

THE ASIAN AGE

LONDON THURSDAY 13 JUNE 2024



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Elon Musk uses iconic Tamil movie meme to take jibe at Apple iPhone-ChatGPT deal

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WINDOWS



Actress Natalie Portman poses for photos during an event at the Roppongi Museum in Tokyo on Wednesday. — AFP

Delhi asks Russia to return Indians as 2 killed in war

New Delhi: After two Indians, recruited by the Russian Army, were killed in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, foreign secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra on Wednesday said India has taken this issue very seriously. He added India has taken up with Russian authorities the need to crackdown on such illegal activities that have seen Indians getting trapped in that country. He also said India had urged Russia to return Indian citizens recruited by Russia's Army. Two other Indians died earlier this year while fighting in Ukraine. "I want to assure you that the Indian government has taken the matter very seriously," Mr Kwatra said. India previously said its authorities were in talks with Russia about the return of its citizens who it said had been duped into working for the Russian Army. **Full report on Page 4**

Pema Khandu to stay on as Arunachal CM

Guwahati: Pema Khandu will become the CM of Arunachal Pradesh for the third term in a row. Mr Khandu was elected the BJP legislature party leader at a meeting here on Wednesday. BJP's central observers Ravi Sankar Prasad and Tarun Chugh attended the meeting. **Full report on Page 3**

Jagannath temple to reopen doors today

Bhubaneswar: Odisha's BJP government in its first Cabinet meeting approved a proposal to re-open all four gates of Shree Jagannath temple in Puri on early Thursday morning and set up a corpus fund for immediate requirement of the 12th-century shrine. **Full report on Page 4**

COUNTERPOINT



They are always down to earth... first for tickets, later for votes and now for portfolios!

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41 Indian workers die, 50 hurt in huge fire in Kuwait building

■ *Modi asks MoS to rush to Kuwait* ■ *Envoy visits hospitals*
■ *Kuwait's Emir vows action* ■ *Building owner, janitor held*

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI/DUBAI/ KUWAIT CITY, JUNE 12

At least 41 Indian workers were killed and over 50 others injured when the building in which they were staying, referred to as a "camp", caught fire at Mangaf in Kuwait City early on Wednesday morning. After this horrific incident, Prime Minister Narendra Modi directed minister of state for external affairs Kiritivardhan Singh to rush to the Gulf nation immediately to "oversee assistance to those injured in the fire tragedy and to coordinate with the local authorities" there for early repatriation of the mortal remains of the deceased. A massive fire engulfed



Rescuers arrive at the site of a building that caught fire at Mangaf in Kuwait City early on Wednesday. — AP

a multi-storey building in Kuwait housing foreign workers, mostly Indians, early Wednesday. Most of the deaths were due to smoke inhalation while the residents were sleeping, and a significant number of occupants were evacuated, reports said.

The fire started in a kitchen in the six-storey building in the Mangaf

area in Kuwait's southern Ahmadi governorate, officials said, adding that the building reportedly had nearly 200 people living in it, who are workers of the same company.

The director-general of the forensic department, Maj. Gen. Eid Al-Owaidan, said the majority of the deceased were Indian nationals from Kerala, Tamil Nadu and north Indian states. Their ages ranged between 20 and 50 years. The building is rented by the NBTC group. India's ambassador to Kuwait Adarsh Swaika visited the Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Farwaniya and Al-Adan hospitals to meet the injured and assured full assistance of the embassy to the patients. He also visited the fire accident spot in Mangaf to ascertain the situation. The Indian **Turn to Page 4**

LS session to start June 24 for MPs' oath, Speaker polls

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

The first session of the 18th Lok Sabha will commence on June 24 for oath or affirmation of the newly-elected members. The session will also witness the election of the Speaker, the President's address and discussion thereon. The session will conclude on July 3.

President Droupadi Murmu will address a joint sitting of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha on June 27 and is likely to outline the new government's roadmap for the next five years.

"First session of 18th Lok Sabha is being summoned from 24/6/24 to 3/7/24 for oath/affirmation of newly-elected members, election of Speaker," Union minister of parliamentary affairs Kiren Rijju said.

He also said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to introduce his council of ministers to Parliament after the President's address on June 27.

The debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address is expected to see an aggressive Opposition trying to corner the NDA government on various issues. The PM will respond to the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address in both the Houses of Parliament.

2 terrorists, CRPF man killed in encounter in J&K's Kathua

■ *7 personnel hurt in Doda* ■ *Hunt on for 2nd Saida attacker*

YUSUF JAMEEL SRINAGAR, JUNE 12

Two militants and a CRPF jawan were killed and half a dozen security personnel and a civilian injured in back-to-back terror attacks and ensuing gunfights in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua and Doda districts during the past 24 hours, officials said on Wednesday.

In a separate encounter, a jawan of the J&K's police's Special Operation Group (SOG) is reported to have been injured in a gunfight with militants at Tanta, a remote area of the Gandoh-Bhalessa belt of the Doda district.

The police sources said that the "contact" with militants was established late Wednesday evening and that the Army's 4



Army personnel take positions near the site of the encounter between the security forces and terrorists in J&K's Kathua district on Wednesday. — PTI

Rashtriya Rifles, along with the J&K police, have engaged them in a fierce gunfight in the area.

These attacks came close on the heels of militants targeting a bus carrying pilgrims from Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh to the revered cave-shrine of Mata

Vaisho Devi in J&K's Reasi district.

Nine persons, including seven pilgrims and the driver and conductor, were killed and 41 other passengers injured as the 53-seater bus plunged into **Turn to Page 4**

■ **Intel grid at grassroots level to be tightened: Page 3**

SC hauls up Delhi govt: 'Rein in tanker mafia, halt water waste'

RAKESH K. SINGH NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

Reprimanding the Delhi government for its inaction in curbing the tanker mafia and checking water wastage while people are suffering amid the heat wave coupled with water scarcity, the Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the city administration what measures it has taken to tackle the recurring problem.

Expressing its ire, the apex court said, "Why were false statements made before this court? If water is coming from Himachal Pradesh, then where is the water going in Delhi? There is so much spillage, tanker mafia, pilferage, etc... What measures have you taken in this regard? People are suffering... What measures have you taken to control water wastage if water scarcity is a recurring problem in summers?"

A vacation bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Prasanna B. Varale told the Delhi government it will ask the city police to take action against the tanker mafia if it cannot deal with them. "If the same water can be transported using tankers, why can't it be supplied through the pipeline?" the top court said. **More on Page 2**



Firefighters douse a fire which broke out at a factory in Maharashtra's Dombivli on Wednesday. No casualty was reported in the incident. The unit is located near Amudan Chemicals, where a massive blast on May 23 claimed 10 lives and left more than 60 persons injured. — PTI

■ **Alliance to take AP glory to new heights: PM**
■ **Son Lokesh, Pawan Kalyan, 21 others in govt**

Naidu takes charge of Andhra as CM 4th time

M.D. ILYAS VIJAYAWADA, JUNE. 12

TDP chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu took the oath as chief minister of Andhra Pradesh for the fourth time — twice as the CM of united Andhra and two times after the separation of Telangana. Apart from him, 23 others, including Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan and Nara Lokesh, were sworn in.

In the presence of a galaxy of national leaders and celebrities, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, governor Abdul Nazeer administered the oath of office and secrecy to Mr Naidu at 11.33 am on Wednesday. The programme was limited to oath-taking without any speeches.

As Mr Naidu uttered: "Nara Chandrababu Naidu Ane Nenu" (I, Nara Chandrababu Naidu), the entire venue, with thousands of TDP supporters, erupted in cheers.

After Mr Naidu, Mr Kalyan took the oath, sending the hall once again into huge applause. After the oath, Mr Kalyan walked up to Mr Naidu and shook hands. He later touched the feet of his elder brother Chiranjeevi for his blessings.

Following Mr Kalyan, Mr Lokesh took the oath and touched the feet of his father, Mr Naidu. When he tried to touch the feet of Mr Modi, the Prime Minister stopped him from doing so.

After assuming the charge, a visibly elated



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan during the swearing-in ceremony, in Vijayawada on Wednesday. — PTI

▶ **AFTER THE event, the Andhra chief minister left for Tirupati. Mr Naidu will stay in the temple town overnight and visit the Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple on Thursday morning.**

Mr Naidu hugged Mr Modi and returned to his chair next to his wife Bhuvaneshwari. At the ceremony, Mr Naidu was seen cordially talking with Mr Modi while introducing his ministers to him during the one-hour-long programme.

Earlier, Mr Naidu received Mr Modi at Vijayawada's Gannavaram Airport and accompanied him to the venue of the swearing-in ceremony.

Mr Modi said that the TDP-Jana Sena-BJP alliance government will take the glory of Andhra Pradesh to greater heights.

In his post on X, Mr

Modi observed: "Attended the swearing-in ceremony of AP's new ministers. Congratulations to all ministers who took the oath along with CM. The coalition government is committed to fulfilling the aspirations of the youth of the state."

After the event, Mr Naidu, along with his family members, left for Tirupati. He will stay in the temple town overnight and visit the Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple on Thursday morning.

After his return from the temple town, Mr Naidu will take charge of his office at an appointed time of 4.41 pm on Thursday and sign orders implementing his five election promises.

The first signature will be affixed on the file approving the mega-recruitment of teachers. The second order will be to repeal the controversial **Turn to Page 2**

Mohan Majhi sworn in as CM of Odisha with his 15 mantris

■ *15th CM, 1st from BJP* ■ *Modi, Shah, Naveen attend*

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 12

Noted BJP tribal leader Mohan Charan Majhi was sworn in as the 15th chief minister of Odisha on Wednesday at a ceremony attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, several Union ministers and chief ministers. Apart from Mr Majhi, two deputy chief ministers, eight cabinet ministers and five ministers of state (independent charge) were also administered oaths of office.

Amidst loud cheers from tens of thousands of supporters and party workers, governor Raghuraj Das administered the oath of office and secrecy to Mr Majhi at the Janata Maidan in Bhubaneswar at 5.10 pm.

Senior BJP leader and Patnagarh MLA Kanak



Odisha chief minister Mohan Charan Majhi during the swearing-in ceremony in Bhubaneswar on Wednesday. — PTI

▶ **SENIOR BJP leader and Patnagarh MLA Kanak Vardhan Singhdeo and debutant from Nimapara Assembly segment Prabhati Parida took oaths as deputy CMs**

Vardhan Singhdeo and debutant from Nimapara assembly segment

Prabhati Paridatook oaths as deputy chief ministers.

The legislators who were inducted into the Cabinet include Suresh Pujari, Rabi Narayan Naik, Nityanand Gond, Krushna Chandra Patra, Prithviraj Harichandan, Mukesh Mahaling, **Turn to Page 4**

Retail inflation slips to 1-yr low of 4.75% in May

New Delhi, June 12: Retail inflation continued its downward slide to reach a one-year low of 4.75 per cent in May due to a marginal decline of prices in the food basket and remained within the RBI's comfort zone of below 6 per cent. The CPI based retail inflation — on a declining trend since January — was 4.83 per cent in April 2024 and 4.31 per cent in May 2023 (the previous low). **More on Page 7**

IN BRIEF

Man attacks ex-wife, children; arrested

Gurgaon: A man was arrested for allegedly attacking his ex-wife and their two children in a village here, the police said on Wednesday. The accused was allegedly upset with his wife for divorcing him and had bought a shroud before the attack, they said. On Monday night, information was received about an attack on a family in Bhimgarh Kheri village here. A police team rushed to the spot and found that the woman and her two children were attacked by her ex-husband Chhatarshal Tomar, a resident of Laxman Vihar Phase-2, the police said. According to a complaint filed by the ex-wife of the accused, Tomar barged into her house at around 8:45 pm on Monday and attacked her. "He started shouting that today he had made all arrangements to kill me and both our children. My son caught Chhatarshal from behind while my daughter held his hand... I immediately called the police who saved us," the complaint stated. Tomar was arrested and an FIR was registered against him. A pistol, two magazines, a sharp knife, a plastic bag, a backpack, a screwdriver, a packet of red chilli powder and a shroud were recovered from him, they said. — PTI

CM Mann meets Kejriwal in Bihar

New Delhi: Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann on Wednesday met AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal in the Tihar jail in Delhi and discussed the party's performance in the just-concluded Lok Sabha elections, party sources said. It was the first meeting between Mr Mann and the Delhi chief minister after the Lok Sabha poll results which came out on June 4. Mr Kejriwal is lodged in the Tihar jail in the excise policy-linked money laundering case. In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the Congress dealt a blow to the ruling AAP and the Opposition BJP and SAD, winning seven of the 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab even as two Independents registered a surprise victory. The AAP could manage to win three seats of Hoshiarpur, Anandpur Sahib and Sangrur as against the target of winning all 13 Lok Sabha constituencies in the just-concluded general elections.

3 held for killing teen in Jahangirpuri

New Delhi: Three youths were on Wednesday arrested for allegedly stabbing a 15-year-old boy to death in Northwest Delhi's Jahangirpuri area. Abhishek (20), Nathu (19) and Dev (18) were arrested from Bhalawa Dairy area, they said. On Tuesday evening, Manish Kumar was stabbed to death in Jahangirpuri's H Block. The accused told the police that about a month ago, Manish had slapped Abhishek's younger brother over a minor issue. So, to take a revenge, Abhishek hatched the plan to kill the teenager, the police said. The trio spotted Manish sitting alone in a park yesterday. They attacked him with a knife and Manish died on the spot, they said.

2 WOMEN AMONG 6 ARRESTED FOR HONEYTRAP SCAM

Noida: Six persons, including two women, were arrested in Greater Noida on Wednesday as the police cracked down on a gang extorting money from people after honey trapping them, officials said. The gang operated a honey trap scheme and used female accomplices to lure victims through phone calls into meeting them in person, the police said. The gang, however, later threatened them with false rape accusations and extorted money through intimidation and violence, they said. Those held have been identified as gang leader Raj Chaudhary, Bhupendra Singh, Faizan Ahmed, Rahul Kumar, Sanjana Yadav and Rifa alias Rustam, the police said. "The gang members duped gullible people. They would first befriend them over phone calls and then call them to some place on pretext of partying. They would later threaten to implicate them in case of rape, molestation. They also assaulted the victims to illegally extort money from them," said additional deputy commissioner of police (Greater Noida) Ashok Kumar Sharma. — PTI

'We will ask city police to deal with mafia if you cannot'

SC raps govt: Have you taken any action on tanker mafia?

RAKESH K. SINGH
NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

Lambasting the Delhi government for inaction in curbing the tanker mafia and checking water wastage while people are suffering amid the heat-wave coupled with water scarcity, the Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the city administration what measures it has taken against them.

The apex court expressed its ire and said, "Why were false statements made before this court? Water is coming from Himachal Pradesh then where is the water going in Delhi? There is so much spillage, tanker mafias, etc. What measures have you taken in this regard... People are suffering, we are seeing visuals on every news channel. What measures have you taken to control water wastage if water scarcity is a recurring problem in summers?"

A vacation bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Prasanna B. Varale told the Delhi government it will ask the city police to take action against the tanker mafia if it cannot deal with them. "If the same water can be transported using tankers, why can't it be supplied through the pipeline?" the top court said, adding, "If there can be stringent laws to control the theft of electricity, why cannot there be laws to check water wastage?"

