentified persons under the BNS for "disobedience to order duly promulgated by a public servant" and the Maharashtra Police Act, he said.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Basic amenities are being provided to industries. In the last three months, the state has received Rs 75,000 crore of foreign investments and the state tops in the sector. A big project will soon come to Nashik district."

Uday Samant, Industries Minister



## BMC awaits clearances for Gargai dam

**Kasara:** Almost four years after the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation applied for forest and wildlife clearances for the Gargai dam project, it is still awaiting the final nod.

The project, estimated to cost Rs 3,105 crore and necessary for meeting Mumbai's rising water demand, has received all other approvals, said a BMC official earlier this week.

The forest and wildlife clearances are necessary as a part of the dam would be

located in the Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary in neighbouring Palghar district, he said.

Approvals from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the National Committee of Seismic Dam Safety have already been secured, and remaining clearances are expected in the next few months, the BMC official said. Preparations for floating tenders are also ongoing, he said.

"We submitted applications to the Union forest and wildlife departments in



2020 and replied to their queries. We are hopeful of receiving approvals soon," the official said during a study tour of the Middle Vaitarna dam in Thane district on Wednesday.

The construction of the

Gargai dam is expected to take at least three to four years. Upon completion, it will supply 440 million litres per day (MLD) of water to Mumbai. Currently, the metropolis receives 3,950 MLD water, short of its ac-

tual requirement of 4,463 MLD.

The BMC's Water Supply Projects department estimates that by 2040, the water demand of the country's financial capital will rise to 6,900 MLD. Keeping this in mind, the civic body has planned to construct dams on the Gargai, Pinjal and Daman Ganga rivers, as recommended by the Chitale committee in 1996.

Gargai is a tributary of the Vaitarna river. The BMC last constructed a dam - Middle Vaitarna - on

the Vaitarna in 2014. Located between the Upper Vaitarna and Modak Sagar dams, it supplies 455 MLD of water to the city.

Officials said Gargai dam is an "easily doable" project as it will be just two km away from Modak Sagar, and connected by a tunnel. This connection will do away with the need to lay new pipelines.

Being a water supply project, the Gargai dam does not require environmental clearances, officials claimed.



# Housing sales up 5 pc, office demand grows 18 pc

New Delhi: Housing sales rose 5 per cent while gross office leasing increased 18 per cent annually during July-September across eight major cities as demand stayed strong for premium homes and workspaces, according to Knight Frank.

Real estate consultant Knight Frank India on Thursday released its report 'India Real Estate' for the third quarter of 2024 calendar year through a webinar.

As per the data, housing sales rose 5 per cent during July-September to 87,108 units across eight cities from 82,612 units in the year-ago period. Gross leasing of office space grew 18 per cent to 19 million square feet from 16.1 million square feet, driven by high demand from multinational companies wanting to set up Global Capability Centres (GCCs).

Knight Frank's report shows a modest increase in housing sales during July-September, in a complete contrast to data provided by Anarock and PropEquity which reported a drop in total sales during July-September.

"Momentum in the residential market has trended up well in 2024 with Q3, 2024 recording the highest quarterly sales this year at 87,108 units," Knight Frank said in the report.

Addressing a virtual press conference, Knight Frank India CMD Shishir Bajjal said, the growth in housing sales is driven by demand for premium housing costing above Rs 1 crore each.

"There are concerns in



affordable housing segment," Bajjal said, adding that sales in this category have declined due to availability and affordability challenges.

As per the report, housing sales have grown across all markets except for the Delhi-NCR where sales have dipped by 7 per cent YoY (year-on-year).

The highest sales volumes were recorded in Mumbai at 24,222 units, which is a new high for the market. Sales in Mumbai grew 9 per cent year-on-year.

Among the larger markets, sales grew the most in Bengaluru at 11 per cent YoY with 14,604 units.

Housing sales in Pune were up 1 per cent to 13,200 units, while demand in Hyderabad grew 9 per cent to 9,114 units. Ahmedabad saw a 11 per cent growth in sales to 4,578 units, while Kolkata witnessed a 14 per cent growth in sales to 4,309 units.

Housing sales in Chennai increased 6 per cent to 4,105 units.

However, sales of residential properties in Delhi-NCR declined 7 per cent to 12,976 units during July-September as compared to the year-ago period.

On office demand, Knight Frank said the gross leasing of workspace in Bengaluru jumped more than two-fold to 5.3 million square feet from 2.1 million square feet.

In Delhi-NCR, the office demand grew 26 per cent to 3.2 million square feet from 2.5 million square feet.

The leasing of office space in Chennai increased 35 per cent to 2.6 million square feet from 1.9 million square feet.

Ahmedabad saw a growth of 69 per cent in demand to 0.3 million square feet from 0.2 million square feet.

However, the office demand in Mumbai fell 17 per cent to 2.7 million square feet from 3.2 million square feet. In Pune, the leasing declined 14 per cent to 2.6 million square feet from 3 million square feet.

In Hyderabad, the office demand decreased 26 per

cent to 2.2 million square feet from 2.9 million square feet.

The gross leasing of office space in Kolkata was down 38 per cent to 0.18 million square feet during July-September 2024 from 0.3 million square feet in the year-ago period.

The consultant noted that the GCCs took 7.1 million square feet, the largest share of the transactions pie, accounting for 37 per cent share in the total leasing during July-September quarter of 2024.

"India-facing businesses and GCCs have continued to expand operations, remaining the primary drivers of increased volumes. We expect this trend to continue for the rest of the year, with the possibility of office leasing numbers crossing 70 million sq ft by the end of 2024 -- an astounding 10 million sq ft increase, or a 20 per cent growth over the previous high. This exceptional growth underscores India's position as a thriving global business hub," Bajjal said.

-PTI

## Solapur to cultivate Napier grass

Mumbai: Solapur will cultivate Napier grass across 150 acres of land to ensure stable and reliable feedstock supply for biogas production, said a statement by Organic Recycling Systems Ltd.

The cultivation, in collaboration with appointed farmers and aggregation agencies, will be carried out in compliance with specific energy yield requirements and applicable permits to ensure the successful integration of this renewable resource into the plant's operations.

Organic Recycling which will oversee the entire farming process through its subsidiary - Solapur Bio-Energy Systems Pvt. Ltd, including manpower allocation, equipment provisioning, and resource management such as fertilizers, water, and land optimization, said in its statement. The subsidiary operates 400 tons of municipal waste daily at Solapur since 2013.

The integration of agricultural operations with waste-to-energy facilities offers a comprehensive approach that enhances the efficiency and sustainability of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) to Compressed Biogas (CBG) projects, the statement said.

The project not only mitigates the risks associated with fluctuating feedstock availability but also creates a replicable model that can be adopted by biogas plants throughout the region by securing a consistent source of high-yield biomass.

Napier grass, known for its high biomass yield, is a promising solution to address the fluctuating supply of organic feedstock, which can often hinder the operations of biogas plants.

## INVESTMENT MATTERS

# Which funds outperform when interest rates drop?



By Mangesh Kulkarni

The Federal Reserve has lowered interest rates for the first time in four years. On September 18, the United States central bank announced a 50-basis-point cut in its primary lending rate. Although a decrease in rates was widely expected, the magnitude of the reduction surprised some. This action by one of the world's most influential central banks is expected to have significant effects globally, impacting monetary policies, financial markets, and consumer mortgages and savings rates worldwide. The Federal Reserve's move will also influence the Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) increased the repo rate by 2.5 percent from April 2022 to May 2023. Over the past year, the RBI has maintained the repo rate at a standstill, signaling a low likelihood of an increase in interest rates. Additionally, the central bank's monthly bulletin suggests that India's headline inflation could average 4.5 percent in the latter half of the fiscal year, driven by lower crude oil prices. Taking these factors into account, it's probable that the Reserve Bank of India will initiate a cycle of interest rate cuts starting early 2025. The key question now is how to capitalize on this situation. There are various strategies available, but investing in long-duration debt funds appears to be the most promising due to its favorable risk:reward ratio. During the previous



cycle of rate cuts from August 2018 to May 2020, the Reserve Bank of India reduced the repo rate by 2.5 percent. During this time, long-duration debt funds saw decent returns. There's a direct relationship between the price and yield of a bond. According to Sebi's categorization, there are 16 types of debt mutual funds. As bond yields decrease, bond prices increase, benefiting long-term bond funds the most. Should interest rates fall by 2 to 3 percent over the next 3 to 5 years, it's expected that long-duration debt funds will outperform other debt funds.

| Fund (Regular)                       | NAV (Aug 2018) | NAV (May 2020) | Return (%) |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------|
| ICICI Prudential Long Term Bond Fund | 54.9           | 69.7           | 26.95      |
| Nippon India Nivesh Lakshya Fund     | 10.05          | 13.32          | 32.53      |
| LIC MF Medium to Long Duration Fund  | 47.43          | 57.78          | 21.8       |

## US-India CEO Forum reaffirms commitment

By Lalit K Jha

Washington: The US-India CEO Forum has reaffirmed its commitment to expanding bilateral trade and commerce, driving inclusive economic growth and innovation, and fostering a resilient partnership.

The Forum is co-chaired by US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo and Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal.

The sixth edition of the Forum -- a platform that convenes US and Indian business leaders to develop and provide joint recommendations for strengthening bilateral commercial ties and expand trade and investment between the two countries -- was held in the US capital on Wednesday.

Lockheed Martin CEO and president James Taiclet and Tata Sons chairman N Chandrababu Naidu are the private sector co-chairs for 2023-2024.

During the meeting, Raimondo and Goyal appreciated the recommendations made by the Forum members over the past two years and their respective initiatives.

Goyal said in a post on X,

"Held a productive meeting with US Secretary of Commerce Raimondo over lunch on the sidelines of the India-US CEO Forum. Our discussions focused on prospects of tech and research and development collaboration in critical sectors such as defence, space, semiconductors, telecom, AI (artificial intelligence) and clean energy." "We also discussed opportunities for US investments in upcoming 20 industrial cities in India to foster mutual growth," he added.

The meeting also took stock of the Forum's accomplishments, including the launch of the publicly accessible Network for Innovation and Harnessing Investments and Trade for Inclusive Growth between the United States and India (NIHIT) platform to facilitate online knowledge sharing and networking among US and Indian startups and small businesses.

NIHIT has so far organized four workshops to promote capacity building and skilling in cybersecurity, digital technologies and AI that were attended by more than 1,000 startups, small businesses and entrepreneurs, a press release said.



People walk past the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) building, in Mumbai, Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024. Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty fell over 1.5 per cent on Thursday. BSE Sensex tumbled 1,264.2 points to 83,002.09 in early trade and the NSE Nifty slumped 345.3 points to 25,451.60. Pic: PTI

## Cross-border Electricity Trade

# Nepal, India sign agreement

By Shirish B Pradhan

Kathmandu: Nepal, India and Bangladesh on Thursday signed a tripartite agreement to facilitate cross-border electricity trade, officials here said.

As per the agreement, Nepal will export its surplus electricity to Bangladesh via India from June 15 to November 15 every year. India will make arrangements to supply electricity

from Nepal to Bangladesh. In the first phase, Nepal will export 40 MW of hydro-electricity to Bangladesh via Indian territory.

