





## IN BRIEF

## Man loses over ₹78K to sextortion trap

**Gurgaon:** Members of a sextortion gang allegedly duped a man of over ₹78,000 here, the police said on Thursday.

According to a complaint filed by the man, on April 30, he got a video call on his WhatsApp from a girl who was in a naked condition. She later convinced the man to take off his clothes during the video call and recorded it. "After some time, I got a call from a person who posed as a crime branch officer. He asked me to pay ₹20,000 and threatened me that he would circulate the objectionable video clip on social media," he said in the complaint. "I transferred ₹20,000 but he again asked me that if I want to get the clip deleted, I will have to pay. After that I got scared and I had transferred ₹58,999 again through UPI. Later, I found myself duped and moved to the police," he said. An FIR was registered under sections 419 (cheating by impersonation), 420 (cheating) of the IPC at cyber crime, West police station on Wednesday, the police said. A senior police officer said that they are trying to identify the accused. — PTI

## Delhi govt plans to build 4th ISBT

**New Delhi:** The Delhi government is planning to build a fourth inter-state bus terminal in the national capital near the Tikri border to cater to buses coming from Haryana. Delhi has currently has three ISBTs — Anand Vihar, Sarai Kale Khan, and Kashmir Gate. A senior official said that the project to build the fourth ISBT is at a nascent stage with the government identifying a piece of land for the purpose. "Haryana-bound buses also traverse through Kashmir Gate but if a bus terminal is built at Tikri border, it will ease the burden on the Kashmir Gate and also provide relief to commuters," he added. The official said that the government initially has plans to build a small bus terminal for the purpose of ensuring facilities for five to six buses and then expand it for more buses. He said that a terminal in outer Delhi will also help when Delhi's pollution levels rise in winter months.

## Brain tumours' cure is more efficient now

**New Delhi:** Claiming to herald a new era in the non-surgical high precision treatment of brain tumours, a Gurgaon private hospital on Thursday launched South Asia's 'First Gamma Knife Esprit'. The Gamma Knife employs computer-guided precision to target brain tumours without actual cutting, making it an optimal choice for treating both malignant and benign tumours, including multiple brain metastases, meningiomas, acoustic tumours, and pituitary adenomas, said Fortis Memorial Research Institute. Dr Sandeep Vaishya, director neurosurgery, Fortis Gurgaon, said "The launch of South Asia's first Gamma Knife Esprit at our facility marks a significant milestone in the field of neurosurgery."

## NOD TO BENEFITS FOR EDU DEPT UNDER SCHEME

**New Delhi:** Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena has approved the grant of financial upgradation under modified assured career progression (MACP) scheme in the pay scale of ₹37400-67000 with grade pay of ₹8700 (pre-revised) to 194 serving /retired principals, vice principals, education officers and district education officers. Taking decision in a long pending matter of government servants, not belonging to organised services, last year, the L-G has ruled that the benefits of MACP Scheme must be given to retired rincipals/ EOs/DEOs /DDEs of the education department. After the decision they were entitled to draw salary in the higher grade pay from the date of implementation of the scheme September 1, 2008 or their respective entitlement, whichever is later. Despite this, retired officers eligible for financial upgradation from 2008, and such eligibility being upheld by various Courts including the Supreme Court, these officers had to go through trauma and harassment all these years for no fault of theirs due to indifferent and inhuman attitude of the education department.

## Top court asks Delhi govt to approach Yamuna board In U-turn, HP informs SC it doesn't have surplus water

**RAKESH K SINGH and AVINASH PRABHAKAR**  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 13

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Delhi government to approach the Upper Yamuna River Board (UYRB) for water supply as Himachal Pradesh took a volte-face and told the top court that it did not have a surplus of 136 cusecs water to spare for mitigating the water crisis in the national capital.

A vacation bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Prasanna B. Varale said Yamuna water sharing between states is a complex and sensitive issue and the court does not have the technical expertise to decide on it even on an interim basis.