The apex court said, "There is so much pilferage, transportation loss, and tanker mafia working. Have you taken any action against these....? The same water is coming through tankers but there is no water in the pipeline... We can see from the affidavit that these matters have been coming in 2018, 2019, and 2021."

"Every time this court says we can't do it, let it be done by the Yamuna Water Board (Upper Yamuna River Board). What measures have you taken to control water waste coming through the two barrages if this is a recurring problem? Please show us what action or FIR you have lodged against tanker mafias," it said.

Seeking to assuage the concern of the bench, advocate Shadan Farasat, appearing for the Delhi government, said action has been taken to prevent



Water level of the Yamuna plummets during the summer season in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

Atishi writes to L-G, alleges collusion of officers, mafia

AVINASH PRABHAKAR JHA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

As the national capital grapples with a water crisis, Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena has directed the Delhi police commissioner to ensure strict vigil and monitoring along the Munak canal to prevent any further theft of water by tanker mafia and to also catch hold of such persons who have been involved in such illegal activities in the past and take necessary legal action against such mafia elements.

He has also asked for a compliance report in this regard within a week.

Earlier in the day, Delhi water minister Atishi wrote to Mr Saxena demanding an inquiry into alleged collusion by senior officers with the tanker mafia and requested him to deploy an ACP-level police officer to patrol the stretch of Munak canal in the city to ensure that no illegal water filling activi-

ty happens there. "There is a need for an enquiry into potential collusion by senior officers in the Delhi government with the tanker mafia because it seems that there has been a deliberate and substantial reduction of the tankers deployed by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) in the last one year," she claimed in her communication to the L-G.

Citing numbers, Ms Atishi said that in January last year, 1,179 tankers were deployed by the DJB and this number was 1,203 in June the same year. "However, this number was reduced to 888 in January 2024 without any approval from me. I repeatedly kept flagging the issue of grievances regarding water tanker shortage and asking the DJB CEO to increase the number of tankers, but he did not do so," she alleged.

The minister said that she directed the chief secretary on March 14, April 3, and April 12 to increase the number of water tankers

advocate Abhishek Singhvi, also representing the Delhi government, said, "However, as against the 1,013 cusecs, the actual water received is varying between 800-900 cusecs."

In an affidavit, the UYRB has told the top court that Himachal Pradesh should prove it has been releasing 137 cusecs of unutilised water for Delhi pursuant to the June 6 directive of the apex court.



A bow follows in the cooling water mist released by an anti-smog gun for relief from the scorching heat on a hot summer day in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

Naidu takes charge of Andhra as CM

■ **Continued From Page 1**
Land Title Act introduced by the previous YSRC government. The third order will be to increase the social security pension from ₹3,000 to ₹4,000. The fourth signature will be to initiate the process of skill census and the fifth order will be to establish Anna can- teens that will supply food at cheap rates. During an informal meeting with the ministers at his residence, Mr Naidu appears to have told them that the portfolios will be allocated by Thursday. Apart from Mr Naidu, 24 ministers took the oath of office and secrecy. They include deputy chief min-

ister Mr Kalyan, Mr Lokesh, Kinjarapu Achanaidu, Kollu Ravindra, Nadendla Manohar, P. Narayana, Vangalapudi Anitha, Satya Kumar Yadav, Nimmala Ramanaidu, N.M.D. Farook, Anam Ramanarayana Reddy, Payyavula Keshav, Anagani Satya Prasad, Kolusu Parthasarathy, D o l a Balaveeranjaneyswamy, Gottipati Ravi, Kandula Durgesh, Gummadi Sandhyarani, BC Janardhan Reddy, T.G. Bharat, S. Savitha, Vasamshetty Subhash, Kondapalli Srinivas and Mandipalli Ram Prasad Reddy. As per the BJP's stated

policy of honouring its grassroot workers, the party nominated Satya Kumar as its representative in the Naidu Cabinet. The new Cabinet is a mix of social groups under Kammam, three to the Reddy community, three to Kapus, two to BC Yadava, one each to SC Mala, SC Madiga, ST, Muslim minority, Arya Valsya, Balija, fisherman, Turpu Kapu, Koppula Velama, Gowda, Settibaliya and Kuraba communities. This is the first time that Mr Naidu has inducted 17 new faces into the Cabinet. This is also the first Naidu Cabinet with-

out his aide Yanamala Ramakrishnuudu. The current makeup of the Cabinet shows the stamp of Mr Lokesh, who gave preference to the new faces and shunning many senior leaders. Former vice-president M. Venkaiah Naidu, former Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana, Union ministers Amit Shah, J.P. Nadda, Nitin Gadkari, Ram Mohan Naidu, Pemmasani Chandra Sekhar, Chirag Paswan, Kishan Reddy, Ramdas Athawale, Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde and state BJP president D. Purandeswari were among the politicians who attended the swearing-in ceremony.

Neet row: NTA to move SC for pleas' transfer from HCs

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

The National Testing Agency (NTA) will approach the Supreme Court seeking the transfer of petitions filed by Neet-UG candidates before several high courts over alleged random grant of grace marks, paper leaks, and anomalies in evaluating answers to certain questions, the Delhi high court was informed on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi wrote to education minister Dharmendra Pradhan on the issue.

A vacation bench of justice Neena Bansal Krishna, meanwhile, issued notice and asked the NTA to respond to four petitions filed by the national eligibility-cum-entrance test-undergraduate (Neet-UG), 2024, candidates raising these grievances.

Following in the footsteps of the Supreme Court, the high court also



Neet aspirants and their relatives take part in a protest in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

refused to stay the counselling process.

The court granted the NTA counsel's prayer for time to respond to the petitions and listed the matter for further hearing on July 5.

At the outset, solicitor general Tushar Mehta told the bench that several pleas have been filed in seven different high courts relating to alleged irregularities in the conduct of the Neet-UG, 2024, examination and some are pending before the Supreme Court.

He said the NTA will soon file a transfer petition in the apex court to consolidate all the pleas. "We are filing transfer petitions in the Supreme Court because there is a likelihood of conflicting views by different high courts. Could your lordship consider waiting for a week or two? We will file a transfer petition," Mr Mehta told the court.

The law officer said these petitions can be broadly categorised as raising the issues of the grant of grace/compensatory marks, alleged paper leaks, and anomalies in answers to certain questions.

Ready plans by Sat for villages' growth: Rai directs agencies

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

Delhi minister Gopal Rai on Wednesday said the agencies concerned have been given a timeline of June 15 to prepare their action plans for the development of villages in the national capital.

While addressing a press conference here, Mr Rai said that for the first time, the city government has made a provision of ₹900 crore for the development of urbanised and rural villages in Delhi. The government has started its preparation at the war front level for the development of these villages, he said.

"We held a meeting with different agencies on Wednesday. The priority is being given for the development of the roads in the villages," Delhi minister said.

"A meeting of the board was held before the model code of conduct implemented in Delhi where a total of 1,387 proposals were placed before the board by MLAs from different Assemblies and the board had passed all 1,387 proposals," he said.



Gopal Rai

► **'FIRST TIME, the city government has made a provision of ₹900 crore for development of urbanised and rural villages'**

In the meeting, all the agencies were instructed to set June 15 as their timeline, he said.

"The practical time we have to implement the work is till October as the GRAP (Graded Response Action Plan) gets imposed in Delhi from around November 4 or 5 and continues till December," he said.

"After that, the model code of conduct of the state Assembly elections will be implemented in January. In view of this, to prepare a comprehensive action plan, we have given all the agencies a timeline of June 15," Mr Rai said

Man accused of killing woman during robbery in N-E Delhi held

New Delhi, June 12: The police carried out multiple raids to arrest a man accused of killing an elderly woman while committing a robbery at her house in Northeast Delhi's Jafraabad last month, officials said on Wednesday.

The police recovered jewellery and gadgets, among other things from 24-year-old Rajan Sharma who works as a security guard at a construction site, they said.

On May 14, a man found his mother unconscious on the floor in her room. She was also profusely bleeding from her head and her gold earrings were missing, the police said.

The woman's son found

that her mobile phone, smartwatch, purse containing cash and jewellery were also missing. He took his mother to GTB hospital but on May 18, she succumbed to her injuries, a senior police officer said.

On June 6, the police received information that the accused was in Delhi's Ghonda area.

Deputy commissioner of police (crime) Amit Goel said raids were conducted in Ghonda, Maujpur as well as Jafraabad, and Sharma was nabbed.

Two silver-colour anklets, four gold-colour bangles, one smartwatch, one mobile phone were recovered from him, the DCP said. A bike used

9L tulips to be planted across city ahead of flowering season

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

Delhi will be adorned with over nine lakh tulips during the flowering season this year. Nine lakh tulips will be planted this year, almost double the number of tulips planted in Delhi in the winters of 2023 (five lakh) and almost six times the number planted in 2022 (1.5 lakh tulips), a Raj Niwas official said on Wednesday.

"The increase in plantation of Tulips and other flowers across the city is in line with Delhi

lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena's aim and the emphasis given on turning the National Capital into a 'City of Flowers'.

"In a meeting chaired by Saxena yesterday, a blueprint was prepared for sourcing and planting of Tulips in the upcoming flowering season. The meeting was attended by the horticulture departments of various civic and government agencies," the official said.

In the meeting, L-G was informed that the New Delhi Municipal Council

(NDMC) would procure 3.25 lakh Tulips while the DDA (Delhi Development Authority) will procure four lakh tulips this year, he said.

Other civic and green- ing agencies will purchase Tulips from NDMC and DDA, as per their requirements. Nearly 2.5 lakh Tulip bulbs would also be received from the CSIR-Institute of Himalayan Bio-resource Technology in Palampur and other centres where NDMC had sent the harvested tulip bulbs from Delhi for further regeneration, he added.

SHORT TAKES

Rahul spearheaded
Cong revival: Gogoi

New Delhi: Crediting Rahul Gandhi with the revival of the Congress, party MP Gaurav Gogoi says he not only provided "moral and philosophical" leadership to the party but also set the narrative for the Lok Sabha polls which was reflected in the results. In an interaction with PTI, Mr Gogoi recalled former Congress president Sonia Gandhi's "we will overcome" message at the Udaipur "chintan shivir" of the party in May, 2022, to assert that the party had come a long way on the road to revival and was determined to move forward on that path. "You must remember the journey of the Congress since 2021 when we had done very poorly in 2019 Lok Sabha polls and in the 2021 Assembly elections, we had lost in Assam and Kerala. The BJP was on an upswing. We organised the 'chintan shivir' in Udaipur as we were 'chintit (worried)'," Mr Gogoi said. — PTI

Akhilesh resigns
from Assembly seat

Lucknow: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday resigned from his Karhal Assembly seat following his election to Lok Sabha from the Kannauj constituency. Vidhan Sabha secretary Pradeep Kumar Dubey said, "Akhilesh Yadav as well as the newly elected party member from Faizabad Lok Sabha seat, Awadesh Prasad, have quit the membership of the UP Vidhan Sabha." Mr Prasad was elected to the UP Assembly from Milkipur constituency on a Samajwadi Party (SP) ticket. He sprang a surprise by defeating BJP's Lallu Singh in Faizabad, which includes the temple town of Ayodhya. Mr Yadav was the leader of Opposition in the UP assembly. The SP will now have to look for a new name in his place for the post of leader of Opposition in the Assembly. PTI

CID issues notice to
BSY in Pocco case

Bengaluru: The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has issued a notice to senior BJP leader and former Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa to appear before its probe team for an inquiry in connection with a POCO case registered against him, police sources said on Wednesday. Mr Yediyurappa is presently in Delhi, and he is likely to join the probe after he returns, sources close to him said. According to police, Mr Yediyurappa has been booked under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offence (Pocco) Act and Section 354 A (Sexual harassment) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) based on a complaint by the mother of a 17-year-old girl who alleged that he sexually assaulted her daughter during a meeting on February two this year. — PTI

UPSET WITH CPM
PERFORMANCE IN
POLLS: YECHURY

New Delhi, June 12: The CPI(M) is not happy with its performance in the Lok Sabha polls despite a marginal increase in the number of seats, and it will do a serious introspection on how to close the gap between its ability to launch struggles on the ground and its power to win seats, party leader Sitaram Yechury has said. In an interview with PTI, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary said there is some disappointment in the party, as despite the Left organisations leading several mass struggles, its impact was not reflected in its electoral performance. Asked about the Bharatiya Janata Party's entry in Kerala, the only state ruled by Left parties at present, Mr Yechury said the Left's vote share is intact, but some of the votes of the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) shifted towards the BJP. In the recently concluded LS polls, the Left parties increased their numbers in House to eight, from five in the 17th Lok Sabha. The CPI(M) won four seats, while the Communist Party of India (ML) Liberation won two each. — PTI



Sitaram Yechury

Shah takes stock of situation, orders stern action against culprits

J&K terror attacks: Intel grid at grassroots level to be tightened

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

Following back-to-back three terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir in the last 72 hours, the sources in the security set up said that the intelligence grid at the grassroots needs to be strengthened further as well as the gaps in the border security need to be plugged in at earliest.

Security experts believe that human intelligence gathering in Jammu and Kashmir needed to be upgraded and gaps in the security architecture required to be plugged as much as possible.

In last three days, the terror attacks took place in Reasi, Kathua and Doda. It may be recalled that both Prime Minister



Security personnel during a search and cordon operation after a terrorist attack at Bhadarwah in Doda district on Wednesday. — PTI

Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah took stock of the situation immediately after the Reasi attack on a bus carrying pilgrims on June 9. Soon after the terror

attack on Sunday, Mr Shah spoke to the lieutenant-governor and DGP of Jammu and Kashmir and warned that the culprits behind this dastardly attack will not be spared

and they will face the wrath of the law.

Noting that the local residents, especially in the border areas, are major assets for the intelligence collection, the sources further said that apart from the other intelligence inputs, the civilians' inputs needed to be scaled up to keep eyes on the infiltrators from the hostile neighbouring country.

The security experts have recently highlighted that the "lack of human intelligence" as one of the key factors that cripples the Central force's anti-terror operations in the in the J&K to hunt down the ultras, therefore, a well coordinated efforts are required to build the robust intelligence network and to fill the gaps in the security grid.

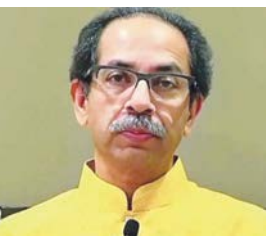
'If Modi can't stop terrorism, he has no right to be PM'

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, JUNE 12

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday hit out at Prime minister Narendra Modi over the terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir saying if the latter cannot handle terror attacks, he has no right to be the Prime Minister again.

He claimed that nothing had changed in the northern state after the abrogation of Article 370. "Kashmir is burning, attacks are being carried out. Lives are being lost. Who is responsible for the terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir? Where are those who have been speaking about Kashmir during the elections?" asked Mr Thackeray.

The former Maharashtra chief minister said the abrogation of Article 370, which provided special status to J&K, has made no difference in the territory. The legislation was revoked on August 5, 2019 — less than two months after PM



Uddhav Thackeray

Modi was elected to serve his second successive term.