The rate per unit of electricity has been fixed at 6.4 cents. From the export of electricity, Nepal will make an annual income of around USD9.2 million, Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) officials said.

The MoU was signed in Kathmandu between NEA

Executive Director Kulan Ghising, NTPC Vidyut Byapar Nigam CEO Deino Naran, and Bangladesh Power Development Board Chairman Mohammad Rizwan Karim, Nepal's Ministry of Energy officials said.

Nepal's Energy Minister Dipak Khadka and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sayeda Rijwana Hasan were also present on the occasion, the officials said.

## Swaraj launches compact tractor

New Delhi: Mahindra Group's Swaraj Tractors on Thursday unveiled its new Target 625 tractor model, available in both two-wheel and four-wheel drive variants, as the company seeks to expand its footprint in the country's competitive agricultural machinery market.

The new model, featuring an 83.1 Nm torque diesel engine and adjustable track widths, aims to cater to farmers looking to adopt modern farming techniques while navigating narrow field spaces, the company said in a statement.

Key features include a lifting capacity of 980 kg-Power take-off (PTO) output of 14.09 kW, constant mesh transmission, and digital instrument cluster.

The Target 625 model is equipped with "Max-Cool Radiator" technology, designed to prevent overheating during extended operations, a common concern in the country's agricultural conditions.

The domestic tractor market has seen growing demand for compact models that can handle diverse agricultural operations while minimizing crop damage during in-field movements.

## Adani's clean energy to power Google cloud

New Delhi: Billionaire Gautam Adani's group will supply clean energy to power Google's cloud services and operations in India, the two firms said on Thursday.

Adani group will supply 61.4 megawatt of electricity from a new solar-wind hybrid project located at its 30 gigawatt (GW) Khavda renewable energy park in Gujarat.

Google powers most of its cloud operations and services through electricity procured from the grid and is planning to run the entire operations on clean energy by 2030.

Adani is expected to start commercial operations in the third quarter of 2025.

At the 'Google for India' event, the search giant also announced a partnership with CleanMax for sourcing 125.4 MW of clean energy to power its offices and cloud regions in India.

Of the contracted volumes, 66 MW solar energy will come from Rajasthan and 59.4 MW wind energy from Karnataka.

"These projects are expected to start commercial operations in Q4 2025 and will deliver carbon-free energy to the grid where



Google operates offices and cloud regions in India," Google said.

While Google made the announcement at the 'Google for India' event here, the Adani Group gave details in a statement.

"Through this partnership Adani will supply clean energy from a new solar-wind hybrid project located in the world's largest renewable energy plant at Khavda, Gujarat. This new project is expected to start commercial operations in the third quarter of 2025," the Adani group statement said.

This innovative collaboration will help advance Google's 24/7 carbon-free energy goal by ensuring cloud services and operations in India are supported by clean energy and thereby contribute to the sustainable growth of Google in India.

## AKD faces uphill battle to revive Sri Lankan economy

By Thiruni Kelegama

London: September 21 was a day of many firsts in Sri Lanka. Millions of people went to the polls to vote in the first presidential elections since mass protests forced the country's last elected president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, from office in 2022.

It also marked the first time in Sri Lanka's history that a second round of counting had to take place, after none of the candidates secured the 50% margin required for victory.

A count of the second-choice votes revealed the biggest shock in decades. In Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Sri Lankans for the first time elected a candidate who does not belong to the two major parties that have dominated the country's politics



since independence in 1948.

Dissanayake leads the National People's Power alliance (NPP), which includes his Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) -- a party known for its leftist policies.

Soon after being sworn in as president, Dissanayake appointed an interim cabinet of three ministers. This included academic,

feminist and human rights activist Harini Amarasuriya, who was selected as the third female prime minister in Sri Lanka's history. He then dissolved the 225-member parliament in which his NPP alliance had only three seats and announced that a parliamentary election would be held on November 14. Dissanayake has said previously that there was "no point continuing with parliament that is not in line with what the people want".

Dissanayake has a daunting task ahead of him. Sri Lanka defaulted on its debt and suspended payments on around US\$78 billion (£59 billion) in foreign and domestic loans in 2022, which triggered the worst economic crisis in the country's history.

And, while no longer on the brink of collapse, the economy is still in a precarious

state. So how will Dissanayake revive Sri Lanka's struggling economy and, perhaps more importantly, will he be able to?

A key challenge facing Dissanayake is managing the terms of a US\$2.9 billion bailout loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which was based on an analysis that presented an overly optimistic outlook for economic growth.

What next?

One of Wickremesinghe's final acts in office was to announce that a draft deal had been reached with international bondholders -- who are owed US\$12.5 billion -- to restructure some of the country's external debt. The deal involves issuing new bonds that would track the country's economic recovery.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Google believes in regulations. We believe that technology should be regulated and regulated well, because it is nuanced. We believe AI should be regulated in a way that takes care of the user benefit. At the same time innovation should thrive, so it is a balance that needs to be struck."



Roma Datta Chobey, India MD, Google



Isha Yoga Centre

# Woman refutes father's charge

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court on Thursday permitted the father of the two women to appear before it through video-conferencing if he wishes to interact with the court in person or through counsel.

"The police shall not take any further action in pursuance of the directions issued in paragraph four of the impugned order dated September 30, 2024, save and except for the submission of the status report to this court," the bench said. "The status report, which was directed by the high court to be filed by the police, shall be submitted before this court," it said and posted the matter for further hearing on October 18.

The bench noted that during the course of interaction with the two women, both the individuals have stated that they joined the ashram at the age of 24 and 27 years respectively.

It said text of the high court's order indicated that they are presently 42 and 39 years old respectively. The bench noted the two women have stated that they are free to travel outside the ashram, which they had done from time to time and their parents have also visited there to meet them.

It further noted that one of the two individuals has stated that she had also participated in a marathon held at Hyderabad.

The apex court noted it was submitted before it



The bench was informed that the two women were present in the court through video-conferencing.

The bench briefly interacted with one of the women in the open court and asked, "You are aware of the fact that your father has filed a habeas corpus petition?"

The women responded, "Yes. We had appeared in the high court for the same and we had explained that we are here at Isha Yoga Centre by our own will."

The judges, who said they would interact with both of them in-chambers, went into their chambers and assembled for the hearing after few minutes. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who appeared for the Centre, said the high court should have been "very circumspect".

The high court had on September 30 passed an interim order on a habeas corpus petition filed by Dr S Kamaraj, who sought a direction to the police to produce his two daughters, whom he alleged were held captive inside the Isha Foundation before the court and set them at liberty.

The petitioner was a retired professor from the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore. He has two daughters and both had masters in Engineering. Both of them joined the Isha Foundation.

## Woman tries to meet PM, removed

**Hazaribag (Jharkhand):** A woman attempted to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his rally in Jharkhand's Hazaribag to press for her demands, but was removed by security personnel and BJP volunteers, police said.

The incident occurred when Modi was addressing a gathering during the concluding function of saffron party's 'Parivartan Yatra' at Gandhi Maidan here.

In a purported video which went viral, she was seen standing on a box close to the stage and trying to wrap her dupatta around her neck while the BJP volunteers as well as security personnel brought her down.

While a scuffle was on between the sides, the Prime Minister's address was heard in the video clip.

Superintendent of Police Arvind Kumar Singh said that the woman wanted to handover a memorandum to the Prime Minister by herself, but security personnel did not allow her. Singh, however, denied that she was wrapping the dupatta around her neck. Earlier, the woman was seen holding a hand-written poster, in which she demanded, among others, a veterinary hospital at Domchanch in the state's Koderma district and installation of street lights.

In the poster, she identified herself as Kusum Sahu, a resident of Domchanch, and claimed that she reached the venue on foot from Koderma. Deputy Inspector General Sunil Bhaskar said that the entire area was barricaded and covered with full security so that nobody could reach the Prime Minister.



Farmers block a railway track during a protest demanding justice for the victims of the Lakhimpur Kheri incident, in Amritsar.

## Sonam Wangchuk released, HC told

**New Delhi:** Solicitor General Tushar Mehta on Thursday told the Delhi High Court that climate activist Sonam Wangchuk and his associates have been released from detention.

The senior law officer also said that the Delhi Police order prohibiting assembly and protests in various parts of Delhi has also been withdrawn.

Mehta made the statement before a bench of Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela.

The bench was hearing petitions seeking the release of Wangchuk and his associates as well challenging the prohibitory order.

Around 120 people from Ladakh, including Wangchuk, were allegedly detained at the Delhi border by police on Monday night while marching to the capital to demand the inclusion of Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The Sixth Schedule pertains to the administration of tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram as "autonomous districts and autonomous regions".

Wangchuk was leading the march, 'Delhi Chalo Padyatra', which began from Leh a month ago.

"The (prohibitory) order which was passed on September 30 now stands withdrawn in view of changed

circumstances as they exist now. So far as persons who were allegedly detained, it was not detention in that sense, but they are also out," the solicitor general (SG) said.

"They visited Rajghat (yesterday). They were there for about two hours. They gave some memorandum which was accepted by the Ministry of Home Affairs. They have also left," he added.

The court closed the proceedings on the petitions by social activist Azad, who said he worked closely with Wangchuk, and lawyer Mustafa Haji, the legal advisor to the Leh Apex Body, after their lawyers also admitted to the release.

## RJD leader on morning walk shot

**Munger (Bihar):** An RJD leader was injured on Thursday in Bihar's Munger district when unidentified gunmen fired at him while he was on a morning walk, a police official said.

The attack on Pankaj Yadav, a state general secretary of the RJD, took place in Safiabad locality.

Yadav, who received bullet injuries in his chest, was taken to a private nursing home where his condition was stated to be out of danger, Deputy Superintendent of Police (Sadar) Rajesh Kumar said.

-PTI

## Baba Ram Rahim out on parole

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

During his temporary release period, Singh will stay at the Dera ashram in Barnawa in Uttar Pradesh's Baghpat.

He came out of jail un-



der tight security this morning after his release on parole, an official said.

The Haryana government has granted a 20-day parole to Singh while barring him from taking part in election-related activities, making speeches and staying in the state during the period.

Singh is serving a 20-year sentence given in 2017 for raping two of his disciples. The Dera chief and three others were also convicted in 2019 for the murder of a journalist over 16

years ago. He had sought a 20-day parole which came days ahead of the October 5 Haryana Assembly polls.

Singh had said that he wanted to stay in Baghpat during the parole if granted.

The jail department had recently forwarded the Dera chief's parole plea to the office of the Haryana Chief Electoral Officer in view of the Model Code being in place for the assembly polls.

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

In the past, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) have questioned "repeated" paroles granted to the Dera chief, saying "justice" was denied to "Bandi Singhs" (Sikh prisoners), who they claim were in jails even after completion of their sentences.

-PTI



Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel after the inauguration of a vegetable market constructed by Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation in Ahmedabad.

## Sai Baba statues row: outfit chief detained

**Varanasi:** The head of a local outfit, which was running a campaign for removal of statues of Sai Baba from temples here, has been detained for breach of peace, police said on Thursday.