"The issue should be left to be considered by the body constituted with the agreement of parties in the memorandum of understanding dated 1994. "Since UYRB has already directed Delhi to submit an application for the supply of an additional 150 cusecs of water on humanitarian grounds, such an application be made, if not already made, today by 5.00 pm, and thereafter the board shall convene a meeting tomorrow and take decision in the matter at the earliest. If need be, the board can convene on a day-to-day basis," the bench said while disposing of the



A woman carries drinking water after collecting it from a tanker at Vivekanand camp in New Delhi. — PTI

plea filed by the Delhi government.

Delhi minister Atishi said the city is facing a 50 million gallons per day shortfall in water production and the present crisis cannot be solved by merely restraining the tanker mafia.

"There is no large-scale leakage, it's a rumour. Leakages, if any, in the pipelines are repaired within 12 hours," Ms

Atishi claimed, adding that a recent audit shows that water leakage in Delhi is lesser than international standards.

There is a genuine water crisis in the city, Ms Atishi said in a press conference and appealed to people to avoid water wastage.

She said the average water production in Delhi has fallen considerably from 1,000-1,005 million gallons per day six days

ago due to a lack of adequate supply of raw water through the Yamuna River and other sources.

A day after the Supreme Court slammed the AAP government over the tanker mafia in the water-scarce national capital, the Delhi government claimed they were operational on the Haryana side of the Yamuna River over which the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) has no jurisdiction.

In an affidavit filed before the top court, the Delhi government said water tankers are needed to cater to areas not connected to water supply lines or where the supply is inadequate.

It said the total water supplied by the DJB and private tankers in the city is around 5-6 million gallons per day which constitutes only 0.5 per cent of the total supply.

The Delhi BJP, however, attacked the AAP government over the water crisis in the national capital, accusing it of failing to prevent wastage of water and misleading people.

New Delhi BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj said due to the shortage of water, people are being fleeced by the tanker mafia.

Earlier in the day, the police began patrolling the Munak canal area to check the activities of the tanker mafia and Ms Atishi inspected a pipeline network supplying water to South Delhi residents.

## Police begins patrolling of Munak canal

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 13

The Delhi police on Thursday began patrolling the Munak canal area to check the activities of tanker mafia, meanwhile city minister Atishi inspected a pipeline network supplying water to South Delhi residents as the water crisis in the city worsened.

A senior police officer said the police teams have set up pickets and started patrolling the 15-kilometre stretch of the canal on the Haryana borders, supplying water to the national capital.

The canal enters Delhi from Bawana and reaches the Haiderpur treatment plant. Teams from Bawana, Narela Industrial Area, Shahbad Dairy and Samai Pur Badali police stations have been tasked with patrolling the Munak Canal and its nearby areas.

"Police personnel have been asked to prevent anyone from taking water from the canal in their tankers," the officer said.



Delhi minister Atishi along with officials of the Jal Board and revenue department conducts inspection of pipeline network in New Delhi. — PTI

leakage, it's a rumour. Leakages, if any, in the pipelines are repaired within 12 hours," Ms Atishi claimed, adding that a recent audit shows that water leakage in Delhi is lesser than international standards.

There is a genuine water crisis in the city, said Ms Atishi and appealed to people to avoid water wastage. She said the average water production in Delhi has fallen considerably from 1,000-1,005 million gallons per day (MGD) six days ago due to a lack of adequate supply of raw water through the Yamuna River and other sources.

Hitting back at Ms Atishi, Ms Swaraj alleged that instead of ensuring action against the tanker mafia, the minister is extending protection to them.

"Atishi says that even if the tanker mafia is stopped, not much water would be saved. This is very unfortunate because people facing water shortage are being fleeced by the tanker mafia," she said.

Earlier in the day, the police began patrolling the Munak canal area to check the activities of the tanker mafia and Ms Atishi inspected a pipeline network supplying water to South Delhi residents.