Mr Thackeray said three attacks took place in J&K in the last three days. "Will he (Modi) still go to J&K or enjoy the breaking up of the opposition parties?" he said. Ever since the Modi-led NDA government was sworn-in for its third consecutive term, J&K has witnessed three terror attacks.

On June 9, when Modi took oath for the third time, terrorists opened fire at a bus carrying pilgrims to the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Katra. Ten people lost their lives while at least 41 people were injured.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan and actor K. Chiranjeevi during the swearing-in ceremony of N. Chandrababu Naidu as Andhra Pradesh chief minister in Amaravati on Wednesday. — PTI

Buzz rife over Priyanka to contest from Wayanad LS seat

Rahul in dilemma, but KPCC chief hints at leader's shift to Rae Bareilly

GILVESTER ASSARY
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JUNE 12

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is all set to vacate the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat to opt for Rae Bareilly.

While Mr Gandhi didn't give any indications in this regard, Kerala PCC president K. Sudhakaran, while addressing a meeting to felicitate the Congress leader, said, "When we hear that he is leaving Wayanad, we became sad. But he has to lead the country; hence, he cannot confine himself to Wayanad and stay here. There is no point in feeling sad and unhappy. All we can do is to extend our full support and best wishes to him."

On his part, Mr Gandhi didn't give any indication



Congress MP Rahul Gandhi being greeted by a kid during a rally in Malappuram, Kerala, on Wednesday. — PTI

about choosing between Wayanad and Rae Bareilly.

Addressing meetings in Edavanna, Malappuram and Kalpetta, the Congress leader said there was a dilemma in front of him. "I have a dilemma.

The question is will I be the Member of Parliament of Wayanad or Rae Bareilly? Unlike Narendra Modi who is not a biological person, I am a normal human being, so it is much simpler for me to make a deci-

sion. My god is the poor people of India. My god is the people of Wayanad. So, for me it is simple. I will talk to the people and the people of Wayanad will tell me what to do."

While reserving his decision, Mr Gandhi said, "I will commit to you one thing that both Wayanad and Rae Bareilly will be happy with my decision."

Even at a public meeting in Rae Bareilly on Tuesday, the Congress leader had hinted at good news that he would disclose later.

Mr Gandhi's hidden remarks have sparked speculation that Priyanka Gandhi Vadra might contest from Wayanad seat.

Rahul thanked the people of Wayanad for standing with him strongly during his trials and tribulations.

Pema Khandu re-elected Arunachal CM; oath today

Shah, Nadda will attend swearing-in ceremony

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, JUNE 12

The BJP legislators on Wednesday re-elected Pema Khandu as the leader of BJP Legislature Party. The meeting of the BJP Legislature Party (BLP) was held in the presence of the party's two central observers - Ravi Shankar Prasad and Tarun Chugh.

Mr Khandu will meet governor K.T. Parnaik to stake his claim to form the government. Mr Khandu, along with his Cabinet colleagues, will be sworn in on Thursday morning, marking the continuation of his leadership in the state.

Mr Khandu-led BJP in Arunachal Pradesh won the Assembly polls by securing a landslide victory by winning 46 seats in



Pema Khandu

the 60-member Assembly. The National People's Party won five seats, the Nationalist Congress Party won three seats, two seats were won by the People's Party of Arunachal, one by the Congress and three by the Independents in the recently concluded Assembly polls.

The NPP has offered support to the Bharatiya Janata Party government, but the party is unlikely to get representation in

the new Cabinet.

The swearing-in ceremony of the new government will be held at the Darbar Hall of Raj Bhavan in Itanagar.

The new government will take oath in presence of BJP national president J.P. Nadda, senior leader and Union home minister Amit Shah and party's national general secretary (organisation) B.L. Santosh, a BJP leader said on Wednesday.

Mr Nadda, Mr Shah, and Mr Santosh are expected to arrive in Itanagar on Wednesday evening.

Serving initially as the tourism minister in Nabam Tuki's Congress government, Mr Khandu's leadership trajectory soared following a constitutional crisis in January 2016 that led to the imposition of president's rule.

SKM protests against Shivraj being picked as agri minister

New Delhi, June 12: The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) on Wednesday protested against the NDA government's decision to allocate the ministry of agriculture and farmers welfare to Shivraj Singh Chouhan and held him responsible for the killing of six farmers in Madhya Pradesh's Mandsaur in June 2017.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the SKM said the farmers were "murdered" while participating in the massive struggle for MSP at the C2 plus 50 per cent formula given by the Swaminathan

Commission, comprehensive loan waiver and against the growing trend of farmers' suicide.

The SKM also announced that a meeting of its general body will be held in Delhi on July 10 which will be attended by the leaders of the constituent farmer organisations from all over India.

"The decision symbolizes arrogance and insensitivity exhibited by the former regimes of 2014 and 2019 with an absolute majority to the BJP. It has aroused wrath among the farmers, the farmers body said. — PTI



Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman arrives to assume charge at the South Block in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

'Maximum killings during Shah's regime' ■ PM busy responding to greetings: Rahul

Opp. slams Centre over J&K terrorist attacks

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

The Opposition on Wednesday hit out at the Centre, particularly Prime Minister Narendra Modi over Jammu terror attacks.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said, "Narendra Modi is busy responding to congratulatory messages and cannot even hear the cries of the families of the devotees who

were brutally killed in Jammu and Kashmir."

"There have been three separate terror incidents in the last three days in Reasi, Kathua and Doda in Jammu and Kashmir; but the Prime Minister is still busy celebrating," Mr Gandhi added.

National Conference president and former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah said that Kashmiris were not responsible for the

■ **FORMER JAMMU and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah said that the only way to prevent such incidents for the Centre is but to engage in talks with neighbouring Pakistan**

attacks and that the only way to prevent such incidents was for the Centre to reach out and engage in talks with Pakistan. "We

still have problems with our neighbour. These problems will not be solved by military action. Unless we talk to our neighbours, we cannot solve it. The terrorists are coming from across borders, and they will continue coming. Whichever government will be there tomorrow, will have to face the same thing."

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Wednesday criticised

Union home minister Amit Shah over the terror attack in J&K, alleging that the BJP leader "was busy wiping out the Opposition". Mr Raut also claimed that during Mr Shah's tenure, the highest number of security forces and civilians were killed in J&K.

Earlier, the Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee had demanded a probe into the attacks in the Union territory.

Govt at Centre formed with help of others, says NCP (SP) prez

Pawar: Gone are days of one-man rule

Pune, June 12: NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Wednesday said gone are the days of one-person rule as the new government at the Centre could not have been formed by the BJP without the help of other parties.

"With the coalition government in place at the Centre, the Modi guarantee is now over, a change made possible by the power of the voters," Mr Pawar said, while speaking during a meeting in Pune's Purandhar teshil, a part of Baramati Lok Sabha constituency, where

he had come to review the water scarcity situation.

"Elections are over and a government has been formed (at the Centre). For the last 10 years, the government had been of one person, but now it has been freed from it (that system). This time, the government has been formed with the help of others," Mr Pawar said, adding that the situation was such that the government would not have been formed without the help of the chief ministers of Bihar (Nitish Kumar) and Andhra Pradesh (N

Chandrababu Naidu).

"The government has been formed with their help, which means gone are the days of one person running the government. It also means that Modi's guarantee, about which we used to hear, is over and power to end it (this guarantee) lies with you," the former Union minister said.

Mr Pawar asserted that the Lok Sabha election outcome showed that a similar result will be seen in the Maharashtra Assembly polls. "After the Lok Sabha poll results are

replicated in the state Assembly polls, I will give the reins of the state in your hands. The power in the state will come in the hands of our people and this power will be used to address critical issues and for that I need your cooperation," Mr Pawar said.

In the LS polls, the BJP won 240 seats, falling short of the 272 majority mark and needing the support of allies in the party-led NDA for government formation, a far cry from the 303 and 282 seats it had won in 2019 and 2014 Lok Sabha elections. — PTI

MNS demands 20 seats from BJP in Maha polls

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, JUNE 12

After giving "unconditional support" to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Lok Sabha elections, Raj Thackeray-led Maharashtra Navnirman Sena has demanded 20 Assembly seats from the BJP for the upcoming state elections.

According to sources, one of the major seats demanded by Mr Thackeray is the Worli Assembly seat, which is currently represented by his nephew Aditya Thackeray, the son of Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray. Raj Thackeray's trusted lieutenant Sandeep Deshpande is the likely MNS candidate from Worli.

Majority of the seats demanded by the MNS are from Mumbai and Mumbai Metropolitan region (MMR).



Raj Thackeray

In 2009, when it fought the Assembly polls for the first time, the MNS had won 13 seats in the Maharashtra

Vidhan Sabha. However, they now have only one MLA in the Assembly. In the Lok Sabha polls, Raj Thackeray had announced unconditional support for Mr Modi and also campaigned for the National Democratic Alliance's candidates. He even shared the stage with the PM at an election rally at Shivaji Park in Mumbai last month.

However, the MNS functionaries were upset over Raj Thackeray being not invited for the swearing-in ceremony of the Modi government. The party leaders accused the BJP of neglecting him.

Sunetra Pawar likely to get RS nomination from Ajit camp

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, JUNE 12

Sunetra Pawar, wife of Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar, is likely to be nominated to Rajya Sabha. A formal announcement will be made on Thursday. She will file her nomination on Thursday.

Ajit Pawar's son Parth Pawar is also being considered by the NCP. Other NCP aspirants are Chhagan Bhujbal, Baba Siddique and Anand Paranjape. Rajya Sabha by-election was necessitated after NCP Working president Praful Patel resigned, following his re-election to the Upper House of Parliament in February 2024.

NCP national president Ajit Pawar on Wednesday evening held a meeting with top leaders including state president Sunil Tatkar, Chhagan Bhujbal and Dhananjay Munde.

An NCP insider said that Ms Pawar and her son Parth Pawar are the front-runners for the Rajya Sabha seat. "After taking into confidence all senior leaders, the party is likely to finalise the name Sunetra Pawar in the meeting," the NCP insider said.

Ms Pawar was defeated by her sister-in-law and Sharad Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule from the Baramati Lok Sabha seat in the recently held Lok Sabha election. Ms Sule won by a massive margin of 1,58,333 votes. Ms Sule had secured 7,32,312 votes, while Sunetra had received 573,979 votes.

SHORT TAKES

Woman gets death penalty for murder

Bhopal: A local court in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district has sentenced a 24-year-old tribal woman to death after convicting her in the murder of her mom-in-law. Kanchan Kol, a resident of Atraila village under the Mangawa police station limits, was accused of murdering her 50-year-old mother-in-law Saroj Kol by stabbing her more than 95 times with a sickle over a minor tiff two years ago. Local additional sessions court judge Padma Jatav sentenced her to death after convicting her in the case, according to the additional public prosecutor in the case Vikas Dwivedy. Her son informed the police about the incident and then took her to the hospital where she was declared dead, Mr Dwivedy said. According to Mr Dwivedy, the slain woman's husband, Valmik Kol, was also a co-accused in the case, but he was acquitted due to lack of evidence.

Bird flu found in WB; 2nd case after 5 yrs

Kolkata: A four-year-old girl from West Bengal was diagnosed with bird flu last month — the second case of human infection with avian influenza A(H9N2) in India, according to the WHO. The first case was reported in 2019 in the country. On Wednesday the WHO said, "On May 22, the International Health Regulations National Focal Point for India reported to WHO a case of human infection with avian influenza A(H9N2) virus detected in a child resident of West Bengal state in India." It added that the girl had exposure to poultry at home and in the surroundings but no one else had reported her symptoms. On May 1, the girl was discharged from the hospital with oxygen support. She has been stable at home, a state health department official said.

8 of family die in UP after truck overturns

Hardoi, Uttar Pradesh: A sand-laden truck overturned on people sleeping outside their house here early Wednesday, leaving eight members of a family dead, the police said. Superintendent of police Keshav Chandra Goswami said the victims were buried alive under the sand. Locals tried to remove the sand to rescue the family but in vain. A bulldozer was subsequently called to remove the sand and the bodies recovered. "Another five-year-old girl was injured in the incident and has been admitted to a hospital," the officer said, adding the truck driver has been arrested. Chief minister Yogi Adityanath condoled the loss of lives in the incident. District magistrate Mangla Prasad Singh said the police has seized the truck and an investigation is being conducted. — PTI

Majhi is sworn in as CM of Odisha

■ **Continued from Page 1** Bibhuti Bhusan Jena and Krushna Chandrara Mahapatra. Ganesh Ram Singkhuntia, Suryabanshi Suraj, Pradeep Bala Samanta, Gokulananda Mallik and Sampad Chandra Swain were administered oaths as ministers of state. Five-time Odisha chief minister and BJD president Naveen Patnaik graced the swearing-in ceremony. Sources said senior BJP leader and Ranpur MLA Surama Padhy is likely to be elected as the new Speaker of the Odisha Assembly. Dressed in his characteristic white robes with a royal blue half jacket, Mr Majhi walked over to and sought the blessings of Mr Modi, Union home minister Amit Shah, BJP president J.P. Nadda and a few other top leaders of the party. Before taking the oath as the new CM, Mr Majhi paid respect to the Odia leaders, who in the past played a crucial role in the formation of Odisha as a separate state on the basis of its language. As many as nine chief ministers, including Yogi Adityanath of Uttar Pradesh and Himanta Biswa Sarma of Assam, of BJP-ruled states, joined the oath-taking ceremony. The CM will hold his first Cabinet meeting later in the evening, where he is expected to announce some crucial decisions. Soon after the swearing-in ceremony, the new CM announced the reopening of the state secretariat's doors for journalists after a period of four years. The previous Naveen Patnaik government had banned the entry of journalists to the state secretariat in 2020 on the pretext of the Covid-19 crisis.

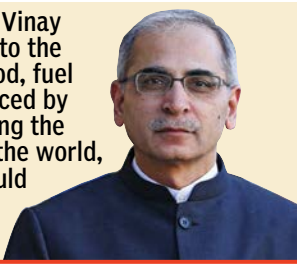
■ Modi set to attend G-7 summit, hold talks with Meloni Dialogue, diplomacy best option to resolve Ukraine conflict: India

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

Prime Minister Modi will on Thursday embark on his first foreign visit after assuming charge for the third term to Italy to attend the G-7 summit as a special invitee that will be held there from June 13 to 15 at Borgo Egnazia in Apulia.

Mr Modi will participate in the outreach session at the summit on June 14, foreign secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra said at a special MEA briefing on Wednesday. At the outreach session, the PM is expected to raise issues about developing nations that are collectively referred to as the Global South. The Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Israel-Gaza conflict are expected to be discussed

FOREIGN SECRETARY Vinay Mohan Kwatra referred to the challenges regarding food, fuel and fertiliser security faced by the Global South following the outbreak of conflicts in the world, indicating that India would focus on such issues at the G-7 meeting



prominently at the summit. The foreign secretary also confirmed that India would attend "at an appropriate level" the peace summit (June 15-16) for the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict that will be hosted by Switzerland, but added that the level of representation is currently being worked out.