Ajay Sharma, the chief of Sanatan Rakshak Dal, was detained on Wednesday night after his outfit removed Sai Baba statues from many temples here on Tuesday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police, Gaurav Banswal said Sharma has been detained on charges of breach of peace on Wednesday night

and his family has been informed.

Sharma had on Wednesday said they have removed Sai Baba's idol from 14 temples so far, including the idol of Sai Baba at the Bada Ganesh temple in Lohatia. Sai Baba's idol will be removed from 50 more temples, he had said.

A number of devotees of Sai Baba have objected to the move and expressed concern over the security of his temples. A meeting of managers of Sai Baba temples was also held here on Wednesday in which it was

decided to approach the police commissioner against those trying to vitiate the atmosphere. Sharma had said that only the worship of Lord Shiva, the supreme deity, should take place in Kashi (Varanasi).

On its website, the Shree Saibaba Sansthan Trust, Shirdi, states that Sai Baba is revered as one of the greatest saints ever seen in India, endowed with unprecedented powers, and is worshipped as a God incarnate. (SAI meaning Sakshaat Ishwar) (God the absolute).

-PTI

## BJP slams Cong over Savarkar remarks

**New Delhi:** The BJP on Thursday played the Congress over Karnataka Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao's controversial remarks about Swatantryaveer Savarkar saying the revolutionary freedom fighter is insulted by the party whose leaders never ever faced imprisonment at cellular jail in Andaman-Nicobar Islands by the British.

The BJP's reaction came after Rao, while addressing an event in Bengaluru,



Dinesh Gundu Rao claimed that Savarkar used to eat meat and was not against cow slaughter. He also said that Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, was not a fundamentalist but

Savarkar was. "The party whose none of the leaders ever suffered 'kala pani ki saja' even for one day is insulting the person who was handed down double life imprisonment at cellular jail in Andaman-Nicobar Islands," BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh told PTI.

Rao's statement is "unfortunate, insulting and highly condemnable," he said.

-PTI

## Man arrested for threatening doctor

**Kolkata:** Kolkata Police on Wednesday arrested one person for allegedly threatening and abusing a doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, which has been the cradle of protests over the rape and murder of a medic, over disagreements regarding the treatment of a patient, officials said.

According to police sources, a complaint was lodged on Wednesday afternoon by a doctor at RG Kar Hospital against a person who came with his relative to the hospital's trauma unit for treatment.

## UP to set digital Kumbh Museum

**Lucknow:** The Uttar Pradesh government is set to build a 'Digital Kumbh Museum' in Prayagraj ahead of the Mahakumbh next year, a minister said on Thursday.

The Tourism Department will establish the museum for the devotees to digitally experience the 'Samudra Manthan' and learn about Kumbh, Mahakumbh, and other spiritual landmarks, Tourism Minister Jaiveer Singh said.

The museum is slated to come up on Arail Road Naini near Shivalaya Park

in Prayagraj. The building, spread over an area of 10,000 square meters, will accommodate 2,000 to 2,500 visitors at a time. The total cost of the project is estimated at Rs 21.38 crore project, Rs 6 crore of which has already been disbursed, he said. A gallery showcasing the 14 gems of Samudra Manthan will be created in the museum, he said. The museum will carry information Prayagraj Mahakumbh, Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain Kumbh, he said.

-PTI

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Syama Prasad Mookerjee was an educationist, he was a scholar. But as far as his politics and ideology are concerned, he was a very communal leader. He is known as the divider of Bengal."



Chandra Bose, grandnephew of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose

## Books on Ambedkar in NIF prize shortlist

**New Delhi:** A diverse range of books that explore the lives of Indian leaders like BR Ambedkar and Sheikh Abdullah as well as the Dom community of Varanasi has made it to the shortlist for the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay NIF Book Prize.

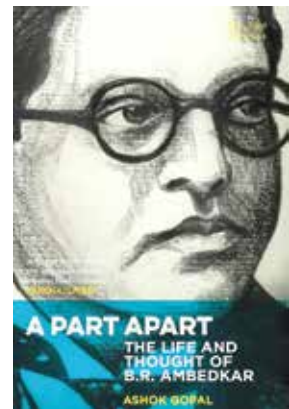
The New India Foundation on Thursday announced the shortlist for the seventh iteration of the reputed prize that recognises "the finest non-fiction writing about the history of Independent India".

From a longlist of 10, which pointed to the complex dynamics of post-independence India as shaping India today, five books have been chosen "for their thoughtful synthesis of history and contemporary relevance".

The shortlist for the book prize includes Neeraj Choudhry's "How Prime Ministers Decide", Ashok Gopal's "A Part Apart: The Life and Thought of B.R. Ambedkar", and Radhika Iyengar's "Fire on the Ganges: Life Among the Dead in Banaras".

(HarperCollins) "H-Pop: The Secretive World of Hindutva Pop Stars" by Kunal Purohit and "Sheikh Abdullah: The Caged Lion of Kashmir" by Chitralekha Zutshi have also made it to the list.

The shortlist was selected by a jury, including political scientist Niraja Gopal Jayal (chair of the book prize), historian Srinath Raghavan, entrepreneur Manish Sabharwal, former diplomat and author Navtej Sarna, lawyer Rahul Matthan, and public



policy researcher Yamini Aiyar. "From the critical deci-

sions made by Prime Ministers and state political leaders, to the life and legacy of B.R. Ambedkar, from the cultural and social dimensions of Hindutva pop music to the complex tapestry of life and death in Banaras - these books offer a compelling exploration of the nation's evolving history.

"Together, they deepen our understanding of India's past and present by illuminating histories that continue to influence the country's future," the jury said in a statement.

The book prize celebrates excellence in non-fiction about India published in the previous calendar year by writers of all nationalities.

Established in 2018, the book prize, which commemorates the freedom fighter and social reformer, carries a cash award of Rs 15 lakhs and a citation. Last year, Akshaya Mukul was awarded the book prize for his biography of Indian writer and poet Agyeya. "Writer, Rebel, Soldier, Lover: The Many Lives of Agyeya".



# Hurricane Hazards....



Dark clouds hover in the sky over New Taipei on Monday evening as Typhoon Krathon neared Taiwan.  
Pic: PTI



In this image taken with a drone Sand washed ashore by the surge from Hurricane Helene fills the streets in Treasure Island on Wednesday.  
Pic: PTI

## Fear of Water Scarcity in Navi Mumbai

# Consultant to search for new sources

By Correspondent

**Thane:** The Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) has appointed a consultant to explore new sources of water to cater to the needs of the city in view of its increasing population, officials said.

An expert committee, led by Navi Mumbai Municipal Commissioner Kailas Shinde, has also been set up to investigate viable options to enhance

the city's water availability, the civic body said in a release.

In response to the rapid development and anticipated population growth in Navi Mumbai, the municipal corporation has commenced planning to ensure an adequate water supply. The commissioner has forwarded proposals to the Konkan Irrigation Development Corporation to address the city's



increasing water needs, it said.

At present, Navi Mumbai receives approximately 450 million litres of water daily from

the Morbe dam located near Khalapur in Raigad district.

However, as several big-ticket infrastructural projects are underway, including the Navi Mumbai international airport, and various mass housing schemes, the existing water supply is likely to prove insufficient for the population that is expected to reach 4.42 million by 2055, the release said.

Recognising the urgency

of the situation, the NMMC has appointed a preliminary consultant to explore new water sources. A tender was issued to select the consultant to address complex challenges associated with implementing new water resource projects. This will include conducting environmental studies, feasibility assessments, and legal and financial investigations, the release added.

An expert committee, led by Commissioner Shinde, has been established to investigate viable options for enhancing the city's water supply. One key recommendation includes utilising wastewater from the Patalganga river and from the Tata Power Generation Station at Bhira, which could help supplement the city's water requirements, it added.

## Hurricane Kirk strengthens

**Miami:** Hurricane Kirk strengthened into a Category 3 storm in the Atlantic Ocean on Wednesday and was expected to grow rapidly into a major hurricane, forecasters said.

There were no coastal watches or warnings in effect, and the storm system was not yet deemed a threat to land.

Kirk reached Category 3 status on Wednesday, the Miami-based US National Hurricane Center said. The storm was about 1,855

kilometres east-northeast of the Lesser Antilles with maximum sustained winds of 195 kilometres per hour.

It was moving northwest at 19 kilometres per hour. A gradual turn toward north-northwest and northward was expected this week. Swells generated by the storm could affect portions of the Leeward Islands and Bermuda by the weekend, likely causing "life-threatening" surf and rip current conditions, the center said.

## Ayush Ministry organises cleanliness campaign

**New Delhi:** The Ayush Ministry marked the culmination of the "Swachhata Hi Seva" campaign on Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary on Wednesday by organising 670 cleanliness activities and reaffirming its commitment to the Swachh Bharat mission.

The ministry, in a statement, said 351 "Swachhata Mein Jan

Bhagidari" activities, 201 Safai Mitra Suraksha camps, and 118 comprehensive cleanliness programmes were organized across the country.

Inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visionary initiative, the campaign highlighted the importance of cleanliness, it stated.

Union Minister of State

(Independent Charge) for Ayush, Prataprao Jadhav, lauded the ministry's efforts in making the campaign a success.

"I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the entire team of the Ayush Ministry for their dedication to making the 'Swachhata Hi Seva' campaign successful.

Together, we have contributed towards fulfilling the vision of our Prime Minister for a clean and hygienic India," he said.

The Housing and Urban Affairs and Jal Shakti ministries must be praised for their hard work and commitment towards ensuring this campaign's success under the prime minister's leadership and bringing a significant improvement in the people's health and wellbeing, the Ayush ministry said.  
-PTI



People watch a total solar eclipse in Tahai Rapa Nui or Easter Island, Chile on Wednesday.  
Pic: PTI

## Typhoon Krathon makes landfall on Taiwan

**Kaohsiung:** Typhoon Krathon made landfall on Siaogang District in the major port city of Kaohsiung, according to Taiwan's weather authorities.

Kaohsiung earlier urged its residents to take cover from potentially disastrous winds. The typhoon packs maximum sustained winds of 126 kph (78 mph) near its center, with gusts of 162 kph (101 mph).

The slow-moving typhoon has doused eastern and southern parts of the island over the past five days, forcing thousands to evacuate from mountainous or low-lying areas. Schools and government offices have been shut around the island for two days, and all domestic flights have been cancelled.  
-AP

# Downed power lines caused Maui wildfire that killed 102

**Honolulu:** The wildfire that killed at least 102 people on Maui last year erupted from an earlier brushfire caused by downed power lines that firefighters believed they had extinguished, officials confirmed on Wednesday as they presented their findings on the cause of the tragedy.

The August 8, 2023, blaze -- the deadliest US wildfire in more than a century -- was long known to have emerged in the afternoon, in the same area as the blaze that began early that morning.

Driven by strong, erratic winds, the fire raced through the historic town of Lahaina, destroying thousands of buildings, overcoming people trapped in their cars and forcing some residents to flee into the ocean.