## Gurgaon: Sanitation worker die as speeding car hits her

**Gurgaon, June 13:** A 52-year-old woman, working as a sanitation worker here, was killed after a speeding car hit her on Thursday, triggering protests, the police said. The incident occurred around 8 am on Thursday when Saroj (52), a resident of Sarai Alawardi village, was working near the main road at Vatika Chowk, the police said.

A speeding Hyundai Xcent car used in taxi service came at a high speed and hit Saroj. The collision was so severe

that the woman fell several feet away after jumping in the air and died on the spot, the police said.

Upon receiving information, other sanitation workers of the Municipal Corporation Gurgaon, gathered at the accident spot, blocked the road and staged protests. They objected to their deployment at high-speed main roads and demanded it to be changed, the police said.

According to the police, Saroj was recently transferred to Badshahpur and

## Families observe 27th year of Uphaar Cinema tragedy

**New Delhi, June 13:** Families of victims of Uphaar tragedy on Thursday observed the 27th year of the incident that claimed the lives of 59 people, including 23 children, in a massive fire inside a South Delhi cinema hall. On June 13, 1997, a fire had broken out at Uphaar cinema hall during the screening of Hindi film Border.

The association of the victims of Uphaar tragedy (AVUT) said there has

been little change in the state of fire safety measures at public places ever since the tragedy.

"AVUT's endeavour for the past 27 years has been not only to get justice for our loved ones, but also to ensure implementation of safety laws in public spaces so that no precious human lives are lost in the future.

"Since the Uphaar tragedy took place, virtually no efforts have been made to enforce fire safety regulations in public

spaces. As a result, millions of people who visit public spaces in India remain vulnerable and unsafe, with the possibility of tragedies of the same magnitude looming large," it said.

Expressing concern over the incidents of fire at a TRP Gaming Zone in Rajkot, Gujarat and the Baby Care Hospital in Delhi, the association said, "India has witnessed many fire tragedies after Uphaar... yet, fire safety does not receive any attention from the government."

It said the fire tragedies in Gujarat and Delhi could have been averted if the owner or occupiers had not violated "every rule of the book with impunity."

## 5 die as fire breaks out in Ghaziabad house, 2 hurt

Major fire engulfs shop at Chandni Chowk, no one hurt

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
with agency inputs  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 13

Five people were killed and two injured after a fire broke out in a residential building due to a short circuit in the Ghaziabad area of Uttar Pradesh on Thursday.

Information was received about the fire in the building in Behta Hajipur under the Loni Border police station area on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday.

The police personnel and firefighters rushed to the spot and rescued a woman and a child from the building.

Additional police commissioner (Ghaziabad) Dinesh Kumar said the fire started on the ground floor of the building and quickly spread to the first and second floors, trapping the residents.

The fire spread due to foam kept in the house. Five bodies were recovered from the building, he said.

The police said the deceased have been identified as Saiful Rehman (35), his wife Nazira (32), daughter Isra (7), Faiz (7-month-old), and Farheen alias Parveen (25).

The injured, Arsh (10) and Uzma (25), were admitted to GTB Hospital in Delhi.

Arsh was later discharged.

In another incident, a massive fire broke out in a shop in the Chandni Chowk area of North Delhi on Thursday and spread to several shops, gutting goods and property worth crores of rupees. No one was reported hurt as yet, officials said.

The main building where the fire started has collapsed and efforts were on



Charred remains of the house where a fire broke out at Hajipur in Ghaziabad on Thursday. — PTI



Smoke billows out after a massive fire broke out at Marwadi Katra in Chandni Chowk in New Delhi. — PTI

to prevent the fire from spreading to several other shops, interconnected, which store garments, he said.

The officer said the narrow lanes of the area threw an additional challenge to the firefighters as they were forced to station their tenders 200 to 300 metres away from the main spot.