India is not a member of the G-7 grouping, but Mr Modi has been regularly attending the G-7 summits

in the past few years following special invitations extended to India by the host nations. The G-7 grouping comprises seven of the "largest" advanced economies in the world — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States apart from the European Union (EU). On the sidelines of the summit, the PM will hold a bilateral meeting with Italian Prime Minister and the summit host

Georgia Meloni during which both leaders will review the entire gamut of bilateral ties and strategic partnership in areas, including trade and defence.

Asked about the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the position that will be taken by India at the summit, the foreign secretary said India has always been of the view that the issue can only be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy. He also referred to Mr Modi's earlier remark that "today is not an era of war". Mr Kwatra also referred to the challenges regarding food, fuel and fertiliser security faced by the Global South following the outbreak of conflicts in the world, indicating that India would focus on such issues at the G-7 meeting.



Fishermen prepare nets to catch fish at the Kasimedu fishing harbour in Chennai on Wednesday as the annual fishing ban period nears its end. The ban will be in force till June 14.

■ Move to help increase prey base for cheetahs 1,500 chitals to be relocated from 3 sanctuaries to MP's Kuno park

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, JUNE 11

To improve the prey base in Kuno National Park (KNP) in Sheopur district in Madhya Pradesh to prevent cheetahs from straying into the nearby human habitations "in search of food", the state forest department has decided to translocate around 1,500 chitals or spotted deer to KNP from other wildlife sanctuaries. The proposal to relocate chitals from three wildlife sanctuaries in the state to Kuno was cleared by the wildlife wing of the state forest department on Wednesday, sources said. Around 500 chitals each from Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR), Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) and



Madhav National Park (MNP) will be relocated to KNP to improve the prey base for cheetahs.

KNP field director Uttam Sharma on Wednesday confirmed that chitals from other wildlife sanctuaries are being shifted to Kuno.

The move to improve the prey base in KNP comes in the wake of cheetahs found to be straying into the human habitations in the periphery of the park and the neighbouring state of Rajasthan, frequently.

The felines have also killed prey such as cattle and goats in these areas.

Mr Sharma, however, dismissed the contention that cheetahs moved out of the core area of KNP because of a declining prey base.

"The prey base in Kuno National Park is sufficient. The main prey of cheetahs in KNP is chital. Cheetah is the fastest animal in the world and moves in vast areas," he said.

A few months ago, around 1,000 chitals were translocated to KNP from other wildlife sanctuaries.

In the first-ever inter-continental translocation of carnivores, eight cheetahs from Namibia were shifted to KNP in September 2019 under the cheetah introduction project.

Monthly stipend by Assam govt to curb early marriage

Scheme for all students from Class 11 to graduation

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, JUNE 12

Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said that his government has designed a scheme to delay the early marriage of girl students by providing monthly stipends to all unmarried girl students from Class 11 to graduation. The scheme will be applicable for married as well as unmarried girl students in post-graduation over the next five years.

Mr Sarma said the scheme, "Nijut Moina", was approved by the Cabinet, which has estimated that ₹1,500 crores would be required in five years to give the incentives to around 10 lakh girls.

"A married girl will not get the benefit. The only exception will be those married girls who are



Himanta Biswa Sarma

enroll-ed in PG courses, they will also get the benefit of the scheme," the CM clarified.

The chief minister said that one of the prime objectives of this scheme is to delay the marriage of a girl so that she can be financially independent and start earning for herself and her family. Asserting that the scheme will increase the gross enrollment ratio of girls substantially, he informed that all girls studying in Classes 11 and 12 will get ₹1,000 every month, it will be ₹1,250 for degree students and ₹2,500 for girls doing PG.

"Except for daughters of ministers, MLAs and MPs,

and those students studying in private colleges, all girls irrespective of their financial background will be included in the scheme. In June and July, during summer vacation, no money will be given. The stipend will be deposited to the bank accounts of the students for 10 months in a year," he said.

Mr Sarma reiterated, "Those girls who were not able to continue their education due to various reasons, including financial hardships, will now be able to do so. We expect around 2,00,000 more girl students to enroll in educational institutions this year."

The CM said the students who are involved in ragging, indiscipline, low attendance or perform poorly in their examinations will stop getting the stipend.

Monsoon sluggish as heat still grips North

New Delhi, June 12: A sluggish southwest monsoon on Wednesday covered large parts of Maharashtra, awaiting a fresh pulse to march across central and northern India, which continued to reel under intense heat conditions.

The IMD said monsoon could cover Odisha, coastal Andhra Pradesh and north-west Bay of Bengal during the next three to four days.

"The Bay of Bengal arm of the monsoon is weak and is awaiting a fresh pulse to take it forward," an official said.

Heatwave conditions were observed on Wednesday in most parts of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, UP, Jharkhand, in many parts of north Rajasthan; in some parts of Himachal, south Bihar, north Odisha and

in isolated pockets of Gangetic West Bengal.

Severe heatwave conditions were also observed in isolated pockets of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Jharkhand and Gangetic West Bengal.

The maximum temperatures were in the range of 45-47°C over some parts of west Jharkhand, south UP, Haryana-Chandigarh-Delhi, Punjab, north Rajasthan.

The highest maximum temperature of 47.5°C was reported at Kanpur IAF in eastern UP.

Former earth sciences secretary Madhavan Rajeevan said after a normal progress, monsoon is going into a hiatus mode.

"Not much progress is expected in the next 8-10 days, thus delaying onset over north India," he wrote on X. — PTI

65 ill in MP village after drinking polluted water

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, JUNE 12

At least 65 people fell ill after allegedly drinking polluted water in a village in Madhya Pradesh's Bhind district, officials said on Wednesday.

The local people alleged that two people died after drinking polluted water.

However, officials denied the allegations that the two people, Brajraj Choudhury (80) and Asharam Viswas (75), died after drinking polluted water, saying that they succumbed to prolonged illness.

The incident took place in the village of Fuph, around 20 km from district headquarters of Bhind.

The local block medical officer Siddharth Chouhan said that a number of people were admitted to the community health centre in Fuph over the last few days following complaints of vomiting.

Later, it was found that the polluted piped water, supplied in the three wards in the village, caused illness among the people. Dr Chouhan said that he held discussions with the authorities of the local civic body on the matter.

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO

BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 12

In a significant development, Odisha's new BJP government on Wednesday announced that the four gates of the Jagannath temple will be reopened for devotees on Thursday.

The gates were mysteriously closed for over a year now for unspecified reasons. Despite repeated demands by the Opposition parties, the Naveen Patnaik government was sitting silent on the issue. Devotees had harrowing times to visit the temple and stand in the queue to have a darshan of Lord Jagannath and His siblings — elder brother Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra.

This decision to open the temple was taken at the first Cabinet meeting, chaired by new chief minister Mohan Charan Mishra. The Cabinet met soon after Mr Majhi was administered the oath of office as the CM of Odisha.

The Cabinet also cleared a proposal to create a corpus fund of ₹500 crores for Srimandir.

The Cabinet also approved a proposal for the setting up of a Samrudha Krushi Committee for the holistic development of farmers.

The committee, among others, will suggest the execution of the BJP's poll promise to provide ₹3,100 minimum support price (MSP) per quintal of paddy to farmers.

41 Indian workers die, 50 hurt in huge fire in Kuwait building

■ **Continued from Page 1** embassy said in a post on X: "In connection with the tragic fire accident involving Indian workers today, the embassy has put in place an emergency helpline number: +965-65505246. All concerned are requested to connect over this helpline for updates." Indians constitute 21 per cent (1 million) of the total population of Kuwait and 30 per cent of its workforce (approximately 9 lakhs). "The fire mishap in Kuwait City is saddening. My thoughts are with all those who have lost their near and dear ones. I pray that the injured recover at the earliest. The Indian embassy in Kuwait is closely monitoring the situation and working with the authorities there to assist the affected," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on X.

"Deeply shocked by the news of the fire incident in Kuwait City. There are reportedly over 40 deaths and over 50 have been hospitalised. Our ambassador has gone to the camp. We are awaiting further information,"

external affairs minister S. Jaishankar wrote on X.

The Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber al-Sabah, on Wednesday ordered the authorities to probe the massive fire and vowed to hold accountable those responsible for the tragedy. Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah condoled the deaths and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousuf Al-Sabah, serving as the first deputy prime minister, minister of interior and minister of defence, has ordered the police to arrest the owner of the Mangaf building, where the fatal blaze occurred, the building's janitor, as well as the owner of the company responsible for the workers pending the end of the criminal evidence personnel's examination of the scene, the Kuwait Times reported.

"What happened today is a result of the greed of the company and building owners," the minister said as he visited the fire scene. He said that he gave

orders to Kuwait Municipality and the Public Authority for Manpower to launch immediate action to address similar violations where large numbers of workers are crammed into one residential building, and make sure that all safety requirements are in place in order to prevent similar incidents in the future.

Engineer Saud Al-Dabbous, the director-general of Kuwait Municipality, has suspended several key officials. "These suspensions were enacted in the interest of public safety, pending the completion of an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the tragic incident," the paper said.

Witnesses said the sight of flames engulfing the building instilled fear among onlookers.

Officials in New Delhi said, meanwhile, that the authorities in Kuwait are expected to carry out a full investigation into the causes of the fire. Some media reports suggested that key fire safety norms may not have been followed in the building, leading to the tragedy.

2 terrorists killed in encounter in J&K

■ **Continued from Page 1** a deep ravine after the driver, who was reportedly hit by a bullet fired by the assailants, lost balance of the vehicle.

The sneak attack on the bus at Kanda near the Teryath village of Reasi's Poni area was carried out by two militants on June 9, the day when Narendra Modi was sworn in for the third term as PM at a grand ceremony in Delhi.

Additional director-general of J&K police Anand Jain told reporters that a newly infiltrating group of militants descended on Saida Sukhal village, close to the International Border (IB) with Pakistan, in the Kathua district at around 7.45 pm on Tuesday.

The terrorists entered a private house and asked a father-son duo who was present there for drinking water, which they refused. As they started fleeing, the gunmen opened fire over their heads and then forcibly entered another house, by which time the other villagers had informed the police about their presence in the area.

A resident Surinder Kumar said that he saw two strangers dressed in black and carrying assault rifles entering the village. "I was returning

home on a motorcycle when a boy ran towards me to inform me that there were two gunmen around. I also saw them and heard them asking for water, but suspecting they were terrorists, I alerted the villagers.

Sensing trouble, the terrorists opened fire, injuring one villager in the shoulder. This was followed by a blast," he said. Mr Jain said: "The villagers grew suspicious and slammed their doors on terrorists while a few raised alarm. The terrorists panicked, fired their rifles into the air and also aimed at a couple of villagers. A police party was already on the spot. One of the terrorists hurled a hand grenade towards them but was killed in the retaliatory fire."

A second terrorist was killed in the gunfight with the security forces on Wednesday. The ADGP said that CRPF jawan Kabir Das, who was injured in the initial stage of the encounter, died in Hiranagar's sub-district hospital early Wednesday. He added that the civilian who was injured in the terrorist firing is "stable."

The security forces have recovered grenades, IEDs, a US-made M4 carbine and other war-like weapons from the slain terrorists. While the efforts were on to neutralise the second militant at Saida, a group of three to four militants targeted a joint checkpoint of the J&K police and the Army in the Chattergalla area of eastern Doda district, injuring five soldiers and a special police officer, the officials said.

After the attack and exchange of fire with the security forces, the militants fled into nearby woods, the police sources said, adding that the J&K police, along with the Army and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), have launched a massive search operation in the higher reaches of Doda to "neutralise" them.

A senior police official said that the J&K police and the Army had stepped up their vigil in the area by setting up additional checkpoints and laying drop-gates after receiving reports about the movement of militants in the area.

"Over the past few days, we were getting information about the movement of terrorists through the intelligence branch of the district police and accordingly, temporary posts jointly manned by the Army and the police were

set up in the higher reaches along with check points on the (inter-state) road," deputy inspector-general of police, Doda-Kishtwar-Ramban range, Shridhar Patil, told the media.

Asked about these back-to-back terror attacks, Mr Jain said, "It is our hostile neighbour who always tries to damage the peaceful environment in our country."

Union minister Jitendra Singh said: "The terrorists are desperate and, as a result of the mounting pressure of the security forces in the Kashmir Valley, they are on the run and are trying to shift the focus of their activities to the Jammu region, but their design will not succeed."

Lieutenant-governor Manoj Sinha said that his administration and the security forces "will not rest till terrorism and its supporters are eliminated from the J&K soil".

While addressing a folk festival here, Mr Sinha said, "The anger among people (over the Reasi incident) is genuine. People should have faith in the great valour, courage and intelligence of the police and security forces. We will not rest till we root out terrorism and its supporters from the J&K soil."

THE ASIAN AGE

13 JUNE 2024

Andhra hopes high as Naidu starts record 4th term as CM

After one of the biggest electoral triumphs of his life, Nara Chandrababu Naidu, chief of the Telugu Desam Party, is set to begin a record fourth term as chief minister of Andhra Pradesh. And with his return to power, hopes are sky high in the beleaguered state, marked with little to no development, investment, job creation or infrastructure upgrade for the last five years or more.

After taking oath on Wednesday in the presence of political and cultural bigwigs, including his NDA partners, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, home minister Amit Shah, Union ministers Nitin Gadkari and J.P. Nadda, and former vice-president of India, M. Venkaiah Naidu, besides a galaxy of film stars including Tamil superstar Rajinikanth, and Telugu megastar K. Chiranjeevi, whose younger brother and Tollywood power star K. Pawan Kalyan is the boss of the Jana Sena Party, a crucial NDA ally, and a minister in the new Andhra Pradesh Cabinet, chief minister Chandrababu Naidu is all set to hit the ground running.

He is also the all-time longest serving Telugu CM, with the intense pressure of high expectations of over five crore people of Andhra Pradesh upon him. They would expect miracles from the former CEO of Andhra Pradesh, Inc., as he was called during his first two terms as CM of united AP, with a fair claim of having re-imagined and recreated Brand Cyberabad.

Mr Chandrababu Naidu, whose business friendly policies, proactive push to build Hyderabad into a global destination for software and pharma investments and rapid push for infrastructure-building during his first stint of nine years over two terms as CM of united AP between 1995 and 2004, was the first state CM and regional party leader to create a space in the post-liberalisation phase of Indian democracy to pursue economic reforms and investments-to-jobs creation as good politics. But he also suffered politically for his work.

Accused of ignoring rural and agrarian distress through the largely drought-prone stint, even as he brought Microsoft and Bill Gates to invest in their first-ever development centre outside the United States, as well as a plethora of other major software corporations, Mr Naidu was sent into a decade outside power, leaving the NDA. He remained in hibernation, between 2004 and 2014, during which time, his state was bifurcated into Telangana and AP, and the residual Andhra state had to lose Hyderabad.

Promising a more balanced tenure when he came to power as an NDA partner, backed by the electoral charisma of the then prime ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi, and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan, Mr Naidu wished to put all his eggs in the basket of a new, greenfield capital of Amaravati, and yet again, lost power badly in 2019 to YSRC chief Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

A tenacious fighter with a never give-up attitude, Mr Chandrababu Naidu, suffering charges of insider trading and corruption, was then sent to prison by the Jagan Mohan Reddy government, but he came back, yet again, into the NDA fold and tasted exceptional electoral success.