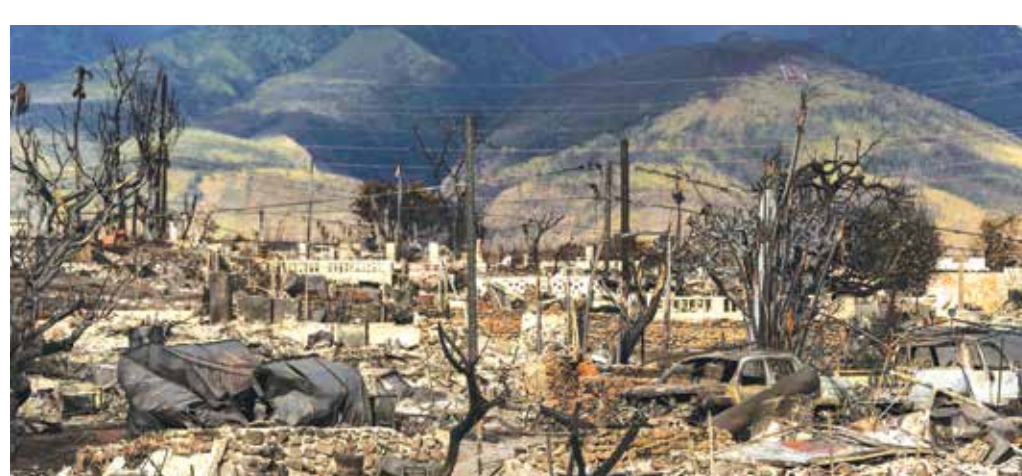
It has been unclear whether the blaze was a rekindling of

the morning fire after firefighters spent hours dousing it or a separate one. The answer could prove significant to questions about liability for the destruction, though a tentative USD 4 billion settlement has been reached.

In presenting their findings, officials with the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Maui Fire Department did not address liability, but found that it was a rekindling of the morning fire.

The rekindling was most likely caused by high winds that blew undetected embers into the dry gully, they said.

A Hawaiian Electric power line fell early on the morning of August 8, sparking a fire in overgrown brush near the edge of town. Fire crews responded and stayed for several hours until they believed the fire was



extinguished. After they left, flames were spotted again and though firefighters rushed back, they were no match for the wind and flames.

Communication between the police and fire departments was spotty, mobile phone networks were down and emer-

gency officials did not activate the emergency sirens that might have warned residents to evacuate.

Power lines and poles had fallen in many locations throughout town, and police blocked some roads to protect residents from potentially dan-

gerous power lines. First responders also had trouble getting a firm answer from Hawaiian Electric representatives if the power had been cut to the area.

The blocked roads contributed to gridlock that left fleeing people trapped in their cars as

the flames advanced. Others died in their homes or outside as they tried to escape.

The death toll surpassed that of the 2018 Camp Fire in northern California, which left 85 dead and destroyed the town of Paradise.

In the months since, thousands of Lahaina residents have sued various parties they believe to be at fault for the fire, including Hawaiian Electric, Maui County and the state of Hawaii. The defendants have often tried to point fingers at each other, with Hawaiian Electric saying the county shouldn't have left the first fire unattended, and Maui County contending the electric utility failed to take proper care with the power grid.

Exactly who was responsible for clearing brush and maintaining the area has also been a point of contention among the

defendants, along with the utility's lack of a public safety power shut-off programme.

A few days before the one-year anniversary of the wildfires, Hawaii Governor Josh Green announced a USD 4 billion settlement. That's the amount the defendants -- including Hawaiian Electric, the state, Maui County, large landowners and others -- have agreed to pay to settle claims.

But the deal is tied up in court, awaiting a decision from Hawaii Supreme Court on whether insurance companies can go after the defendants separately to recoup what they've paid to policyholders.

Lawyers for people seeking compensation fear allowing insurance companies to sue Hawaiian Electric and others will subvert the deal, drain what is available to pay fire victims and lead to prolonged litigation.



# Rare Israeli strike in central Beirut kills seven

**Beirut:** An Israeli airstrike on an apartment in central Beirut killed seven Hezbollah-affiliated civilian first responders. Israel has been pounding areas of the country where the militant group has a strong presence since late September, but has rarely struck in the heart of the capital.

There was no warning before the strike late Wednesday, which hit an apartment in central Beirut not far from the United Nations headquarters, the prime minister's office and parliament. Hezbollah's civil defence unit said seven of its members were killed.

In a separate development, the Israeli military ordered the evacuation of villages and towns in southern Lebanon that are north of a United Nations-declared buffer zone established after the 2006 war. The warnings issued Thursday signalled a possible broadening of Israel's incursion into southern Lebanon, which until now has been confined to areas close to the border.

At least eight Israeli soldiers were killed in clashes with Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, where Israel announced the start of what it says is a limited ground incursion earlier this week. The region was bracing for Israeli retaliation following an Iranian ballistic missile attack.

Residents reported a sulfur-like smell following a strike in Beirut, and Lebanon's state-run National News Agency accused Israel of using phosphorous bombs, without providing evidence. Human rights groups have in the past accused Israel of using white phosphorous incendiary shells on towns and villages in southern Lebanon. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Hezbollah has an armed wing with tens of thousands of fighters but it also has a political movement and a network of charities staffed by civilians.

## Houthi rebels launch drones

In a separate development, Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen said they had launched two drones at Tel Aviv overnight. The military said it identified two drones off the coast of the bustling metropolitan area, shoot-



## Four Iraqi soldiers killed

**Baghdad:** Four Iraqi troops were killed Wednesday and several wounded in an ambush by the extremist Islamic State group, Iraq's Interior Ministry said. The attack came days after the US military announced that troops from its coalition against IS in Iraq and Syria will withdraw from Iraqi territory next year but maintain a presence in Syria until 2026. Despite IS losing its so-called caliphate where it controlled large swaths of land in Iraq and eastern Syria in 2019, it continues to launch attacks through its scattered cells, which this year have nearly doubled, and tries to recruit more people. According to CENTCOM, IS claimed 153 attacks in the two countries in the first six months of 2024.

ing one of them down while the other fell in the Mediterranean Sea.

The escalating violence in Lebanon has opened a second front in the war between Israel and Iran-backed militants that began nearly a year ago with Hamas' surprise Oct 7 attack from the Gaza Strip into Israel.

The Israeli military said Thursday that it killed a senior Hamas leader in an airstrike in the Gaza Strip around three months ago. It said that a strike on an underground compound in northern Gaza killed Rawhi Mushta-

ha and two other Hamas commanders.

In recent weeks, Israeli strikes in Lebanon have killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and several of his top commanders. Hundreds more airstrikes across large parts of Lebanon since mid-September have killed at least 1,276 people, according to Lebanon's Health Ministry.

## Israel struck 200 targets

The Israeli military said Thursday that it had struck around 200 Hez-

## India concerned over tensions in West Asia

**New Delhi:** India on Wednesday expressed deep concern over the escalation of the security situation in West Asia and said the conflict must not take a wider regional dimension even as it advised its nationals to avoid all non-essential travel to Iran. "We are deeply concerned at the escalation of the security situation in West Asia and reiterate our call for restraint by all concerned and protection of civilians," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. "It is important that the conflict doesn't take a wider regional dimension and we urge that all issues be addressed through dialogue and diplomacy," it said in a statement.

lah targets across Lebanon, including weapons storage facilities and observation posts. It said the strikes killed at least 15 Hezbollah fighters. There was no independent confirmation.

Hundreds of thousands of people have fled their homes, as Israel has warned people to evacuate from around 50 villages and towns in the south, telling them to relocate to areas that are around 60 km (36 miles) from the border and considerably farther north than an UN-declared buffer zone.

## Four medics wounded

**Beirut:** The Lebanese Red Cross said an Israeli strike wounded four of its paramedics and killed a Lebanese army soldier as they were evacuating wounded people from the south. It said the convoy near the village of Taybeh, which was accompanied by Lebanese troops, was targeted Thursday despite coordinating its movements with UN peacekeepers.

## Biden won't support attack on Iran's nuclear sites

**US President Joe Biden says he will not support an Israeli attack on sites related to Tehran's nuclear programme. "The answer is no," Biden said Wednesday, when asked if he would support such retaliation after Iran fired about 180 missiles at Israel on Tuesday. Biden's comments came after he and fellow Group of Seven leaders spoke by phone on Wednesday to discuss coordinating new sanctions against Iran. The White House said in a statement that the G7 leaders "unequivocally condemned Iran's attack against Israel" and Biden reiterated the United States' "full solidarity and support to Israel and its people." All the while, the administration has signalled that it's urging that Israel display restraint."**

ried out strikes in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, and a strike in central Beirut earlier this week killed three Palestinian militants.

**Axis of Resistance** Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthis are part of the Iran-led Axis of Resistance, which also includes armed groups in Syria and Iraq. They have launched attacks on Israel in solidarity with the Palestinians, drawing retaliation in a cycle that has repeatedly threatened to set off a wider war.

# CIA makes it easier for informants

**Washington:** The CIA wants to make it easier -- and safer -- for people in Iran, China and North Korea to share information with the US's premier spy agency.

The agency on Wednesday posted online instructions in Korean, Mandarin and Farsi detailing steps that potential informants can take to contact US intelligence officials without putting themselves in danger.

The instructions include ways to reach the CIA on its public website or on the darknet, a part of the Internet that can only be accessed using special tools designed to hide the user's identity. The CIA posted similar instructions in Russian two years ago following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"People are trying to reach out to us from around the world and we are offering them instructions for how to do that safely," the agency said in a statement. "Our efforts on this front have been successful in Russia, and we want to make sure individuals in other authoritarian regimes know that we're open for business."

The tips, presented in text-only videos and infographics, include using a virtual private network, or VPN, to circumvent Internet restrictions and surveillance, and the use of a device that can't easily be traced back to the user.

The CIA also urged any potential informants to use private web browsers and to delete their Internet history to cover their tracks.

The messages in the three languages were posted on Telegram, YouTube, X, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. Several of those platforms are blocked in China, Iran and Russia but can still be accessed using a VPN.

Authoritarian leaders around the world have used the Internet as a tool of mass surveillance and as a way to deliver propaganda and disinformation while blocking sites and views deemed unfavourable to the government. China, Russia, North Korea and Iran all block access to US platforms like Facebook, for example, and use web access to control what sources of information users can access. AP



**Demonstrators march to Congress for increased funding for public universities in Buenos Aires Argentina on Wednesday.**

Pic: AP/PTI

# Alcohol poisoning kills dozens

**Tehran:** At least 26 people died in Iran after drinking alcoholic beverages that contained toxic methanol in recent days, state media said.

The official IRNA news agency reported late Wednesday that toxic methanol had killed men and women in various cities

and towns in the northern provinces of Mazandaran and Gilan and the western province of Hamadan.

Alcohol poisoning also led to hundreds of hospitalisations, IRNA said.

The source of the alcoholic beverages was not clear in the reports.

The consumption of al-

cohol has been generally prohibited in Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution brought hardline Islamists to power. Many Iranians buy alcoholic drinks from bootleggers who make them secretly. Some people also make alcohol at home for personal consumption. Methanol can contaminate

traditionally fermented alcohol.