"A call related to the fire was received at 5.00 pm from the Chandni Chowk area. The fire was in Marwadi Katra, Nai Sadak, in Chandani Chowk," DFS chief Atul Garg said.

He said that initially 14 fire tenders were rushed

to the spot, but later 16 more tenders were pressed into service.

"Our teams were working at the site and trying to douse the flames. The fire is massive and the operation may take more time to douse the flames completely. So far, no one has received any injury," Mr Garg said.

BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said that the fire started from Marwadi Katra market which spread to Anil Market.

A building at the back side of the market has also collapsed due to fire and water pressure.

## Summer plan to control pollution from June 15: Rai

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 13

Delhi's summer action plan to control air pollution in the national capital will come into effect from June 15, environment minister Gopal Rai said on Thursday.

The city government has come up with a summer action plan, which will mainly focus on tree plantation, Mr Rai said at a press conference. "We held a meeting on Thursday in which 30 departments participated. The focus of the summer action plan will be on tree plantation. From June 15 to September 15, the government will work by focusing on 12 key points of the summer action plan," he said.

The greening agencies have been directed to prepare their action plans, he added.

Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) fluctuated between 'moderate' and 'poor' during May 24 to June 12, Mr Rai said and added that dust particles play an important role in summer pollution.

All the agencies will jointly run an anti-dust campaign from June 15 to June 30. For this, 580 patrolling teams will go on inspections and monitor if dust control measures at construction sites are being followed, he said.

In May 2023, the Delhi government launched an



Gopal Rai

action plan to combat air pollution during the summer months with a focus on controlling dust pollution.

Further, ahead of monsoon, Delhi urban development minister Saurabh Bharadwaj directed chief secretary Naresh Kumar to conduct a third party audit of the claims of desilting of drains by agencies like PWD and MCD by June 30.

The minister has also asked the chief secretary to submit a list of drains which have been desilted as on June 10 by different departments of the Delhi government.

According to the order, in a review meeting dated June 10 concerning the desilting process, the public works department (PWD) had claimed that out of 2,156 km long drains, about 61 per cent of drains, that is, 1,293 km drains, have been completely desilted. Similarly, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) had also claimed that 87.14 per cent of drains taken under phase-I have been completely desilted.

"The perpetrators of such heinous crimes are often booked under section 304 A IPC (Rash and negligent Act) which is a bailable offence. "In such instances, they are shown leniency and given the opportunity to avoid adequate punishment, despite having willfully neglected to follow safety rules," it said and demanded a law to deal with man-made disasters and a fast track courts to expedite such cases. — PTI

## Police creates fake Instagram account to trap criminal on run

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 13

A criminal who had evaded arrest for over a decade fell for a honey-trap laid by the Delhi police in which a male constable posed as a woman on a social media platform, officials said on Thursday.

The constable created a fake Instagram handle to lure 45-year-old Bunty, accused in 20 cases of snatching thefts, possession of illegal arms and bootlegging at different the police stations in Delhi, they said.

"The accused was declared as a proclaimed offender (PO) by city court in June 26, 2013 in a case registered against him in Tilak Nagar Police Station," DCP Manoj Kumar Meena said.

Even after several attempts by the team, he remained at large, the DCP said terming him a hardcore criminal. The team received a tip-off this year that Bunty was hiding in Indira Vikas Colony, he said.

When the team visited the location, they found out that Bunty was using an Instagram account, the DCP said. "Later, the team laid many traps and efforts were made to trace the accused, but the offender remained at large. Subsequently, the team member, a head-constable Omparkash Daggar came up with an innovative idea," said the DCP.

The constable created a fake Instagram handle with a girl's name, Meena said. "Dagar started chatting with Bunty and he was eager to befriend the 'fake girl'," said the DCP.

Later, Bunty agreed to meet the constable posing as a girl at Punjabi Bagh Metro Station. "On June 7, the meeting was fixed. The team was ready and laid a strategic trap with the help of technical surveillance. As the accused reached the spot, he was successfully apprehended from Punjabi Bagh Metro Station," the police officer said.