In his fourth term, he will face several challenges, including rebuilding the infrastructure and financial health of his state, now tottering without its own capital for a decade, and having suffered a huge partisan divide as its new social reality. But the people of Andhra Pradesh have faith, reflected in the mandate they gave, that if anyone can turn things around, it is Nara Chandrababu Naidu who is equal to the task.

Neet: Key questions unanswered

There must be something seriously wrong with the conduct and granting of marks in the medical entrance test Neet-UG examination of 2024. Several irregularities were noted in its conduct, including the possible leaking of the question paper, wrong issue of different question papers to different sections of students in parts of India and many more questions hanging over the results. No wonder the Supreme Court decided to issue notice to the Centre as well as the National Testing Agency vested with the task of conducting the exam and correction of papers that lakhs of students take all over the country. It is the integrity of the testing system that is being doubted now after several egregious actions by the NTA.

With their whole career depending on their performance in the test to qualify for a medical education in dentistry and general medicine at the undergraduate level, student anxiety skyrocketed with the release of results.

The court has said that it might take extreme action like a retest if the anomalies are not properly explained. It is not often that students stand with placards decrying the exam system, but they are so alarmed by the glaring discrepancies in the test this year that they have been quite demonstrative about their grievances.

An unusual number of toppers — as high as 67 this time — as compared to just two last year and three on average in the last five years, grace marks awarded to 1,586 candidates on the grounds that there was “loss of time” in an offline test and 44 toppers getting grace marks despite getting an answer wrong because a Class 12 NCERT textbook had carried an inaccuracy were some of the glaring anomalies pointed out.

The testing agency and the government that has appointed it for the task of setting the question papers in confidential mode and putting them out to lakhs of candidates have much to answer and do it satisfactorily to convince the top court that injustice has not occurred because of the errors committed by the system. The problems are cropping up at a time when there is intense resentment against the national test in many states, especially in Tamil Nadu where a retired judge listed how Neet has altered the medical entrance landscape, favouring students from affluent families because 99 per cent of students passing the test needed to train at special tuition academies and putting the CBSE stream of education at an advantage over others. As the court said, NTA and the Centre have a lot to answer for.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



It's time for New Gen to consolidate on ground



Shikha Mukerjee

Now that the anti-BJP Opposition is back in strength in the 18th Lok Sabha after the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance parties won 232 of the 543 seats and the conglomerate of regional and smaller parties have earned bragging rights, it's time for leaders of these parties to return to the battlefield. Narendra Modi may have been reduced to leading a minority government but the BJP still remains a formidable political machine.

The time to engage in the byzantine workings in New Delhi's rarified environment has not arrived for Rahul Gandhi or Akhilesh Yadav, not even Supriya Sule and Abhishek Banerjee, who are still underestudies even though they packed a punch in this election. With others like Uddhav and Aaditya Thackeray, M.K. Stalin and Udhaynidhi, and Tejashwi Yadav, these torchbearers of the political aristocracy must go back to fortifying the trenches, connecting with the popular sovereign, managing the organisational networks and strengthening the bases they have retaken from the BJP.

The representative of Indian politics' middle ground, bookended by the extreme-right BJP-RSS and the Left, the Congress as the largest national party, Samajwadi Party, Nationalist Congress Party, DMK, Trinamul Congress and the RJD have to work on the ground to foil the recapture of the median voter and the space they compelled the BJP to vacate.

This election is certainly historic, but not because Mr Modi became PM for the third time, matching Jawaharlal Nehru's record. It is historic because a new generation of leaders have emerged in the old parties and rebuilt the bases that were almost razed by the

BJP juggernaut between 2014 and 2024.

Each of these leaders were handed hay as they entered the firepit that is the Lok Sabha election. Instead of setting themselves on fire, they lit a fire that sent the BJP scampering. In UP, the SP won 37 seats, against the BJP's 33, down from 62. In Maharashtra, the Congress won 13 seats, while the BJP won a mere nine seats, down from 23 in 2019. In Tamil Nadu, the BJP was nil out of 39 seats. The Mamata-Abhishek Banerjee duo, sneeringly referred to as "Pishi-Bhaipo" by Mr Modi and his party, regained ground and won 29 seats out of the state's 42.

The transition in leadership from the founding to successor generation that is this new league of younger leaders was invariably marked by blood feuds, defections, bad-mouthing and backstabbing by veterans within and outside the immediate families. Through the process of taking control, stabilising the often-vandalised parties, establishing their identities by coming out of the shadow of their predecessors, these new leaders have a history with many commonalities and the wisdom of hindsight, that if some things were done differently, it would have been less politically destructive.

The decade of Mr Modi's first two terms seems to have worked like a baptism of fire for the new generation. Instead of the visceral animosity their predecessors had towards the Congress, a leader like Akhilesh Yadav, or Uddhav and Aaditya Thackeray, can and do get along with Rahul Gandhi. The SP-Congress alliance in UP is proof that such partnerships do indeed work well. The new league of leaders turned out to be challengers of 73-year-old Mr Modi's popularity among voters, a hefty 25 per cent-plus of whom are under 30 and, more signifi-

If Rahul Gandhi stalls the momentum that the Lok Sabha poll performance created by becoming the Leader of the Opposition with ministerial rank, endless office work and a big bungalow, it would please the BJP

cantly, either grew up and became first-time voters or were job-seekers in the past 10 years, sitting recruitment examinations that either didn't take place as scheduled, or were cancelled because of paper leaks or were waitlisted as the government hadn't notified the filling of vacancies.

Without a formal common minimum programme, a centralised seat-sharing mechanism, this new generation has an extraordinary ability to identify and speak on issues and problems by pinpointing the BJP as the common enemy and their target. Jobs, unemployment, contractual recruitment into the Army through the "Agnipath" scheme, recruitment exams and unfilled vacancies, bad environment for trade and small businesses, the cost-of-living crisis, hate speeches and divisive politics are shared and separate concerns. In a remarkable campaign, each of these parties addressed each of these issues, contextualising them within the overarching anxiety about Mr Modi's authoritarian, extreme right-wing politics, crony capitalism and bad governance. Each of these leaders used the lived experiences of their constituents to locate these problems within the specific territories which they worked to recover from the BJP's stranglehold and build support for the common agenda that India's democracy, Constitution, diversity, social harmony and political pluralism were in danger from the hegemonic and homogenising design of the Narendra Modi-led BJP.

In Maharashtra, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, the INDIA bloc parties have dislodged the BJP from its number one position in the Lok Sabha election. The

INDIA parties have to retake these states in the coming Assembly elections. In Tamil Nadu, the BJP hasn't made a breakthrough despite the best efforts of Mr Modi. In West Bengal, the BJP is a distant number two, way behind the Trinamul Congress. In Karnataka, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Bihar the BJP haemorrhaged; it yielded seats to the Congress, the Rashtriya Janata Dal and even the CPI(M).

The new generation of leaders rebuilt political capital from the bottom up. They fought the BJP and its reputation as an outstandingly efficient, cohesively organised and strongly-led party that had mastered strategy, especially manipulating caste and sub-caste fractions, making them serve as vote-multipliers to enable the party to punch above its weight in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal, Karnataka and dream of making a dent in Tamil Nadu.

The responsibility of the new league of leaders is clear: to increase the efficiency of their parties in defeating the BJP by getting better at working in coordination with allies at the ground level, where hostility between workers of different parties can upset the momentum that the Lok Sabha poll performance created by becoming the Leader of the Opposition with ministerial rank, endless office work and a big bungalow, it would please the BJP. A peripatetic Rahul Gandhi is a different kettle of fish than one who is tied down in New Delhi. The Congress has other younger, successful and hungry leaders, like Sachin Pilot or Gaurav Gogoi, who can take on the BJP.

As leaders of regional parties, even Chirag Paswan and Nara Lokesh seem to have figured out that their future lies in defending their territories against, principally, the BJP.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS

HONOUR STATES

For years, Mr Narendra Modi ran Gujarat by his tenet of hands-on governance. He administered the state through the district bureaucracy and by leveraging his personal eloquence. He had sought little help from either the Assembly or his ministers. As PM, his PMO stayed pivotal. The remedy must lie away from this highly centralised style to that of feeling the pulse of the commoner. The setback to the BJP's own calculations in the recent LS elections should serve as a pointer. Moderation is a rare virtue in politics and what is needed now is consultative federalism.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

TAX THE RICH

POLITICIANS in power never tire of telling the citizens about the need to sacrifice all they can for the greater glory of the nation. But they themselves will do nothing for the sake of the nation except give long speeches. There is a recent trend of top business honchos advising working 72 and 84 hours every week. But ask them about the proposal to introduce billionaire tax and they would all gang up together and oppose it tooth and nail. All lessons in patriotism and nationalism seem to be meant only for the poor suffering public while the top guys keep on increasing their own wealth in leaps and bounds.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

AYODHYA LESSON

THE PEOPLE of India, each a hero for democracy and its protection, have demonstrated their power in the recent Lok Sabha election. Citizens from all backgrounds, dalits, adivasis, farmers, the poor, and OBCs, have shown their strength. The BJP faced defeat even in seats like Ayodhya, despite fulfilling its major promise of constructing the Ram Temple. This loss is attributed to actions such as harassing the poor and demolishing their shelters, which affected votes in various regions, including those from farmers and Adivasis. In response to these results, the BJP, now part of a new coalition government, has focused on implementing schemes like PM-Kisan Nidhi and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana to win back the hearts of thousands of Indians.

Jakir Hussain
Kanpur

Bhopinder Singh



If Labour wins in UK, as expected, Starmer govt may be good for India

The general election in Britain is due to be held just three weeks from now, on July 4. The Conservative Party had won a majority in the House of Commons in 2010, 2015, 2017 and 2019, albeit with different Prime Ministers — starting with David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss to the incumbent, Rishi Sunak. However, this is poised for a change, given the seemingly irreversible lead of the Labour Party under Sir Keir Starmer over the Rishi Sunak-led Conservatives. Almost all pollsters validate the writing on the wall. It is time to bid farewell to the Tories and await the pragmatist, reformist and constantly evolving Labour Party leader Keir Starmer as the next PM of Great Britain.

Why should this concern India? Because Britons of Indian origin constitute the UK's largest ethnic minority, at about 2.5 per cent of the population, or two million. The fact that Rishi Sunak too is of Indian origin and has often worn his religio-cultural identity on his brown sleeves, the subliminal after-effects can be imagined in the erstwhile empire where it was once imperiously claimed that "the sun never set". Beyond the patent political correctness that defines most Britons, to assume that there would be no subliminal racist concerns with a PM named "Rishi" (sage in Sanskrit), that too within the ranks of the Tories, is to live under a rock! As could be normally expected, would attempts by Rishi Sunak's successor, Keir Starmer, to "un-do" Rishi and

his legacy, lead to changed equations which are fundamentally detrimental to India? The short answer is "no".

For starters, Labour has been the "natural" party of choice for most Britons of Indian origin, given the support afforded towards India's Independence, as opposed to the Conservatives. Yet, it is equally true that the Conservatives had swung a significant voter base towards itself during the Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour era (2015-2020), which was marked by Mr Corbyn's hard-left stances that militated against Indian positions, especially on Kashmir. A 2019 Labour motion noted that Kashmir was a "disputed territory" and that "the people of Kashmir should be given the right of self-determination in accordance with UN resolutions". Many Britons of Indian origin were horrified with the obviously "anti-India" stance, always predicated on the hyphenated corollary to be viewed as "pro-Pakistan". Second, the unprecedented possibility of an Indian-origin incumbent at 10 Downing Street (Rishi Sunak) accelerated the mass exodus of many desis towards Tory ranks.

But the ambiguous and relatively un-decoded Keir Starmer is outrightly anti-Jeremy Corbyn, as are his policies. Sir Keir Starmer has completely enervated the headline Labour-Left and steered the Labour anchorage to its revised centrist moorings. About four years ago, he retracted sharply from Mr Corbyn's position on Kashmir by brazenly counterpoising: "Any constitutional issues in India are a

matter for India's Parliament, and Kashmir is a bilateral issue for India and Pakistan to resolve peacefully. Labour is an internationalist party and stands for the defence of human rights everywhere." The telling usage and deep import of insisting on "bilateral issue" (read, pro-India position), whilst nuancing the same with perfunctory Labour verbiage of "internationalist" and "human rights", was a marked course correction. Keir Starmer did so, calculating the possible repercussions on the extreme-left section of his Labour party and even on the still-sizeable vote bank of Britons of Pakistani origin. The lawyer in him punted to be clearly "pro-India".

Since then, Sir Keir has solidified his "pro-India" spiel and last year spoke at the India Global Forum, acknowledging: "This is a changed Labour Party... the opportunity is there for this to be an Indian century ... The challenge, as I see it now, is for Britain to step out of the shadows in its mind, to cast aside the entitlement of history and deepen our relationship with the real India, the modern India, the future India." Tellingly, Keir Starmer had suspended Mr Corbyn for his anti-Semitism (another strong retraction in Labour stand) and today Mr Corbyn is standing as an Independent!

Clearly, the PM-in waiting is seeing the practical picture as opposed to that of a puritanical ideologue when he acknowledges the "win-win" possibilities with the growing Indian economy that just dislodged the UK from the Global Top 5. India, as the second

largest source of foreign direct investment into the UK, will be critical to Keir Starmer's plans to fix the UK's pressing economic woes.

Also, unlike Rishi, who would be extra-cautious to avoid showing any overt India bias (beyond cultural issues) due to his inherent Indianness, Keir Starmer could freely demonstrate positive India biases, as they would make eminent sense, economically, and even from partisan lens.

Whereas, like all right-wing politicians, Rishi is harping to the past by desperately proposing long-abandoned schemes like National Service to drum up a "renewed sense of pride". This on top of the Brexit fiasco (which Keir Starmer hopes to moderate and normalise with EU) points to the agenda-less spiel of the Tories, which promises even more conservatism, exclusivism and revisionism. In contrast, Sir Keir Starmer is relatively fresh (he became an MP in 2015), flexible and unstrapped to the dogmas of the past. His politics are completely practical, relentlessly ends-focused, and not caught up in identities, "camps" or ideologies (some even call it transactional and unrooted), and that may just be the reason why New Delhi ought to welcome Sir Keir Starmer as the next PM of Britain, once the vacuously nativist fuss around Rishi Sunak is over.

The writer is a retired lieutenant-general and a former lieutenant-governor of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Puducherry

SHORT TAKES

NEW CALEDONIA
REFORM THAT LED
TO RIOTS PUT OFF

Paris, June 12: President Emmanuel Macron said on Wednesday that a voting reform that caused deadly riots in French Pacific territory New Caledonia would be “suspended” in light of snap parliamentary poll.

Instead he aimed to “give full voice to local dialogue and the restoration of order” after weeks of unrest in which nine people died, Macron said.

The reform would have allowed people resident in New Caledonia for at least 10 years to vote in local ballots — unfreezing electoral rolls that have gone unchanged.

COURT INDICTS
NOBEL LAUREATE
YUNUS FOR GRAFT

Dhaka, June 12: Bangladeshi Nobel peace laureate Muhammad Yunus was indicted in a corruption case on Wednesday, the latest charges to proceed against the respected economist that supporters say are politically motivated.