Alcohol poisonings have skyrocketed in Iran in recent years. In 2020, toxic alcohol killed more than 700 people in the country.

Both imported and locally made alcoholic beverages are available on the country's black markets.

## Georgian anti-LGBTQ law

# President refuses, Speaker accepts

**Tbilisi (Georgia):** The speaker of the Georgian parliament signed into a law Thursday a bill that severely curtails LGBTQ+ rights in the country and mirrors legislation adopted in neighbouring Russia.

Shalva Papuashvili, the parliament speaker, said on social media that the legislation does "not reflect current, temporary, changing ideas and ideologies, but is based on common sense, historical experience and centuries-old Christian, Georgian and European values".

Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili had refused to sign the bill and returned it to parliament on Wednesday. It was introduced by the governing Georgian Dream party and approved by lawmakers last month.

The bill includes bans on same-sex marriages, adoptions by same-sex couples and public endorsement and depictions of LGBTQ+ relations and people in the media. It also bans gender-affirming care and changing gender designations in official documents.

"This law protects the

rights of all citizens, including freedom of expression, so that the rights of others are not violated, which is the essence and idea of true democracy," Papuashvili wrote.

Parliament gave the legislation its final approval as Georgia, a largely conservative country where the Orthodox Church wields significant influence, prepares to vote in a parliamentary election. The law has been widely seen as an effort by the governing party to shore up support among conservative groups. It was decried by human rights advocates and LGBTQ+ activists, who said it further marginalised an already vulnerable community.

The law has drawn comparisons with Russia, where the Kremlin has been highlighting what it calls traditional family values. Russian authorities in the last decade have banned public endorsement of "nontraditional sexual relations" and introduced laws against gender-affirming care, among other measures. AP

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

**"From Ukraine to Sudan, the Middle East and far beyond, war is creating a hellscape of destruction, destitution and fear. Inequality and climate chaos are undermining the foundations of peace. And hate whipped up online is spilling over onto the streets."**



**Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General, UN**

# UK hands over sovereignty of Chagos Islands to Mauritius

**London:** Britain's government said Thursday it agreed to hand sovereignty of the long-contested Chagos Islands, an archipelago of more than 60 islands in the Indian Ocean, to Mauritius, in a deal that secures the future of a strategically important UK-US military base there.

British Foreign Secretary David Lammy said the agreement secures the vital military base at Diego Garcia, the largest in the chain of islands, for the future.

The UK government said without the deal the secure

operation of the military base would be under threat, with contested sovereignty and legal challenges, including through various international courts and tribunals. As part of the deal, the UK will retain sovereignty of Diego Garcia for an initial period of 99 years.

"It will strengthen our role in safeguarding global security, shut down any possibility of the Indian Ocean being used as a dangerous illegal migration route to the UK, as well as guaranteeing our long-



**Around 1,500 inhabitants from the Chagos Islands were displaced to make way for the US base.**

term relationship with Mauritius, a close Com-

monwealth partner," Lammy said.

The deal was strongly supported by international partners including the US, British officials said.

The agreement will have to be signed off in a treaty and is dependent on legal processes being finalized. Both sides have committed to complete this as quickly as possible.

The Chagos Islands have been at the heart of what Britain calls the British Indian Ocean Territory since 1965 when they were siphoned away from Mauritius, a UK territory that gained independence three

years later.

The US Navy base at Diego Garcia was built in the 1970s and provides what American authorities have described as "an all but indispensable platform" for security operations in the Middle East, South Asia and East Africa.

In a statement, the White House said President Joe Biden applauded the "historic agreement" on the status of the Chagos Islands. It called the Diego Garcia base vital in preserving "national, regional, and global security".



EDITORIAL

Sacred Cows

In a canny move that melds agriculture and electoral strategy, the Maharashtra government recently elevated indigenous cow breeds to the status of 'Rajyamata-Gomata' (state mother cow). The decision, announced by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's cabinet, comes just ahead of the Maharashtra Assembly election. While the state's indigenous cows are undeniably important to local agriculture and culture, the political significance of the move is unmistakable.

The government's decision is deeply symbolic. In Hinduism, the cow holds a revered position, often seen as a symbol of motherhood and fertility. Its utility, from milk to dung, has been woven into the fabric of Indian life for centuries. In granting 'Rajyamata-Gomata' status, the Shinde-BJP-NCP Mahayuti coalition is not just recognizing the cow's place in culture but also seeking to project itself as a guardian of traditional values, particularly in rural Maharashtra.

Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis has framed the decision as a boon for farmers, with promises of financial support for cow shelters and efforts to boost the breeding of native cows. The Mahayuti is clearly hoping to solidify its support among voters in the rural hinterland and the conservative-minded electorate. The cow, after all, has long been a potent emblem in political discourse, and tapping into this symbolism can pay electoral dividends. For many farmers, especially in Marathwada and northern Maharashtra, where breeds such as Deoni and Dangi are native, the cow is more than a livestock animal - it is a cultural anchor. These areas are crucial battlegrounds in the upcoming election, and the move aims to resonate with voters who hold traditional symbols dear.

This decision also highlights a broader trend in Indian politics, where cultural nationalism is increasingly leveraged to consolidate support. The invocation of Vedic traditions and Ayurveda, as emphasized in the government's resolution, seeks to reinforce a narrative of returning to India's roots. Ayurvedic practices, such as the use of 'Panchgavya' and organic farming, are positioned as part of a broader revival of indigenous knowledge. However, beneath this celebration of tradition lies a more immediate concern for the government: retaining power in a state, especially after the Mahayuti's dismal performance in the Lok Sabha election. Given the formidable challenge from the opposition MVA coalition, by championing the cause of indigenous cows, the Shinde government is aiming to shore up its rural base and appeal to Hindu sentiments. While the move may galvanize the rural electorate, it could also alienate urban voters who are less swayed by such symbolism. Maharashtra's urban centers, which are crucial to any party's electoral fortunes, may see this as a diversion from more pressing concerns such as economic recovery, infrastructure development and unemployment. Government will need to balance its cultural messaging with tangible economic policies to avoid being perceived as out of touch with urban aspirations.

NATIONAL INTEREST

Manipulating Gandhi: A History of Misrepresentation



By Kiran D. Tare

Few historical figures command the universal reverence that Mahatma Gandhi does. His enduring legacy of non-violence, justice, and social equity continues to shape political discourse in India and abroad. However, Gandhi's iconic stature has also made him a prime target for political manipulation. His image has been invoked, reinterpreted, and misused by political actors to further their agendas, often distorting his teachings and intentions in the process. Nowhere is this more evident than within the Congress party, where even Gandhi's own relatives have played a role in misleading the public about the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and selectively curating his legacy to align with their narrative.

For decades, Congress leaders have positioned themselves as the rightful custodians of Gandhi's principles. From Jawaharlal Nehru to Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, the party has regularly cited the Mahatma's philosophy to legitimize its policies and counter opponents,

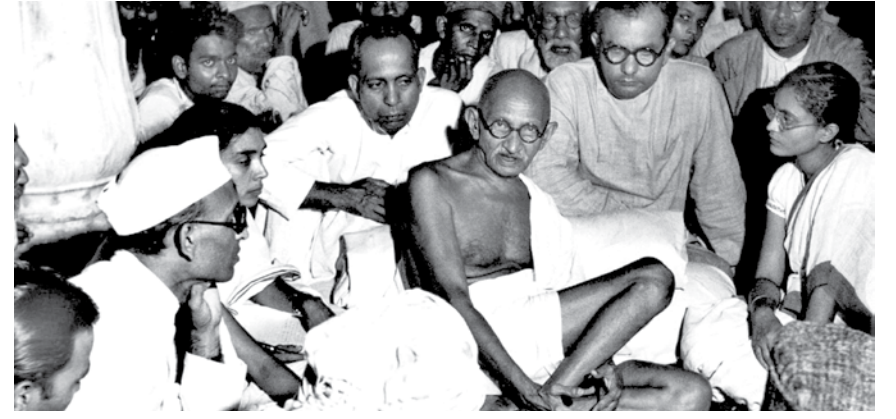
For decades, the Congress party has selectively curated Gandhi's legacy, distorting his nuanced relationships, particularly with the RSS, for political gain

particularly the RSS and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). But behind the familiar rhetoric lies a carefully constructed mythology that deliberately obscures Gandhi's more nuanced relationships with India's other political forces, including the RSS.

Contrary to popular belief—and Congress propaganda—Mahatma Gandhi maintained cordial relations with the RSS, even praising its discipline, social work, and efforts toward eradicating untouchability. During a visit to an RSS camp in 1934, Gandhi expressed admiration for the organization's dedication to national service and simplicity. His words, documented in his newspaper 'Harijan', affirmed that any group inspired by sacrifice and service was bound to flourish. The RSS, inspired by this endorsement, continued to grow and develop, integrating Gandhi's name into its morning chants alongside other revered Indian leaders. Despite these connections, the Congress has long perpetuated the myth that Gandhi held the RSS in contempt—an effective tool for casting the organization as an extremist threat.

This narrative was further manipulated after Gandhi's assassination in 1948. While the RSS was briefly banned by the Congress-led government, subsequent investigations, including the Justice Kapur Commission, exonerated the group from any involvement in the murder. The commission found no evidence that the RSS played a role in Gandhi's assassination, yet the Congress has persistently implied otherwise, casting the RSS as a scapegoat in a broader ideological battle. The distortion of these historical facts has served the party's interests, allowing it to paint its rivals as enemies of the Mahatma's vision.

Such 'selective' memory extends even to Gandhi's own descendants. Figures like Tushar Gandhi, the great-grandson of the Mahatma, have played an active role in sustaining this misrepresentation. For instance, his claims in 2017 that



Prime Minister Narendra Modi had "never willingly" visited the Sabarmati Ashram, are emblematic of the Congress's broader strategy. By insinuating that Modi, a former RSS member, does not genuinely honour Gandhi's legacy, the party seeks to undermine the BJP's credibility. Yet, records show that Modi has visited the ashram multiple times, both as Gujarat's Chief Minister and as Prime Minister, rendering such claims disingenuous.

As the Congress battles for relevance in an evolving political landscape, its manipulation of Gandhi's image reveals more about its own insecurities than it does about Gandhi's actual beliefs. Far from embodying the inclusivity and non-violence that Gandhi championed, the party has weaponized his legacy as a tool of division. The careful omission of Gandhi's relationship with the RSS, combined with the selective promotion of certain aspects of his teachings, highlights its willingness to distort history in pursuit of political gain.

The Indian National Congress, founded in 1885 as a modest gathering of English-speaking elites, would have remained a drawing room affair had not Gandhi infused it with mass appeal. By adopting non-violent civil disobedience, Gandhi galvanized millions, turning the Congress into a potent political force.

However, after Independence, Nehru,

who shaped the narrative of India's struggle for freedom, elevated the Congress as the vanguard of resistance while marginalizing other figures and movements.

The RSS was duly demonized, painted as reactionary and complicit in communal tensions. The question remains why? It was Gandhi's charisma that helped the Congress. Did his political heirs fear the RSS as another charismatic force post-Independence? That would certainly explain why a false narrative was created about Gandhi's relations with RSS.