## SHORT TAKES

## Pappu Yadav gets bail in extortion case

**Purnea (Bihar):** A court in Bihar on Thursday granted bail to independent MP Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav in an extortion case lodged against him earlier this week. Mr Yadav got bail from the court of chief judicial magistrate, Purnea, in the case lodged on June 10 at Mofussil police station. Emerging from the court, Mr Yadav denied the allegation by a local businessman that soon after being declared elected from the Purnea Lok Sabha seat, the MP had demanded ₹1 crore. "I have never suffered so much of mental torture. It is all part of a conspiracy against me. I will move the Supreme Court and file a defamation suit against the businessman and police officials who appear to have connived with him," said Mr Yadav, who had pulled off a sensational victory in the elections, wrestling the seat from two-term sitting JD(U) MP Santosh Kushwaha. — PTI

## Keeping vow, Majhi reopens Puri gates

**Bhubaneswar:** Three of the four gates of Srimandir, the abode of Lord Jagannath, which were closed by the previous Naveen Patnaik government administration for "unexplained" reasons, reopened for devotees in the presence of newly sworn-in chief minister Mohan Charan Majhi and his council of ministers. The gates were closed in 2020 after the Covid-19 pandemic struck the state. This decision to open the temple was taken at the first Cabinet meeting chaired by the new CM. The Cabinet had met minutes after Mr Majhi was administered the oath of office as CM of Odisha by governor Raghubar Das. The three gates of the temple were closed for over a year now. Only one gate, Singha Dwar (lion's gate), was open for devotees.

## Bandi takes charge as MoS in home ministry

**New Delhi:** BJP MP Bandi Sanjay Kumar on Thursday took over as Union minister of state for home affairs at North Block after performing religious rituals. He was welcomed at his office by his ministerial colleague Nityanand Rai, who is also Union minister of state for home, Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla and Intelligence Bureau director Tapan Deka, among others. "On taking charge as minister of state in the ministry of home affairs, I would like to thank each one of you for being on my side and my support system. These doors opened only because of support from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union home minister Amit Shah, party chief J.P. Nadda. I earnestly request you to continue to support me in my service for the nation," Mr Kumar said in a post on X.

## TMC's BID TO KEEP ME OUT OF BENGAL WILL FAIL: MALVIYA

**Kolkata, June 13:** BJP's IT cell chief Amit Malviya on Thursday asserted that the "slandorous" allegations against him by a Kolkata-based lawyer was an attempt by the TMC to keep him out of Bengal which will not succeed. Mr Malviya, who is also the party's Bengal co-in-charge, had on Wednesday said he would file a criminal defamation case against lawyer Santanu Sinha for allegedly making derogatory comments against him. He also challenged West Bengal CM and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee to address concerns about Sandeshkhali through proper channels rather than resorting to smear campaigns. "Mamata Banerjee must find other legitimate means to wipe the taint of #Sandeshkhali instead of using fringe elements to fling mud on me. Such attempts to keep me out of Bengal won't work. I ain't leaving till @BJP4Bengal ensures justice for the women of Sandeshkhali and ousts the TMC from power," he posted on X. Mr Malviya added, "For the uninitiated, the BJP and even the Left had branded Hindu Samhati as Trinamul's Hindutva wing". Mr Sinha is a leader of the Hindu Samhati. He also shared a photograph of Sinha outside TMC Bhavan with the post. — PTI

■ 'Armed forces ready to face every challenge' ■ MoD's 100-day plan on track  
Rajnath eyes ₹50K-cr def exportsPAWAN BALI  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 13

Rajnath Singh on Thursday took over the charge of the defence ministry for the second consecutive term in the new Narendra Modi government. Immediately after assuming charge, Mr Singh chaired a review meeting on the first 100 days' action plan of the ministry of defence (MoD) under the new government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Mr Singh said that the objective of the ministry will be to increase defence exports. "Defence exports touched a record ₹21,083

crores in the financial year 2023-24. It was historic. Our target will be to export over ₹50,000 crores worth of defence equipment by 2028-2029," he said.