Yunus, 83, is credited with lifting millions out of poverty with his pioneering microfinance bank but has earned the enmity of PM Sheikh Hasina, who has accused him of “sucking blood” from the poor.

Hasina has made several scathing verbal attacks against the Nobel Peace Prize winner.

OVER 80 KILLED
IN BOAT ACCIDENT
IN WEST CONGO

Beni, June 12: More than 80 people have been killed in a boat accident on the River Kwa in the Democratic Republic of Congo’s Mai-Ndombe province, the country’s presidency said on Wednesday.

Deadly boat accidents are common in the waters of Congo, where vessels are frequently loaded well beyond their capacity. The central African country has few tarred roads, and river travel is common.

“The President of the Republic is calling for an investigation into the true causes of this unfortunate incident.”

HK: PASSPORTS
OF 6 DEMOCRACY
ACTIVISTS VOID

Hong Kong, June 12: The Hong Kong government said on Wednesday it had cancelled the passports of six democracy activists who fled to the United Kingdom, calling them “lawless wanted criminals”.

Hong Kong has intensified a crackdown on dissent since authorities quashed massive, at times violent, pro-democracy protests in 2019, enacting security laws that critics such as the United Kingdom and the United States say have curbed its unique freedoms.

The city issued HK\$1 million (\$128,000) bounties last year for 13 activists based abroad.

SA RECORDS 1ST
VIRAL INFECTION
MPOX DEATH

Johannesburg, June 12: A 37-year-old man has died in South Africa from the viral infection mpox, becoming the first fatality in the country after five laboratory-confirmed cases were recorded over the past month, the health minister said on Wednesday.

The man died in Tembisa Hospital on Monday, health minister Joe Phaahla told a news conference. “One death is too many, especially from a preventable and manageable disease like mpox,” he said.

Mpox spreads through close physical contact. Most cases are mild but it can kill.

ACROPOLIS IN
ATHENS CLOSES
AFTER HEATWAVE

Athens, June 12: The Athens Acropolis, Greece’s most visited tourist site, was closed to the public during the hottest hours of Wednesday as the season’s earliest-ever heatwave swept the country, prompting school closures and health warnings.

The culture ministry had said the Unesco-listed archaeological site would close from midday to 5:00 pm (0900 to 1400 GMT), with temperatures expected to reach 43 degrees Celsius (109 degrees Fahrenheit) on Wednesday and Thursday. The first heatwave of the year in Greece, regularly hit by searing summer temperatures, is due to peak over those two days.

Join election pact
against far right:
Macron to rivals

Paris, June 12: French President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday urged rival parties to join his electoral alliance against Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Rally, while the conservative Republicans ditched their party chief for eyeing a far-right pact.

The fast-moving political developments come after Macron’s shock decision to call a snap parliamentary election in a few weeks’ time. The vote could hand real power to Le Pen’s party after years on the sidelines.

In what amounted to a campaign speech, Macron on Wednesday defended his decision to call the snap vote, and urged parties on both sides of the political centre to join him in the battle against the hard right in the June 30 and July 7 elections.

Macron, who ruled out quitting if his ruling alliance loses, called on “our compatriots and political leaders who do not recognise themselves in the extremist fever” to “build a new project ... a coalition to govern.”

In a sign of the political chaos that Macron’s decision has unleashed, the Republicans party leadership on Wednesday decided to kick out their party

chief Eric Ciotti after he appealed for a poll alliance between his party’s candidates and the RN.

Macron described such an accord as a “deal with the devil”. It would have ended the decades-long mainstream political consensus to block the far-right from power.

Writing on X, Ciotti said the Republicans meeting had not followed protocol: “I am and remain the president of our political party, elected by the members!” he said.

Macron called the election on Sunday after the anti-immigration, eurosceptic RN came out on top in a vote for the European Parliament. The RN is expected to win 31% of votes in the first round national vote on June 30, while a left-wing alliance would get 28%, an Elabe poll on Wednesday showed. Macron’s ticket is seen clinching 18%.

Political commentators say the battle between the far right and left will determine who comes out on top in the legislative election, which will be decided in the second round on July 7. If the RN were to win a parliamentary majority, Macron would remain President for three more years. — Reuters



People protest to demand rise in wage and pension, as they march towards the National Assembly in Islamabad, on Wednesday.

— AFP

Imran nod for
talks with govt

Islamabad, June 12: Pakistan’s jailed former prime minister Imran Khan in an apparent U-turn has given a green signal for talks with the government to ease the ongoing political tension, days after refusing to have a dialogue with the toothless ruling coalition.

The change of heart came after the Supreme Court during a hearing of a case on changes to the country’s graft laws observed that Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party should initiate talks with the government and resolve its issues in Parliament through dialogue.

Speaking to journalists outside the Adiala Jail where Khan is incarcerated, PTI leader Gohar Ali Khan on Tuesday said that Khan has given the go-ahead for the talks with the government. He said the party would initially take its allies into confidence but could also take a solo flight on the issue. “We told the PTI founder that dialogue is necessary, as the distance is widening. He agreed with us (on this),” Gohar told the media outside the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi.

According to Gohar, Khan, 71, wanted the avenues of dialogue to be opened. “The PTI founder has said many times that ‘I am ready to forgive



Imran Riaz Khan

PAK YOUTUBER,
ALSO AN ARMY
CRITIC DETAINED

Lahore, June 12: Pakistan’s popular YouTuber and television anchor Imran Riaz Khan, regarded as a staunch critic of the powerful Army, was detained allegedly by officials of the intelligence agencies at the Lahore airport here on Wednesday, his lawyer claimed.

Khan, a supporter of jailed ex-PM Imran Khan, was “kidnapped” by unidentified persons accompanied by policemen, said his lawyer Advocate Azhar Siddique. — PTI

what happened to me’,” Gohar was quoted as saying by Geo TV.

Imran is lodged at the high-security Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi since his arrest 10 months ago for his involvement in multiple cases. — PTI

ANNUAL | PILGRIMAGE

Mecca, June 12: Muslim pilgrims have been streaming into Saudi Arabia’s holy city of Mecca ahead of the start of the Haj later this week, as the annual pilgrimage returns to its monumental scale.

Saudi officials say more than 1.5 million foreign pilgrims have arrived in the country by Tuesday, the vast majority by air, from across the world.

More are expected, and hundreds of thousands of Saudis and others living in Saudi Arabia will also join them when the pilgrim

mage officially begins on Friday. Saudi officials said they expect the number of pilgrims this year to exceed 2023, when more than 1.8 million people performed Haj, approaching pre-pandemic levels. In 2019, more than 2.4 million Muslims made the pilgrimage.

The pilgrims included 4,200 Palestinians from the occupied West Bank who reached Mecca earlier this month, said the Palestinian ministry of awqaf and religious affairs.

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip were not able to travel

Israel, Hamas guilty of sexual
violence, finds UN’s HR probe

Hamas official denies group presented new ideas for Gaza truce deal

Geneva, Doha, Cairo, Jerusalem, Beirut, Dubai, June 12: UN-backed human rights experts say in a report issued on Wednesday that Israeli forces and Palestinian militants engaged in sexual and gender-based violence during the first months of the Israel-Hamas war.

Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan denied on Wednesday that the Palestinian Islamist group had put forward new ideas for the US-backed proposal for a Gaza ceasefire, after US secretary of state Antony Blinken said it had suggested numerous changes. Hamdan, speaking to pan-Arab *Al-Araby TV*, also said Blinken was “part of the problem, not the solution” in the Gaza war.

Lebanon’s Hezbollah fired big barrages of rockets at Israel on Wednesday in retaliation for an Israeli strike which killed a senior Hezbollah field commander, escalating the conflict across the Lebanese-Israeli border.

The Israeli strike in south Lebanon village of Jouaiyya late on Tuesday killed three Hezbollah fighters alongside the senior field commander identified by Hezbollah as Taleb Abdallah, also known as Abu Taleb.

A merchant ship issued a distress call after being struck in the Red Sea off Yemen, a security firm said on Wednesday, in what appeared to be the



A Palestinian man carries two water containers past destroyed buildings in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, on Wednesday.

— AFP

latest attack by Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

The proposal outlined by US President Joe Biden envisages a truce and a phased release of Israeli hostages in Gaza in exchange for Palestinians jailed in Israel, ultimately leading to a permanent end to the war. The independent experts, in a detailed chronicle of events that have mostly been reported in the media, said Israeli forces and Palestinian militants committed war crimes, while Israel was also said to have committed crimes against humanity. Israel, which has refused

to cooperate with the body and accused it of bias, rejected the allegations.

The report, which covered the time between the Oct. 7 rampage and the end of last year, laid out a wide array of alleged rights violations and crimes by both sides.

It said Israeli forces had committed forced starvation, murder or willful killing, collective punishment and intentional attacks on civilians, and that the military wings of Hamas and other Palestinian groups had performed killings and mistreatment of civilians and hostage-takings.

It said that frequency, prevalence and severity of sexual and gender-based crimes by Israeli forces amounted to signs that some forms of such violence “are part of ISF operating procedures”.

Despite noting denials by Hamas’ military wing of sexual violence against Israeli women, it said the experts had documented “cases indicative of sexual violence” against women and men.

The expert panel was commissioned in 2021 by the UN-backed Human Rights Council to look into rights violations and abus-

es in Israel and the Palestinian areas it controls.

Led by Navi Pillay, a former United Nations human rights chief, they are independent experts and do not speak for the world body itself.

Israel has refused to cooperate with the experts. Israel’s diplomatic mission in Geneva responded that the report “outrageously and repugnantly attempts to draw a false equivalence between IDF soldiers and Hamas terrorists with regard to acts of sexual violence” and reiterating claims of anti-Israel discrimination. — Agencies

Hit by US curbs, Russia halts euro,
dollar trade on biggest exchange

Moscow, Washington, Budapest, June 12: New US sanctions against Russia have forced an immediate suspension of trading in dollars and euros on its leading financial marketplace, the Moscow Exchange. The exchange and the central bank rushed out statements on Wednesday — a public holiday in Russia — within an hour of Washington announcing a new round of sanctions aimed at cutting the flow of money and goods to sustain Russia’s war in Ukraine.

“Due to the introduction of restrictive measures by the US against the Moscow Exchange Group, exchange trading and settlements of deliverable instruments in US dollars and euros are suspended,” the central bank said.

Earlier, the United States announced a raft of sanctions on Wednesday aimed at constraining Moscow’s war in Ukraine while raising the stakes for foreign banks that still deal with Russia, ahead of G7 leaders’ talks this week.

“Hungary will not block Nato decisions on providing support for Ukraine but has agreed that it will not be involved,” Prime Minister Viktor Orban said on Wednesday during a visit to Budapest by the alliance’s secretary general Jens Stoltenberg.

Hungary has been at odds with other Nato countries over Orban’s continued cultivation of close ties to Russia and refusal to send arms to Ukraine, with Budapest’s foreign minister last month labelling plans to help the war-torn nation a “crazy mission”. “Hungary made

KYIV STRIKES AGAIN

SET FREE WOMAN ACCUSED
OF SPYING, SAYS RUSSIA

Moscow has demanded the immediate release of a Russian woman arrested in Denmark on suspicion of espionage, a foreign ministry spokeswoman said on Wednesday, accusing Copenhagen of “persecution”. Danish intelligence said Tuesday a Russian citizen had been arrested on suspicion of “enabling a foreign intelligence service to operate in Denmark”.



● A RUSSIAN navy frigate and a nuclear-powered submarine churned into Havana harbour on Wednesday, a stopover the US and Cuba said posed no threat but which was widely seen as a Russian show of force as tensions rise over the Ukraine war.

clear today that it will not block decisions by Nato which, although they differ from our rational assessment of the situation, are shared and advocated by the rest of the alliance,” Orban said.

The treasury department and state department’s sanctions hit more than 300 targets, including entities in Russia and in countries like China, Turkey and the UAE. Those designated include the Moscow Exchange and subsidiaries, a move set to complicate billions of dollars in transactions. — Agencies

RUSSIA FIRES MISSILES, DRONES AT UKRAINE
BEFORE DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO STOP WAR

Russian forces fired missiles and drones at the Kyiv region and five other areas of Ukraine in a nighttime attack, officials said Wednesday. Ukraine’s military said on Wednesday it had hit three Russian surface-to-air missile systems in Russian-occupied Crimea overnight, its second reported strike on air defences on the peninsula this week.

UKRAINIAN LAWMAKERS PROPOSE FEE TO
EXEMPT WORKERS FROM MILITARY DRAFT

Ukrainian lawmakers announced a bill on Wednesday that would allow businesses to exempt their employees from military service if they pay a \$500 monthly fee per worker. Hundreds of thousands of draft-age men have left or stayed outside of Ukraine since the war began in 2022.

Ukraine to get US new
Patriot missile system

Washington, June 12: The US will send another Patriot missile air defence system to Ukraine in the coming days, US media reported, citing unnamed administration and military officials.

News of the decision to provide the advanced system came as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pleaded on Tuesday for more air defences at the start of an intense week of diplomatic meetings with Western partners. Zelenskyy has recently called for several additional Patriot systems, including two to defend the eastern Kharkiv region, where Russia has been pressing a new offensive.

“Russia’s greatest strategic advantage over Ukra-

ine is superiority in the sky. It is missile and bomb terror that helps Russian troops advance on the ground,” Zelenskyy told a reconstruction conference in Berlin on Tuesday.

“Air defence is the answer,” he added. The *New York Times* reported that the new Patriot system destined for Ukraine was currently deployed in Poland, which is defending a rotating American force that is slated to return to the United States.

The Pentagon did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment on the transfer.

The delivery would be at least the second Patriot system sent to Ukraine by Washington. — AFP

MALDIVES FACES
HIGH DEBT PAIN:
WORLD BANK

Male, June 12: Highlighting that the Maldives has been spending “beyond its means” for decades, the World Bank has warned that the nation faces high debt distress risk and financing challenges, making it vulnerable to shocks.

World Bank country director for the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka Faris H. Hadad-Zervos also said that the island nation’s annual debt servicing needs are likely to be \$512 million for the current and following years, and another \$1.07 billion in 2026.

Hadad-Zervos’s statement, posted on his official X account, comes days after the ministry of finance here said that the public and publicly guaranteed debt is almost 110 per cent of Maldives’ GDP. The heavily tourism-dependent nation had suffered badly due to the Covid-19 pandemic-induced lockdowns and started recovering only in 2023.

According to the ministry’s Quarterly Debt Bulletin for Quarter 1, 2024 published on June 1, the public and publicly guaranteed debt has risen to \$8.2 billion — 110 per cent of the Maldives’ GDP. The ministry reports that the state’s debt rose by \$90.8 million in the first three months of the year.

The total debt had reached \$8.09 billion by 2023 “For decades #Maldives has been spending beyond its means. Sharp spending rise and subsidies have widened the deficit, leading to a vulnerable fiscal situation and unsustainable debt,” he said on X. — PTI

Chinese EVs face
EU tariffs of 38%

Brussels, June 12: The European Commission notified car makers on Wednesday that it would apply additional duties of up to 38.1% on imported Chinese electric vehicles from next month, a move likely to draw possible retaliation from China.