Despite ideological differences, the RSS had mourned Gandhi's assassination, with its daily 'shakhas' suspended for 13 days. This was a powerful, if overlooked, demonstration of the group's respect for the Mahatma.

Today, a new generation of Indians are seeking a more honest reckoning with their nation's history. It is time the Congress's efforts to appropriate and manipulate Gandhi's legacy and distorting his relationships with other entities, particularly with the RSS, by presenting a one-sided narrative, India's grand old party goes against the very principles of truth, non-violence, and inclusivity that the Mahatma symbolized.

Gandhi's legacy deserves far better than to be reduced to expedient political rhetoric, and certainly better than to be twisted for narrow electoral gain.

GLOBAL WATCH

A New Dawn Over Nippon

Japan's 65th Prime Minister, Shigeru Ishiba, represents a break from the past - both in terms of policy and personal background. Ishiba, a rare Christian in a predominantly Shinto and Buddhist nation, ascension comes at a time when the country faces pressing economic challenges, fractious relations with neighbours, and an aging population that threatens its fiscal sustainability.

Japan has seen a remarkable turnover in leadership since the end of World War II, with prime ministers cycling through often short and tumultuous terms. Unlike Britain or Germany, where long-serving leaders have often shaped their nations' trajectories, Japan's prime ministers frequently struggle to maintain power long enough to implement bold reforms.

Yet, few have been able to leave a lasting legacy. The longest-serving prime minister, Shinzo Abe, was an exception. Serving from 2006 to 2007 and then again from 2012 to 2020, Abe's 'Abenomics' aimed to revive the economy through aggressive monetary easing and fiscal stimulus. His leadership was marked by a push to amend Japan's pacifist constitution, strengthening the country's military posture - a stance Ishiba himself advocates.

Ishiba's rise to power, although delayed, was almost inevitable. A former defense minister, he has been a fixture in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) for decades, holding



various senior positions and cultivating an image as a hawkish yet reform-minded leader. His often-blunt approach has sometimes left him at odds with party leaders, but it has also earned him the respect of Japan's defense and security establishment. Known for his detailed policy knowledge, especially on defense and rural issues, Ishiba contrasts sharply with his predecessor, Fumio Kishida, whose technocratic leadership had failed to inspire much enthusiasm.

Ishiba's foreign policy will likely continue his hawkish defense stance (especially with respect to Beijing), advocating for a stronger military and revisions to Japan's pacifist constitution. However, his pragmatism sets him apart from more nationalistic LDP peers. While he emphasizes bolstering defense against regional threats, particularly from China, Ishiba also seeks to improve relations with neighbours through diplomacy and deterrence, prioritizing strong U.S. ties while maintaining dialogue with Beijing.

Japan's economy remains stagnant despite over a decade of stimulus measures under Shinzo Abe and his successors. Deflation persists, and the country's debt-to-GDP ratio is among the highest globally. Abe's policies, focused on monetary easing, fiscal stimulus, and reforms, failed to spur long-term growth.

Abe's successor, Kishida, adopted a similar approach but emphasized wealth redistribution.

Shigeru Ishiba, a fiscal conservative, prioritizes long-term economic sustainability, likely advocating spending cuts and tackling Japan's national debt. His rural-focused policies aim to revitalize neglected regions. Like Junichiro Koizumi, Ishiba is a maverick pushing for reform, though his challenges—demographic and political—are more severe.

Ishiba's Christian faith is another element that sets him apart. Though Japan is largely secular, the prime minister's Christianity places him in the company of a very small minority. Previous Christian prime ministers, like Takashi Hara (who led Japan in the early 20th century), were more anomalies than trendsetters, but Ishiba's faith has not been a political liability. Instead, his Christianity is a symbol of how Japan's political landscape has broadened over the years.

Historically, Japan's leaders, from postwar giants like Shigeru Yoshida to technocratic managers like Yasuo Fukuda, have come from traditional backgrounds, reflecting the country's Shinto and Buddhist roots. In contrast, Ishiba's rise highlights the increasing diversity within Japan's political class, even as it remains overwhelmingly male and conservative.

Japan's newly-minted PM Shigeru Ishiba faces the unenviable task of navigating Japan through economic stagnation, regional tensions and demographic decline.

INVITATION

Maharashtra Elections: The Satta Bazaar Dilemma!



By Mamta Sen

For the first time, Satta Bazaar or the Bookies Market are confused and at a loss, unable to predict which party or candidate will win the upcoming Assembly elections in Maharashtra. Mohan (name changed) one of the regulars in the circuit, shares some tidbits circulating through the grapevine about how, for the very first time in many years, the entire Satta Bazaar is struggling to come up with reliable numbers on who will win or lose these upcoming elections. The reasons he says are not one but multiple. The first is the lack of trust and clarity on the seat-sharing formula amongst both the ruling Maha Yuti and the opposition Maha Vikash Aghadi coalition. The second reason is the possible coming together of multiple fronts that may include Prakash Ambedkar's Vanchit Ba-

hujan Aghadi (VBA), Raju Shetty's Swabhimaan Paksha, Sambhaji Rajee Bhonsale's Swarajya Sanghata, and Bachhu Kadu's Prahar Janshakti Party, as well as the Maharashtra Navanirman Sena (MNS) and the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), and not to mention the many candidates who may contest as Independents in case they fail to get a ticket. Adding to this complex mix is the possible entry of the Maratha activist Manoj Patil, who may take a political contest the elections, potentially changing the entire equation.

"This is nothing less than a political circus of sorts," says Mohan, noting that he and his associates have analysed that while the smaller parties may come together to form a possible third and fourth front, it cannot be ruled out that most parties may prefer to go solo at the last minute, contesting all 288 seats. The victory numbers according to the 'market' is the MNS, which is expected to contest 250 seats and might win at least 5-6 seats of them. And the combination of VBA along with others may fetch them at least 55 seats. Similarly, AIMIM, which may contest 50 seats, stands to win at least in five prominent Muslim-dominated areas of Maharashtra, while the possible number of victorious Independents may exceed 20.

The third area that the bookies

have reportedly been monitoring, he claims, is the shortage of strong candidates. Aside from ageing veterans, not a single political party has a strong and capable



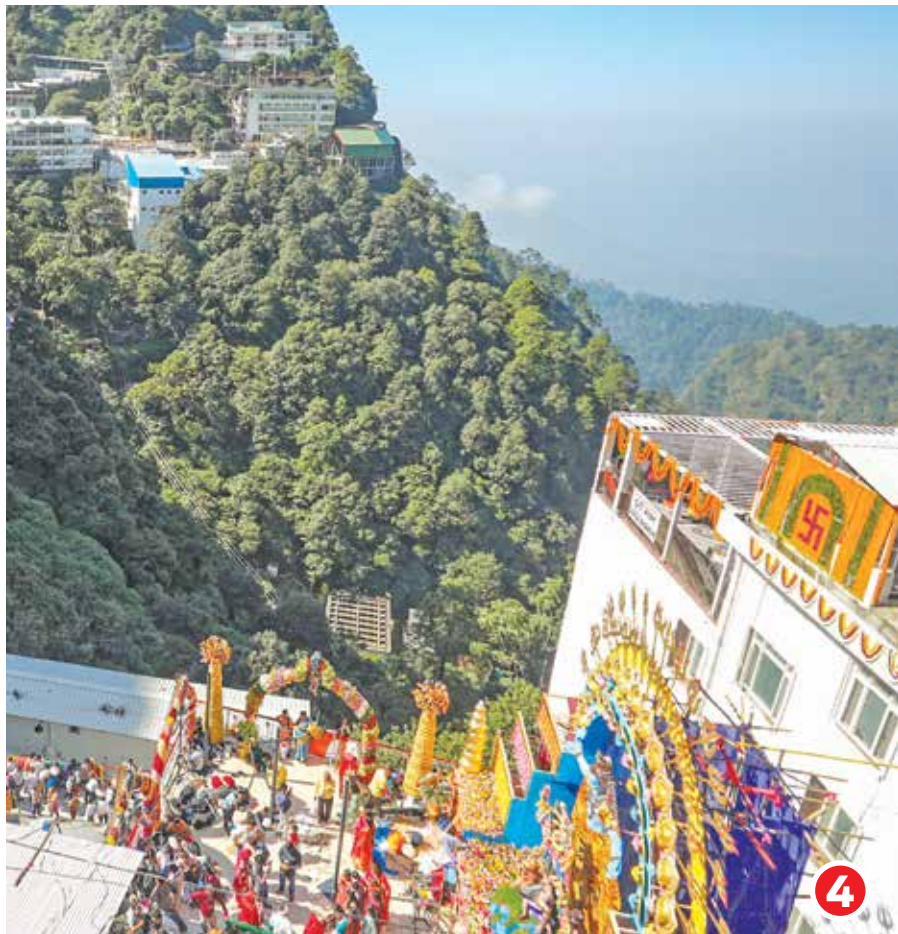
second or third line of leadership ready to contest these elections. Instead, we see large number of family members of established leaders many who lack substantial political experience and understanding of grassroots politics as well. Additionally, you have contractors-cum-real-estate agents turned wannabe politicians who lack vision and are jumping on the election bandwagon, hoping to pay their way through to become the next big thing in Maharashtra.

"No one has any idea who to bet on or who will form the next government in Maharashtra. There are no good candidates this time around. Voters are tired. We think the voter turnout may be less this time, and if that happens, you can expect candidates whom you have never even heard of getting elected on a smaller number of votes, and that is quite worrying for everyone," he says. Well, let's wait and watch for sure!

(The writer is a journalist based in Mumbai. Views personal.)

Maharashtra's political circus has the bookies in a daze. For the first time in the history of Indian politics, the Satta Bazaar has no idea who to bet on or who will form the next government of Maharashtra.





**KALEIDOSCOPE**

1. A 100-foot idol of Goddess Durga being installed at a community puja pandal ahead of the 'Durga Puja' festival in Kolkata.
2. An idol of Goddess Durga being taken to puja pandal on a boat in Nadia.
3. Children dressed as 'Langurs' pay obeisance at the Bada Hanuman Mandir during the ongoing 'Langur Mela' in Amritsar.
4. Devotees walk towards the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine on the first day of Navratri festival in Reasi district.
5. Members of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) take part in a rally amid rains on 'Mahalaya', at Panisagar in North Tripura district on Wednesday.

All Pictures PTI, AP

**TALK OF THE TOWN**

## The Thrill of Encounters in Bollywood: A Cinematic Reflection



By  
**Abhijit Joshi**

The recent encounter of Akshay Shunde, the accused in the Badlapur sexual assault case, has become the talk of the town, with supporters and critics expressing their views. However, this article isn't about the police action or the criminal case itself—that's for the judiciary to decide.

What this encounter does remind me of is Bollywood's long-standing obsession with encounters, and how the Indian audience perceives them. Films based on real-life encounters offer a mix of thrill, drama, and a reflection of society's complex relationship with crime and justice.

Encounters in Bollywood films have always been more than just police actions. They are spectacles, filled with tension, and moral dilemmas. The connections between the underworld and Bollywood have often been whispered about but rarely discussed openly, adding a layer of intrigue to films dealing with gangster encounters. This "unsaid truth" has become part of the allure that surrounds these movies. In Bollywood, the encounter drama is portrayed in two major ways. One, where the gangster tries to escape from the police—either after being cornered, or when the police receive a tip-off.

When the gangster refuses to surrender and tries to flee, the police, after warning him, fire, often aiming for the leg. If he still attempts to run, he is killed. The second type involves a gangster attacking the police, sometimes even while in custody, grabbing their weapons and trying to make a run for it—leading to his death. These scenarios have played out numerous times in Bollywood, embedding themselves in the audience's memory.

Take the iconic 1975 film Deewar, where Vijay (Amitabh Bachchan) meets his tragic end in an encounter. In the film's climax, Inspector Ravi (Shashi Kapoor) confronts his brother Vijay, asking him to surrender. When Vijay refuses and tries to escape, Ravi shoots him, ending the movie with an emotional scene where Vijay dies after meeting his mother. Another similar encounter can be seen in Shakti (1982), where Vijay (Amitabh Bachchan) runs after killing JK Verma (Amrish Puri).

Despite being asked to surrender by his father, Inspector Ashwini Kumar (Dilip Kumar), Vijay is shot dead when he refuses. These encounters were personal, driven by family conflicts that spiraled due to the protagonist's underworld connections.

Bollywood has produced numerous films that focus on police and gangster confrontations, often claim-



ing to be inspired by real-life incidents. The 2002 film Encounter: The Killing was one of the first to fully explore the genre. Directed by Ajay Phansekar and starring Naseeruddin Shah, the film is a gripping take on police encounters and the impact of crime on families. The plot revolves around a police officer who kills a young boy in an encounter, only to later search for the boy's parents, who never claimed the body. The movie poignantly highlights the hypocrisy of middle-class parents, disconnected from their children's lives until tragedy strikes. Then there's the 2004 film Ab Tak Chhappan, directed by Shimit Amin and produced by Ram Gopal Varma. The story of Inspector Sadhu Agashe, portrayed by Nana Patekar, is loosely based on the life of Mumbai police

officer Daya Nayak, famous for his role in the Mumbai Encounter Squad.

The film, known for its realistic portrayal of police procedures and moral ambiguity, became a classic, with Nana Patekar's performance earning critical acclaim. It's a film that refuses to sugarcoat the harsh realities of life as a police officer tasked with eliminating gangsters.

The audience's appetite for encounter-based films was further fueled by the 2007 film Shootout at Lokhandwala, based on the infamous 1991 gunfight between Mumbai Police and gangster Maya Dolas. Starring Amitabh Bachchan, Sanjay Dutt, and Vivek Oberoi, this film took dramatic liberties but stayed rooted in real events. The film's tagline, "based on true rumours," perfectly encapsulates Bollywood's relationship with encounters—a mix of fact and fiction, driven by the desire to entertain while reflecting societal issues.

A few years later, the 2013 film Shootout at Wadala hit the screens, bringing to life the story of gangster Manya Surve, played by John Abraham. The film was praised for its gritty realism and intense action sequences, once again putting the spotlight on the phenomenon of police encounters. While films like Singham and Simmba have more recently presented a more polished, commercial version of police encounters, it's movies like Ab Tak Chhappan, Shootout at Lokhandwala, and Shootout at Wadala that remain etched in the audience's memory for their hard-hitting portrayal of crime and justice.

In a country where encounters—both real and reel—fascinate the public, Bollywood continues to be at the center of this complex narrative. Whether glamorizing the gritty world of gangsters or raising questions about the morality of encounters, the industry keeps its finger on the pulse of a society that finds itself grappling with these very real issues.

(The writer is a communication professional. Views personal)

**TRIBUTE**

## The Godfather II: A Sequel That Surpasses the Original



By  
**Shoumojit Banerjee**

Francis Ford Coppola's "The Godfather II" (1974), which marks its fiftieth anniversary, stands as that rarity - a sequel that not only rivals but arguably surpasses the original 1972 masterpiece, a feat seldom equalled in cinematic history.

The breathtakingly ambitious 200-minute film is a continuation of the Corleone family saga and possibly the definitive artistic word on the criminal underworld and the exploration of power - aesthetically rivaled only by Sergio Leone's "Once Upon a Time in America" (1984).

Far more than just the vicissitudes of a Mafia family, The Godfather Part II mirrors the great dynasties of classical history, like the Médicis or the Borgias of Renaissance Italy. The Godfather II is two films in one, traversing multiple historical epochs to showcase the rise of the father - a young Don Vito Corleone (masterfully portrayed by Robert De Niro) in the 1910s alongside the tragic fall of son Michael Corleone (Al Pacino's finest performance) in the late 1950s.

The film intercuts between Michael's crumbling empire, with scenes set against backdrop of Batista's Cuba, and his father Vito's rise as a young Sicilian immigrant in New York decades earlier.

In a tour-de-force on the intricacies of power and succession, Coppola invites the viewer to explore the contrasting trajectories of father and son: one building an empire from nothing, the other presiding over its fall as it corrodes his soul.

By the film's end, Michael, who,



in "The Godfather" started off an idealist WWII hero, transforms into a cold, loveless monster, prematurely aged, ordering the execution of his older brother Fredo (brilliantly played by John Cazale) for going against the 'Family.'

The transformation of Mario Puzo's pulpy novel into high art under Coppola's direction is an intriguing story in itself. In 1965, a 45-year-old Mario Puzo, bedevilled by shylocks, set about writing, not great literature, but a hypnotically engrossing story about America's criminal underworld titled 'Mafia'.

By 1967, Hollywood's Paramount Studio, reeling from financial losses, had latched on the concept of nurturing potential bestsellers into films. This is how Puzo's novel on the strength of 114 pages and telling the sympathetic story of a racketeer Don Vito Corleone was 'nurtured' by the studio.

In 1969, the book, 'The Godfather' became a runaway bestseller. Yet, the film, which came out in 1972, was fraught with uncertainty. From the unbankability of one of the world's greatest actors Marlon Brando, who played the ageing Don to the initial hostile reviews of a then-unknown Pacino, a pressure-

cooker atmosphere had pervaded the making of the film as Coppola frenetically pulled off all stops to achieve his artistic vision. As 'The Godfather' broke movie records, the film became, according to historian Arthur Schlesinger, "the cultural phenomenon of the season."

But why this sequel to a perfect film? Coppola agreed to do it as he was handed complete creative control by Paramount and fascinated by the idea of a film that "would work freely in time, moving backward and forward in time."

Casting played a pivotal role in the 'The Godfather II's' success. De Niro, who pulled-off the notoriously challenging assignment of playing the younger Vito Corleone, delivering lines in Sicilian and broken English, was unilaterally cast after Coppola viewed his early performance in Martin Scorsese's 'Mean Streets' (1973).

The formidable supporting cast included Michael V. Gazzo and legendary acting teacher Lee Strasberg, who portrayed the Machiavellian Hyman Roth.

Critics initially struggled to reconcile to the film's darker themes; Roger Ebert, who has awarded four stars to several less-deserving flicks, initially gave 'The Godfather II' a mere respectable three.

The film's stunning period detail (right down to the dirt of early 20th-century New York), its technical mastery - Gordon Willis phenomenal cinematography, moving seamlessly between sepia-toned scenes of Vito's early 20th-century New York to Michael's late 1950s, is remarkable. Critic D. Keith Mano said that The Godfather II was better than The Godfather and that the two-volume set represented a great American document.

'The Godfather II' went on to win six Academy Awards. Pacino, however, was notably overlooked for Best Actor, a snub that would resonate until he belatedly received one for 'Scent of a Woman' eighteen years later - for a performance in a film far inferior to his high points in the 1970s.





Coco Gauff of the United States throws her racquet during the women's singles quarterfinals match against Yuliia Starodubtseva of Ukraine in the China Open tennis tournament at the National Tennis Center in Beijing on Thursday. Pic: AP/PTI

Kanga Leage Cricket

Bhoir shines in Islam Gym win

By correspondent

Mumbai: All-rounder Vinayak Bhoir played an impressive role with bat and ball and helped Islam Gymkhana snatch a win against Khar Gymkhana by gaining the first innings lead in a B Division match of the MCA Dr H. D. Kanga Cricket League, played at the Islam Gymkhana ground on Wednesday.



bowling attack of medium pacer Javed Khan 4 for 30 and left-arm spinner Bhoir 3 for 35 dismissed Khar Gymkhana for 127 in 39.5 overs to take the crucial lead. Islam Gymkhana in the second innings made 25 for 2 in 4.4 overs.

**Brief scores - B Division:** Young Comrade CC 98 all out, 31.2 overs (Shameet Shetty 28; Sachin Gupta 3/20) & 65 for 5, 22.5 overs (Mayuresh Tandell 37) Vs Sind SC 128 for 4 decl, 30.2 overs (Sai Chavan 45, Sujay Thakkar 28; Shameet Shetty 3/45). Sind SC won on 1st innings lead.

**New Hindu CC** 172 all out, 53.5 overs (Vinay Kunwar 36, Rohit Shukla 28; Sachin Solanki 4/44, Vedant Gurav 3/27) Vs **Sainath SC** 97 all out 24.2 overs (Jigar Rana 36; Rajesh Sardar 5/23, Jugraj Mehta 4/22). New Hind won on 1st innings lead.

**Islam Gymkhana** 192 for 9, 34.3 overs (Vinayak Bhoir 73, Sufyan Shaikh 28, Shashwat Pathak 25; Abdul Khan 6/45) & 25 for 2, 4.4 overs vs **Khar Gymkhana** 127 all out, 39.5 overs (Swayam Waghmare 42; Javed Khan 4/30, Vinayak Bhoir 3/35, Hitesh Kadam 3/52). Islam Gymkhana won in the 1st innings lead.

**Goregaon Sports Club** 116 all out, 39.4 overs (Ro-

han Bhosale 43; Kunal Thorat 7/20) & 20 for no loss Vs **Shivaji Park Youngsters** SC 120 for 6 decl, 29 overs (Shubham Shinde 50). Shivji Park Youngsters won on 1st innings lead.

**Muslim United SC** 195 for 9, 39.5 overs (Shashikant Kadam 77, Mahamad Yaseen Saudagar 34; Khizar Dafedar 4/55, Harsh Mendon 3/27) Vs **Dadar Union SC** 134 for 6, 29 overs (Ashay Akre 45, Aadit Degaonkar 31). Match drawn.

**Payyade SC** 144 all out, 41.2 (Omkar Ghule 29, Vicky Patil 27, Vedant Gadia 26; Aniket Vishwakarma 3/16, Jagdish Jadhav 3/34, Sandeep Pawar 3/53) vs **United Cricketers** 118 for 6, 39.1 overs (Prithvik Pandit 45, Darshan Kamthe 27; Ajay Mishra 5/28). Match drawn.