Less than a month after Washington quadrupled duties for Chinese EVs to 100%, Brussels said it would set tariffs of 17.4% for BYD, 20% for Geely and 38.1% for SAIC over what it said were excessive subsidies. China’s commerce

ministry said it would monitor the development and resolutely take all necessary measures to safeguard the legitimate rights of Chinese companies.

The EU provisional duties are set to apply by July 4, with the anti-subsidy probe set to continue until Nov 2, when definitive duties, typically for five years, could apply. The EU said it would apply rates of 21% for companies deemed to have cooperated with the investigation and of 38.1% for those it said had not. — Reuters

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	76,606.57	0.20
Nifty 50	23,322.95	0.25
S&P 500*	5,441.47	1.23
Dollar (₹)	83.54	0.05
Pound Sterling (₹)	106.57	0.14
Euro (₹)	89.83	0.02
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	71,734.244	0.34
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	82.39	0.57
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.014	-0.001
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.428	0.026

* As of 8:30 PM IST

NBCC bags order worth ₹100 crore from Oil India

State-owned NBCC (India) Limited has bagged a ₹100 crore contract from Oil India Ltd (OIL) to construct a centralised core repository with advanced laboratory facilities at Guwahati in Assam. NBCC and OIL are also in the final stages of discussion for undertaking various other works in Assam. The anticipated value of these works is approximately ₹900 crore approximately, the company said.



Dredging Corp. secures contract from SPM Port

Dredging Corporation of India Ltd (DCIL) has secured a contract worth over ₹2,000 cr from Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port Authority in West Bengal. The contract is for maintenance of dredging in the Hooghly estuary in the shipping channel leading to Haldia Dock, it said. The Hooghly estuary is a vital waterway for maritime trade, and maintaining its depth is essential for safe passage of vessels to and from Haldia Dock.

Motilal launches fund to focus on defence stocks

Motilal Oswal Mutual Fund launched Nifty India defence index fund, first index fund offering exposure to defence stocks listed in India. The fund aims to provide investors an opportunity to participate in growth potential of defence sector. The fund offer opens on June 13 and closes on June 24. The fund reflects the performance of defence companies operating in manufacturing and servicing defence projects.



Dee Development looks to raise ₹418 cr via IPO

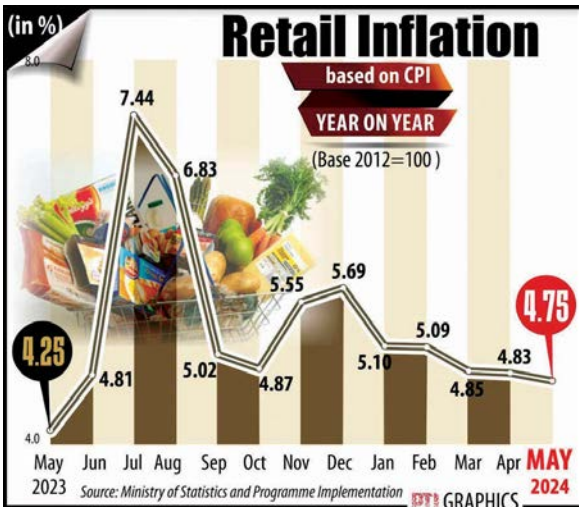
Dee Development Engineers, a piping solutions provider for industries, on Wednesday it has announced ₹418 crore initial public offering (IPO) in the price band of ₹193 to ₹203 per equity share of ₹10 face value. The public offering opens on June 19, 2024 and closes on June 21, 2024. The public offering comprises of fresh issue of equity shares worth ₹325 crore and an offer for sale of over 4.58 million shares.

Retail inflation eases to 12-mth low of 4.7%

CPI inflation under 5% for 3 consecutive months from March

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

With the decline of food prices and kitchen items, India's headline retail inflation eased to a 12-month low of 4.75 per cent in May on an annual basis. According to national statistical office (NSO) data, rural and urban inflation rates are 5.28 per cent and 4.15 per cent respectively. "Inflation in the food basket was 8.69 per cent in May, marginally down from 8.70 per cent in April," the NSO data showed. The consumer price index or CPI inflation has now been under the 5 per cent-mark for three consecutive months starting this March. It has remained within the RBI's target range of 2-6 per cent since September 2023. "The spices category has seen a considerable



decline in year-on-year inflation. Inflation for clothing and footwear, housing, and miscellaneous groups has also decreased since last month," the data said. Meanwhile, India's

industrial production growth slipped to 3-month low of 5 per cent in April this year due to poor show by the manufacturing sector, though mining and power segments performed well. Factory out-

put growth, measured in terms of the Index of Industrial Production or IIP, was 5.4 per cent in March and 5.6 per cent in February 2024, according to data released by ministry of statistics and programme implementation. The previous low of IIP was recorded at 4.2 per cent in January 2024. For the fiscal 2023-24, the IIP growth was 5.9 per cent against 5.2 per cent in the preceding financial year. India's index of industrial production grew by 4.6 per cent in April 2023. As per the data, the mining output growth accelerated to 6.7 per cent in April. "The manufacturing sector's growth decelerated to 3.9 per cent in April. Power generation increased 10.2 per cent in April against a contraction of 1.1 per cent same month last year," the data showed.

India to remain fastest growing GDP, finds WB

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 12

India will remain the fastest-growing of world's largest economies, although its pace of expansion is expected to moderate, finds the World Bank. India will clock a steady growth of 6.7 percent per year, on average between FY2 and FY26. While retaining the GDP growth forecast for FY24 and FY25 at 6.6 per cent and 6.7 per cent respectively, the World Bank estimated the country to clock 6.8 per cent growth in FY26. This is slower than 7 per cent and 8.2 per cent growth achieved in FY22 and FY23 respectively.

This moderation is mainly due to a slowdown in investment from a high base. However, investment growth is still expected to be stronger than previously envisaged and remain robust over the forecast period, with strong public investment accompanied by private investment. Private consumption growth is expected to benefit from a recovery of agricultural production and declining inflation. Growth in industrial activity, including manufacturing and construction, was stronger than expected, alongside resilient services activity, which helped offset a slowdown in agricultural production partly caused by monsoons. Growth of domestic demand remained robust, with a surge in investment, including in infra, offsetting a moderation of consumption



● **GROWTH IN industrial activity, including manufacturing and construction, was stronger than expected, alongside resilient services activity, which helped offset a slowdown in agricultural production.**

growth as post-pandemic pent-up demand eased. However, government consumption is projected to grow only slowly, in line with the government's aim of reducing current expenditure relative to GDP. In India, the fiscal deficit is projected to shrink relative to GDP, partly because of increased revenues generated by the authorities' efforts to broaden the tax base. The South Asian region's fiscal imbalances will slowly improve, although, apart from India, a reduction of fiscal deficits is expected to be smaller. According to the World Bank, inflation in the South Asian region has gradually declined from the peaks reached in mid-2022 as inflation in India has kept within the Reserve Bank's target range of 2 to 6 per cent since September 2023.



WILL IMPLEMENT MEASURES TO UP MANUFACTURING, SAYS SITHARAMAN

FC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday assumed the charge in office and retained the post for the second term in a row in the ministry as a cabinet minister. "The government is fully committed to ensuring 'ease of living' for its citizens and will continue to take further steps in this regard," she told reporters after taking charge in the Modi 3.0 government. Post announcement of the portfolio of the Union finance minister, all eyes are now on the full budget, where she is expected to outline the roadmap for the next five years along with key policy announcements. Additionally, she will focus on addressing unemployment by implementing measures to boost manufacturing. In the interim budget for FY25, she adhered to tradition by sticking to vote-on-account measures only. "The reforms undertaken since 2014 will continue, which will further provide macroeconomic stability and growth for India. India's commendable growth story in recent years amidst global challenges and noted that there is an optimistic economic outlook for the coming years," She highlighted.

Better rain prospects to support wage growth

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 12

A drop in inflation and better monsoon rainfall is expected to support 6.5 per cent growth in real wages in FY25. The real wage growth in FY24 should have been around 3.5 per cent, according to India Ratings (Ind Ra). The support to real wage growth is expected to emanate from a drop in inflation and improved

employment conditions given an above-normal southwest monsoon rainfall for 2024, finds Ind Ra. It estimates that private final consumption expenditure (PFCE) demand is expected to grow 7 per cent in FY25. The average real wage growth during FY20-FY21 was negative 0.7 per cent. PFCE in the same period moved in tandem. Due to the negative base, the real wage growth in FY23

stood at 8.9 per cent and 12.6 per cent in FY22. For FY24, the overall real wage growth in the economy would have been around 3.5 per cent. The real rural wage growth of agricultural activities stood at 0.1 per cent in FY24. The urban minimum real wage growth was above 4 per cent in 1HFY24 but drifted down to 0.7 per cent in 2HFY24. The wage growth of the non-financial private corporations moderated to 3.6 per cent in 3QFY24 after clocking over 6 per cent growth for 10 quarters, and stood at about 6 per cent in 4QFY24.

real rural wage growth of agricultural activities stood at 0.1 per cent in FY24. The urban minimum real wage growth was above 4 per cent in 1HFY24 but drifted down to 0.7 per cent in 2HFY24. The wage growth of the non-financial private corporations moderated to 3.6 per cent in 3QFY24 after clocking over 6 per cent growth for 10 quarters, and stood at about 6 per cent in 4QFY24.

Nifty hits new high on positive global trends

Mumbai, June 12: Benchmark equity indices ended higher on Wednesday, with the Nifty hitting its fresh record closing level, mainly due to buying in power, capital goods and industrial stocks amid a largely positive trend in global equities.

Besides, a heavy rush on select index-heavyweight counters like HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries boosted investors' sentiment, traders said. In a highly volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 149.98 points or 0.20 per cent to settle at 76,606.57. During the day, it jumped 593.94 points or 0.77 per cent to 77,050.53. The BSE benchmark is just 28.51 points away from breaching its previous lifetime peak of 77,079.04. The NSE Nifty went up by 177.1 points or 0.76 per cent to hit its new intraday high of 23,441.95. It ended at a new closing peak of 23,322.95, up 58.10 points or 0.25 per cent. "After opening on a positive note, the market continued to move up for the better part of the session. Intraday weakness in between has been used as a buying opportunity," Nagaraj Shetti, senior technical research analyst at HDFC Securities, said. In the broader market,



the BSE midcap gauge jumped 1.07 per cent and smallcap index climbed 1.06 per cent. Among the sectoral indices, industrials, power, capital goods, energy, commodities, healthcare, and metal were among the biggest gainers. On the other hand, realty and FMCG were the laggards. "Ahead of US inflation data and FOMC meeting, global markets largely remained positive. The consensus indicates expectations of stable US inflation, but the trajectory of potential rate cuts holds significant importance for future direction, as rate cut expectations have tempered to 2 from 3 earlier. "The domestic market is trading at new high on expectations of the final budget with a focus on growth, which was amplified by the RBI's upgrade in GDP growth forecast," Vinod Nair, head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. — PTI

OLYMPUS, HCL PLAN AFFORDABLE HEALTH TECHNOLOGIES

New Delhi, June 12: HCL Technologies and global medtech company Olympus Corporation on Wednesday said they have expanded their strategic partnership to enable advanced and affordable healthcare for patients through engineering technologies. HCLTech will establish a dedicated product innovation centre in Hyderabad to serve Olympus' operations across the US, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. "Our collaboration will enhance Olympus' engineering capabilities and unlock new innovations that enable quality healthcare through technology," Andre Roggan, chief technology officer, Olympus said. — PTI

Production-linked incentive likely for toys sector: Official

New Delhi, June 12: Government is pursuing a proposal of extending fiscal incentives under the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for toy manufacturing. Government measures such as mandatory quality control orders and increasing customs duty have helped boost exports of toys from India, but there is a need to do much more for the sector, said department for promotion of industry and internal trade secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh. He also indicated that they are diligently pursuing the proposal of extending fiscal incentives under the PLI scheme for the sector. Singh said that the



industry is wondering about one proposed major policy intervention and "let me assure you that we are still pursuing that". In the interim Budget in Feb., the commerce ministry has recommended an outlay of ₹3,489 crore for the PLI scheme for toys to boost domestic manufacturing of the sector. Singh said that the country's toy exports have jumped to \$325.72 million in 2022-23 from \$96.17 mil-

lion in 2014-15 as the government is providing all-around support for creating a conducive manufacturing ecosystem for the toy industry. Imports of toys dipped by 52 per cent from \$332.55 million in 2014-15 to \$158.7 million in 2022-23. "The national action plan for toys and other initiatives has had a good impact, but we need to do much more," Singh said. In order to make India a global hub for toy manufacturing, the government has undertaken a series of initiatives including the formulation of a comprehensive national action plan for toys to promote the designing of toys and promoting indigenous toy clusters. — PTI

Oracle betting big on cloud computing

Austin (US), June 12: Oracle reported better-than-expected bookings and announced partnership deals with tech rivals, giving a boost to chairman Larry Ellison's effort to redefine the software maker as a major competitor in the business of cloud computing. The company, known for its database software, is focused on expanding its

cloud infrastructure unit, which rents computing power and storage, to compete with Amazon.com, Microsoft and Alphabet's Google. While this division produces a small portion of total sales, investors view it as Oracle's major future growth bet. In the past two quarters, "Oracle signed the largest sales contracts in our history - driven by enormous

demand for training AI large language models in the Oracle Cloud," chief executive officer Safra Catz said. Oracle also announced a new agreement to make its namesake database available on Google's cloud infrastructure. A similar deal with Microsoft "will turbocharge our cloud database growth," Ellison said.

Oracle's cloud has developed a reputation for success with generative AI start-ups - the company touted customers including Reka, MosaicML, and Elon Musk's xAI. "The world's largest cloud companies and the world's most accomplished AI companies choose to use Oracle Cloud services and data centres," Ellison said. — Bloomberg

HIGH | VALUE

M-cap hits \$3.26 trillion ahead of Microsoft's \$3.24 trillion

Apple becomes most valuable firm

Bengaluru, June 12: Apple once again became the world's most valuable company on Wednesday, dethroning Microsoft from the top spot, as the iPhone maker pushed ahead in a race to dominate artificial intelligence technology. Its shares jumped nearly 4 per cent to a record \$215.04, giving it a market valuation of \$3.29 trillion. Microsoft's market capitalisation stood at \$3.24 trillion, falling behind Apple for the first time in five months. Apple shares had added

more than 7 per cent in the previous session, a day after it unveiled a range of AI-enabled features and software enhancements for its devices, a move that several analysts said would power iPhone sales. At Apple's annual developer conference, executives, including chief executive officer Tim Cook, touted how voice assistant Siri would be able to interact with messages, emails, calendar as well as third-party apps. "All those questions about Apple lagging from an AI technology standpoint



were answered at the Worldwide Developers Conference," said Michael James, managing director of equity trading at Wedbush Securities in Los Angeles.