'Weight management is athlete's responsibility'

Mumbai: No stranger to the physical toll of weight management during a competition, six-time world champion boxer M.C. Mary Kom Thursday waded into the debate surrounding wrestler Vinesh Phogat's Olympic heartbreak for being 100gm over, saying that to be within the prescribed limit is an individual responsibility.

The 42-year-old mother of four, who is India's only woman boxer with an Olympic medal (a bronze in London, 2012), was in the city to promote Utkarsh Small Finance Bank, which named her as its brand ambassador.

Speaking for the first time on Phogat, who was disqualified on the day of her 50kg finals in the Paris Games for being marginally over the prescribed limit, Mary Kom said weight management is an athlete's responsibility.

Mary Kom, in the past, has spoken about her weight cut routines and how difficult the process can be. The Manipuri started out as a pin-weight (46kg) category boxer before settling for the fly-weight (51kg) division in her amateur career.

Phogat, who was being seen as gold medal contender in Paris, skipped meals and fluids, worked out an entire night and also cut her hair to be within the requisite category but the effort fell short eventually. She challenged her disqualification, calling the rules inhumane, but her appeal was rejected by the



Court of Arbitration for Sport. The wrestler retired to join politics after the heartbreak and is contesting the Haryana assembly elections on a Congress ticket.

Want to discuss with minister Mary Kom was also quizzed about India's boxing campaign in Paris and she was still perplexed by how poor the performance was. She said she wants to have a meeting with the national federation and sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya to understand "what is lacking" and clear her "doubts".

The Indian boxing contingent, which included two reigning world champions in Nikhat Zareen and Lovlina Borgohain, cut a sorry figure in the Games and failed to win even one medal.

"We know what the result was, it was so, so bad. I want to know what is lacking," said the Manipuri, who became the first Indian woman boxer with an Olympic medal when she bronzed in the 2012 London Games.

One of the most successful athletes in the history of Indian sports, Mary Kom felt the boxers got all the logistical support they needed but she does have some "doubts" regarding how their training was managed by the Boxing Federation of India.

"I will meet the boxers too if the situation demands. If the sports minister has the knowledge (about the issues) I want to discuss that also," she said. Refusing to share her exact concerns, Mary Kom said she would rather discuss them in the meeting

I felt so disappointed in the sense that I have also done the same (weight management) for the last so many years. Weight is important, that is my responsibility. I cannot blame anyone. I do not want to say this in her case. I am saying this in my case only. If I do not cut the weight properly then how will I play?

with Mandaviya and BFI brass.

"The federation has provided all the coaches. But I have a few doubts as well. But what is the point in saying them now, the Olympics are done. Now there is no point in saying all that, but I want to discuss it with them in the meeting," said the former Rajya Sabha MP.

"(The) sports minister is doing whatever he can do from his side, infrastructure, facilities or whatever (other) needs are there. But how did the federation handle the training? Was it done systematically or not? What happened exactly, I do not know," she wondered.

"If I do not meet them and not discuss, how will I know about them?" -PTI

WC: India need top guns firing

Dubai: A stellar effort by senior stars would be mandatory when India take on New Zealand in their opening Group A match of the women's T20 World Cup here on Friday, aiming for a strong start in their quest to wipe off the memories of past near-misses.

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, who in all likelihood, will be appearing in her last T20 World Cup, has been witness to several near misses and disappointing moments from close quarters, including India's capitulation to Australia in the final at Melbourne in 2020.

As a has been in the past, this Indian line-up is rich in talent and, arguably, only Australia have a similarly well-oiled unit.

But the reigning champions have six titles in their cabinet, and India's is still dust-laden. -PTI

Saad, Shruti in quarters

By correspondent

Mumbai: Top seed Saad Dharmadhikari (Pune) brushed aside a strong challenge from Prerana Alvekar (Kolhapur) by rallying to snatch a hard fought win in a women's singles pre-quarter-final match of the Yonex Sunrise Shri Nandu Natekar Memorial Maharashtra State Senior Inter District (Team) and State Badminton Championship 2024, conducted under the auspices of Maharashtra Badminton Association (MBA) and Badminton Association for Mumbai Upanagar (BAMU) and played at the Goregaon Sports Club on Thursday.

In men's singles round of 32 encounters, top seed Varun Kapur (Pune) eased past Rohit Borade (Raigad) 21-8, 21-17, while compatriot and second seed Yash Shah also encountered smooth sailing and got past Shubham Pal (BAMU) 21-17, 21-7 to advance to the pre-quarter-finals. Playing confidently,



Saad Dharmadhikari

Alvekar started in promising fashion against the fancied Dharmadhikari and won a close opening game. But the experienced Dharmadhikari came into her own and dominated the next two games to complete an 18-21, 21-12 and 21-12 victory to seal her place in the last eight.

Second seed Shruti Mundada (Pune) did not break into a sweat as her opponent Raksha Kandasamy (Raigad) conceded a walkover.

In an interesting women's encounter, Siya Singh (Thane) showed solid fight-

ing spirit as she recovered after losing the first game against Nehal Gosavi (Nagpur) and went on to clinch a 19-21, 21-17 and 21-10 victory to progress to the quarter-finals.

**Results - Women's singles (round-16):** 1-Saad Dharmadhikari bt Prerana Alvekar 18-21, 21-12, 21-12; Mrunmayee Deshpande bt Prakriti Sharma 21-19, 21-10; Ananya Gadgil bt Shalmali Sutar 21-15, 21-10; Purva Barve bt Hrishha Dubey 21-14, 21-12; Aarya Korgaonkar bt Sanskruti Satarkar 21-15, 21-14; Isha Patil bt Bhatoye Naishaa 21-17, 1-0 retired; Siya Singh bt Nehal Gosavi 19-21, 21-17, 21-10; 2-Shruti Mundada W/o Raksha Kandasamy.

**Men's singles (round 32):** 1-Varun Kapur bt Rohit Borade 21-8, 21-17; Prathmesh Kulkarni bt Ninad Kulkarni 17-21, 23-21, 21-10; Nagesh Chamle bt Ajay Meena 21-14, 21-17; Suveer Pradhan bt Ojas Gedam 12-21, 21-9, 24-22; 2-Yash Shah bt Shubham Pal 21-17 21-7.

Easy win for Niraj Makhija

Mumbai: Niraj Makhija (UAE) made a positive winning start defeating Kurush Mistry (IND) 11-2, 11-6, 11-5 in a MO50 first round of the third Mumbai Masters Squash Championship 2024 organized under the auspices of the Squash Rackets Federation of India on Thursday.

Harsha Raghavan showed solid fighting qualities and recovered from the brink of defeat to brush aside Jove Abraham's challenge, posting a 6-11, 8-11, 13-11, 11-5 and 11-2 victory.

**Results - MO40 (round 1):** Ankur Gupta bt Abhishek Taparia 11-2, 11-1, 11-7; Amit Gajria bt Gaurav Verma 14-12, 11-7, 11-8; Animesh Kejriwal Jyotishman Das 11-4, 11-4, 11-5; Appachu SK Amit Bhaiya 11-6, 11-2, 11-5; Amaninder Singh bt Saunabh Shah 11-7, 11-1, 11-6; Tushar Kundekar bt Karun Mehra 11-1, 11-4, 11-3; Saunabh Sinha bt Prabhat Rai 11-5, 11-4, 11-6.



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

Dedicated league game-changer: Savita

New Delhi: Former captain Savita Punia has hailed Hockey India's move to introduce a dedicated women's competition in the Hockey India League (HIL) from this year, calling it a game-changer for the sport in the country.

For the first time in the

tournament's history, the Hockey India League (HIL) will feature women's teams alongside men's sides, marking a significant milestone for the league.

The revamped tournament will feature eight men's teams and six women's teams from the last

week of December to the first week of February 2025 in an FIH-sanctioned window. "The introduction of a dedicated women's league is a game changer and certainly a huge step forward for Indian hockey," Savita said in a Hockey India release.

Lionel Messi wins 46th trophy

Columbus (Ohio) : Lionel Messi and Inter Miami have another trophy, along with home-field advantage throughout the Major League Soccer playoffs.

Messi scored twice in the final minutes of the first half, goalie Drake Callender stopped a penalty kick in the 84th minute and Inter Miami beat the defending MLS Cup champion Columbus Crew 3-2 on Wednesday, wrapping up the Supporters Shield given annually to the team with the best regular-season record.

It was Messi's 46th major trophy won for club or country, extending his record for the most by any men's soccer player in history. And it is the second he has won with Inter Miami, this Supporters Shield being added to the Leagues Cup trophy the Herons claimed shortly after Messi joined the club in 2023.

"We knew this was a group that could fight for this," Messi said. Luis Suarez also scored for Inter Mi-

ami, which will open a best-of-three first-round playoff series in the final weekend of October. If the team wins that series, it would have the right to host every match it plays the rest of the season — an Eastern Conference semifinal (scheduled for Nov. 23 or 24), the East final (Nov. 30 or Dec. 1) and the MLS Cup final on Dec. 7.

"We have a nice opportunity to go down in history ... and now we think about what is coming," Messi told Apple TV after the match. "We have a great advantage in that we play all the games at home, which was what we were looking for. I think that we are very, very strong at home."

Also still within reach for Inter Miami: the best MLS regular-season mark ever. Wednesday's win pushed Inter Miami's record to 20-4-8 this season, giving it 68 points. If the club wins its final two matches — Saturday at Toronto and Oct. 19 at home against New England — it would finish with 74

points. New England has the single-season points record, finishing with 73 in 2021.

Messi opened the scoring in the 45th minute, taking a long pass from Jordi Alba — his longtime teammate at Barcelona, the club with which Messi won 35 of his trophies — and splitting two defenders before somehow getting the ball past Columbus goalkeeper Patrick Schulte for a 1-0 lead.

And about five minutes into first-half stoppage time, Messi struck again on a free kick from about 30 yards out. Schulte seemed fooled, and Messi squeezed the ball between the goalie and the near post for a 2-0 lead.

"Dominant," Inter Miami coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said.

Diego Rossi scored in the first minute of the second half for Columbus to cut the lead in half, but it didn't take long for Inter Miami to restore the two-goal cushion. Almost immediately after play resumed, Schulte was upended

by one of his own defenders and Suarez sent a header into an empty net for a 3-1 edge.

Juan "Cucho" Hernández's penalty kick in the 61st minute got Columbus within 3-2. But once again, the momentum didn't last for long. Rudy Camacho was sent off for his second yellow card in the 63rd minute, meaning the Crew had to play with 10 men the rest of the way.

A deflected ball in the 76th minute got across the box and onto the right foot of Mohamed Farsi - but his shot was blocked by Callender, who was perfectly positioned to protect the lead.

Then came more drama, when Inter Miami was called for its second handball inside the box - an automatic penalty kick - of the second half. Hernández picked the left side of the net, but Callender made the save look almost

easy. That save helped finish what Messi started.

It was the fifth two-goal game of the MLS season for Messi, who now has 17 goals in

17 league matches this season. He's missed 15 of Inter Miami's MLS matches in 2024, either because of commitments to Argentina's national team or the two-month absence that he needed to recover from a badly injured ankle - an injury that happened during his nation's run to the Copa America title in July. -AP