● **SOME OF the specifics about AI capabilities that are going to be integrated into upcoming iPhones made it very apparent that there will clearly be demand for a significant upgrade cycle.**

"Some of the specifics about AI capabilities that are going to be integrated into upcoming iPhones made it very apparent that there will clearly be demand for a significant

upgrade cycle." The tech giant has trailed rivals such as Microsoft and Google-owned Alphabet in the red-hot field of AI, a reason why its shares underperformed this year compared to its peers. Some of the concerns over its weak share performance, however, eased after Apple beat market expectations for quarterly results and forecast in May, and unveiled a record \$110 billion buyback plan. Apple's shares have risen about 12 per cent so far in 2024. — Reuters

SHORT SINGLES

Nepal, SL stare at exit; SA in Super 8

Heavy rain washed out Sri Lanka and Nepal's crucial Group 'D' fixture in the T20 World Cup that ended up assuring a Super 8 spot for South Africa. The match was abandoned without a ball being bowled as both teams settled for a point each and are now staring at an early exit from the tournament.

South Africa secured the Super 8 berth by topping Group 'D' with three wins from three matches.

Second placed Bangladesh, who are ahead of the Netherlands on net run-rate, are also vying for the second spot.

Nepal next face South Africa (Saturday), and Bangladesh (Monday) in Kingstown, St. Vincent.

Sri Lanka's chances of qualifying are the slimmest as they have only one match left in the group — against the Netherlands in St. Lucia on Monday.

Josh questions T20 WC format

Australian pacer Josh Hazlewood finds it a bit strange that their superior net run-rate after three comprehensive wins will count for nothing in the Super 8 stage of the T20 World Cup. Considering it is the biggest-ever T20 showpiece with the involvement of 20 teams, the ICC created four groups of five teams, out of which two from each pool make the Super 8 stage of the tournament.

The format is different from the previous edition, when all the top teams began their competition in the Super 12 stage where two groups of six teams were created and top two from each pool made the semifinals.

"Yeah, it's a little bit strange that it doesn't really, it doesn't go through the tournament. This is probably the first T20 World Cup I've played that's set up this way, or first World Cup in general that's set up this way, so it's a little bit different," said Hazlewood.

"Yeah, the work that you do in the round games and if you go through undefeated and have a good net run rate, doesn't really account for much once you're in the Super Eights. So, yeah, it's a strange run, but that's how it is."

Last respect paid to MCA prez Kale

India and Mumbai players Iajinkya Rahane and Dhawal Kulkarni and several others from the cricketing fraternity on Wednesday paid their last respects to Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) president Amol Kale, who passed away in New York.

Kale's mortal remains were brought back to India on Wednesday afternoon after he died on the intervening night between June 9 and 10 due to a cardiac arrest.

The 47-year-old was in New York to watch India's match against Pakistan in the ongoing T20 World Cup.

"Deeply saddened to hear about the sudden demise of MCA President Amol Kale. His dedication to Mumbai cricket was exemplary. Deepest condolences to his family and friends during this difficult time," BCCI secretary Jay Shah, who also watched the India-Pakistan game, wrote on his X account.

The secretary Ajinkya Naik, other association officials and former India player and MCA's women's cricket advisor Diana Edulji were also present at the MCA Lounge at the Wankhede Stadium, where Kale's mortal remains were brought in for about an hour.

ARSHHHH...

Sublime Arshdeep silences USA as India cruise into Super 8

MOSES KONDETY
NEW YORK, JUNE 12

Team India beat down a spirited challenge from hosts USA, defeating them by seven wickets to keep a clean slate in Group 'A' and sail into the Super Eight stage of the T20 World Cup on Wednesday.

Chasing a Nelson (111) for victory, the Blues overcame initial setbacks to finish the task in 18.2 overs at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium.

Suryakumar Yadav (50 not out — 49 balls, 2x4, 2x6) and Shivam Dube (31 not out — 35b, 1x4, 1x6) were the architects of the chase with a solid 67-run stand for the unbroken fourth wicket. Earlier, pacer Arshdeep Singh had drilled USA earlier with fantastic figures of 4 for 9.

Virat Kohli's wretched run at the World Cup continued. The IPL top-scorer was out for a golden duck as he edged left-arm seamer Saurabh Netravalkar to wicketkeeper Andries Gous behind the stumps on the second ball of the innings to stun Indian supporters into silence.

Captain Rohit Sharma too departed quickly, falling to the same bowler as India slipped to 10 for 2 in the third over.

Pant (18) and Surya then stitched a 29-run stand to repair the damage before the former lost his stumps to an Ali Khan delivery that kept low.

That brought IPL stars SKY and Dube together. They made sure there were no further hiccups for the Blues.

Earlier, USA got to 10 over the three-figure mark after being put in to bat.

India were off the blocks in a flash. Arshdeep Singh struck on the first and last balls of the first over, rapping Shayan Jahangir on the pads and then Gous's big shot climbed vertically before landing in the safe hands of Hardik Pandya behind the straight umpire.

It was not until the fourth over that the hosts got the first six of the match. Captain Aaron Jones hooked fast bowler Mohammed Siraj out of the ground. That was the



Arshdeep Singh (right) celebrates with teammate Suryakumar Yadav after taking the wicket of USA's Shayan Jahangir during the T20 World Cup match at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in New York on Wednesday. India won the match by seven wickets and qualified for the next stage of the tournament.

only shining spot during the Powerplay, at the end of which USA were a lowly 18 for 2. Siraj got back at Jones though, catching him on the fine leg fence as he tried to play a similar shot off Pandya.

Shivam was out of sorts bowling his first over, ninth of the innings. He conceded 11 runs includ-

ing a six and a four to opener Steven Taylor.

It was a case of 6 and out for Taylor. The left-hander sent Axar Patel out of the ground in the 12th over and then played the next ball from the left-arm spinner on to his stumps to end his knock of 24 that came off 30 deliveries and contained two sixes.

The Americans were pretty slow, getting to the team 50 in the 12th over. The 13th over fetched 12 runs for USA as Nitish Kumar targeted Pandya, hitting him for a ramrod straight boundary and a soaring six.

Nitish kept going for his shots, and perished as he tried to get another maxi-

SCOREBOARD

USA: Shayan Jahangir lbw Arshdeep 0, Steven Taylor b Axar 24, Andries Gous c Pandya b Arshdeep 2, Aaron Jones c Siraj b Pandya 11, Nitish Kumar c Siraj b Arshdeep 27, Corey Anderson c Pant b Pandya 15, Harmeet Singh c Pant b Arshdeep 10, Shadley van Schalkwyk not out 11, Jasdeep Singh run out (Pant/Siraj) 2. Extras (lb-2, w-7) 9. **Total (for 8 wickets in 20 overs) 110.**

Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-3, 3-25, 4-56, 5-81, 6-96, 7-98, 8-110.

Bowling: Arshdeep Singh 4-0-9-4, Mohammed Siraj , Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-25-0, Hardik Pandya 4-0-14-2, Shivam Dube 1-0-11-0, Axar Patel 3-0-24-1.

India: Rohit Sharma c Harmeet Singh b Netravalkar 3, Virat Kohli c Gous b Netravalkar 0, Rishabh Pant b Ali Khan 18, Suryakumar Yadav not out 50, Shivam Dube not out 31. Extras (lb-1, nb-1, w-2, pen 10) 14. **Total (for 3 wickets in 18.2 overs) 111.**

Fall of wickets: 1-6, 2-15, 3-44.

Bowling: Saurabh Netravalkar 4-0-18-2, Ali Khan 3.2-0-21-1, Jasdeep Singh 4-0-24-0, Shadley van Schalkwyk 4-0-25-0, Corey Anderson 3-0-17-0.

mum off Arshdeep in the 15th over, courtesy a splendid catch by a leaping Siraj on the deep midwicket boundary. USA 81 for 5 at the end of the 15th over.

Pant then pulled off a nice running catch at square leg to dismiss former New Zealand player Corey Anderson off Pandya. The Kiwi departed after making just 15 off 12 balls.

For all his brilliance in the field, Siraj spilled a catch too — Harmeet Singh was the one to get away. The batsman did not last long though - he was caught by Pant off Arshdeep for 10.

Shadley van Schalkwyk and Harmeet then got into double digits — scoring 11 and 10 respectively to push the total towards the end.

POINTS TABLE

GROUP A						
TEAMS	P	W	L	N/R	Pts	NRR
INDIA	3	3	0	0	6	+1.137
USA	3	2	1	0	4	+0.127
PAKISTAN	3	1	2	0	2	+0.191
CANADA	3	1	2	0	2	-0.493
IRELAND	2	0	2	0	0	-1.712

GROUP B						
TEAMS	P	W	L	N/R	Pts	NRR
AUSTRALIA	3	3	0	0	6	+3.580
SCOTLAND	3	2	0	1	5	+2.164
NAMIBIA	3	1	2	0	2	-2.098
ENGLAND	2	0	1	1	1	-1.800
OMAN	3	0	3	0	0	-1.613

GROUP C						
TEAMS	P	W	L	N/R	Pts	NRR
AFGHANISTAN	2	2	0	0	4	+5.225
WEST INDIES	2	2	0	0	4	+3.574
UGANDA	3	1	2	0	2	-4.217
PNG	2	0	2	0	0	-0.434
NEW ZEALAND	1	0	1	0	0	-4.200

GROUP D						
TEAMS	P	W	L	N/R	Pts	NRR
SOUTH AFRICA	3	3	0	0	6	+0.603
BANGLADESH	2	1	1	0	2	+0.075
NETHERLANDS	2	1	1	0	2	+0.024
NEPAL	2	0	1	1	1	-0.539
SRI LANKA	3	0	2	1	1	-0.777

Oz stifle Namibia, book Super 8 spot

North Sound (Antigua), June 12: Leg-spinner Adam Zampa starred again in the middle overs as Australia annihilated Namibia by nine wickets to qualify for the Super 8 stage of the T20 World Cup here.

Australia put up a complete bowling performance to dismiss Namibia for a meagre 72 before gunning down the target in just 34 balls with Travis Head and skipper Mitchell Marsh remaining not out on 34 and 18 respectively.

With three wins in a row, Australia thus stormed into the Super Eight from Group with a match in hand. They take on Scotland at Gros Islet in their concluding Group 'B' fixture on Saturday.

For Namibia, it was their second loss in three games, eliminating them from the Super 8 race.

Scotland and England are fighting for the second Super spot from Group B. Josh Hazlewood (2/18) removed the Namibian openers Michael Van Lingen and Niko Davin before Zampa (4/12) got into the act to run through Namibia, who ended with their lowest total in T20Is.

Zampa reached a major landmark in the game as he became the first Australian bowler to take 100 wickets in T20 Internationals.

Opening the bowling alongside Hazlewood, Marcus Stoinis (2/9) also took a couple of wickets while skipper Pat Cummins and Nathan Ellis chipped in with a wicket each.

Australian opening duo of David Warner (20 off 8) and Head (34 off 17) were in a hurry to get the job done, giving the team a flying start.

— PTI

SCOREBOARD

Namibia: Michael van Lingen c Maxwell b Hazlewood 10, Nikolaas Davin c Maxwell b Hazlewood 2, Jan Frylinck c Marsh b Cummins 1, Gerhard Erasmus c Maxwell b Stoinis 36, Johannes Smitt lbw Ellis 3, Zane Green lbw Zampa 1, David Wiese c Hazlewood b Zampa 1, Ruben Trumpelmann c Maxwell b Zampa 7, Bernard Scholtz b Zampa 0, Jack Brassell not out 2, Ben Shikongo c David b Stoinis 0. Extras (b-4, lb-1, w-4) 9. **Total (all out in 17 overs) 72.**

Fall of wickets: 1-14, 2=15, 3-15, 4-18, 5-21, 6-31, 7-43, 8-43, 9-72.

Bowling: Josh Hazlewood 4-0-18-2, Marcus Stoinis 3-0-9-2, Pat Cummins 3-1-16-1, Adam Zampa 4-0-12-4, Nathan Ellis 3-1-12-1.

Australia: David Warner c Trumpelmann b Wiese 20, Travis Head not out 34, Mitchell Marsh not out 18. Extras (lb-1, w-1) 2. **Total (For 1e wicket in 5.4 overs) 74.**

Fall of wicket: 1-21.

Bowling: Ruben Trumpelmann 2-0-19-0, David Wiese 1-0-15-1, Ben Shikongo 1-0-19-0, Gerhard Erasmus 1-0-6-0, Jack Brassell 0.4-0-14-0.

ATP PERUGIA | CHALLENGER

Nagal wins thriller to reach quarterfinals

Perugia (Italy), June 12: Indian tennis star Sumit Nagal continued his fine form as he entered the quarterfinal of the ongoing ATP Perugia Challenger here.

On Wednesday, the sixth-seeded Indian toppled unseeded local Alessandro Giannessi in a three-set thriller 0-6, 7-5, 7-6 (7-5).

Last week, India's top singles player had won the Heilbronn Challenger in Germany.

In the opening set, Nagal received heavy thrashing after the Italian blanked him 6-0.

However, the 77th-ranked Indian did not back down from

a fightback and kept things close in the following set before earning a lone break and winning the set 7-5 to take things to the decider.

As for the final set, it was 'game on' for both the competitors, who eventually took to the tie-breaker, where Nagal survived to take the set 7-6 (7-5).

In the quarterfinal, the Indian will face off against the winner of the pre-quarterfinal clash between Maks Kasnikowski of Poland and third seed Borna Coric of Croatia.

— PTI

AIFF seeks probe into Qatar's goal

New Delhi, June 12: The All India Football Federation (AIFF) has lodged a complaint with the match commissioner, seeking a probe into the controversial goal awarded to Qatar in their crucial World Cup qualifying match in Doha. Sources in the AIFF said they have asked for a "thorough investigation into the goal" that was allowed by South Korean referee Kim Woo-Sung despite the ball clearly going out of play during the must-win match that India lost 1-2 at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium on Tuesday.

The goal sparked widespread outrage as it deprived the Indians of what would have been



their maiden entry into the third round of the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers for the 2026 edition.

"We have lodged a complaint with the match commissioner and are seeking a thorough investigation into the whole thing," said an AIFF official.

In the 73rd minute, Abdullah Alahrak's free-kick saw Yousef Ayem attempt a header, which

was saved by India skipper and goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu.

But as the custodian lay on the ground seeing the ball roll over the line, Hashmi Hussein kicked it into play with Aymen slotting it into the net.

Since the ball had visibly rolled out of play, the game should have stopped and then resumed with a corner-kick in this case as Sandhu was the last player to come in contact with the ball before it went out.

But, to the frustration of the Indian players, the referee awarded the goal to Qatar and despite the visiting team protesting vehemently, the on-field official upheld his decision.

— PTI

OUR DREAMS KILLED BY IRREGULAR GOAL: STIMAC

Doha, June 12: India football coach Igor Stimac said "injustice" was done and his team's "dream was killed" by the blatantly "irregular" goal that allowed Qatar to claw back and clinch the must-win World Cup qualifying match here. "Qatar were lucky tonight, especially because they came back from 0-1 with an irregular goal. I can confirm that now because I have seen the replay. The whole ball was out of play and the goal was given," Stimac didn't mince words as he spoke about what went wrong in the game.

"It shouldn't be happening in today's football because that goal changed everything in this game. It could've happened to Qatar today and I would say the same. I'm not looking for an excuse.

"I feel sad that when you have 23 boys working really hard and living the dream, to achieve something, and that dream is killed because we didn't stop such things from happening," the Croat added.

The loss, however, cannot hide the fact that India have been consistently poor in their campaign, the lowest point being a home loss to Afghanistan.

Stimac said his players gave their everything and he had no complaints.

— PTI