Mr Singh said that the focus would also be on carrying forward the priority areas with renewed thrust to establish a more secure, self-reliant and prosperous nation. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, our aim will be to further strengthen the security apparatus of the country, with focus on achieving self-reliance in defence manufacturing. Armed Forces modernisation and



BJP MP Rajnath Singh being greeted by the minister of state Sanjay Seth upon assuming charge as the defence minister in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

the welfare of the soldiers, both serving and retired, will continue to be our main focus," he said. The defence minister

asserted that the armed forces are being equipped with state-of-the-art weapons/platforms and they are ready to face



Union minister for road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari being welcomed by supporters on his arrival at the airport in Nagpur on Thursday. — PTI

## Cong: Anger over Neet to 'reverberate inside Parl'

**New Delhi, June 13:** The Congress on Thursday again demanded a Supreme Court-monitored probe into the Neet exam issue, and asserted that the anger in the country over the matter will "reverberate inside Parliament as well".

The Opposition party also sought the removal of the National Testing Agency (NTA) director general and claimed that the BJP government's attitude towards the ongoing demand for an inquiry into the Neet examination is "irrespon-

sible and insensitive".

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said that in the last 10 years, the Modi government has ruined the future of crores of youth through paper leaks and rigging.

"Grace marks was not the only problem in Neet exam. There has been rigging, papers have been leaked, corruption has taken place. The future of 24 lakh students appearing in the NEET examination is at stake due to the actions of the Modi government," the Congress president said. — PTI

■ P.K. Mishra to continue as principal secy to Prime Minister  
Spymaster Doval reappointed NSAAMRESH SRIVASTAVA  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 13

The Centre on Thursday reappointed Ajit Doval and P.K. Mishra as the national security adviser and the principal secretary to the Prime Minister, respectively, while two retired IAS officers — Amit Khare and Tarun Kapoor — have also been appointed as advisers to the PM.

The appointments of Mr Doval and Mr Mishra will be co-terminus with the term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi or until further order, whereas the two advisers have been appointed for two years with effect from June 10 or until further order.

The appointments committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of Ajit Doval, IPS (Retd), as



Ajit Doval



P.K. Mishra

the national security adviser with effect from June 10. Mr Doval will be assigned the rank of a Cabinet minister in the table of precedence, it said, adding the terms and conditions of his appointment will be notified separately.

A similar notification was also issued for the reappointment of Mr Mishra, which comes into effect from June 10. He

will also have the rank of a Cabinet minister in the table of precedence.

A former IPS officer, Mr Doval had joined as the NSA in May 2014 when Mr Modi took over as the Prime Minister in May 2014 and continued in the second term in 2019. He is now the longest-serving NSA in India's history.

An IPS officer of the 1968 batch of the Kerala cadre

and the first police officer to get the prestigious Kirti Chakra, he is known as an expert in strategic thinking and operational planning to the PM.

Mr Mishra, a retired 1972-batch officer, was appointed principal secretary to the PM in 2019. He also served as the principal secretary in the chief minister's office in 2001 when Mr Modi had taken over as the Gujarat CM.

Of the other two advisers, Amit Khare, a retired 1985-batch IAS officer of the Jharkhand cadre, was the secretary (higher education) in the education ministry, while Tarun Kapoor, a 1987-batch IAS officer of the Himachal Pradesh cadre had superannuated as the secretary of the ministry of petroleum and natural gas.

## Uma Bharti's security up after threat call from Pak

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY  
BHOPAL, JUNE 13

The security of senior BJP leader and former Union minister Uma Bharti has been strengthened after her security officer received "threat" calls from Pakistan and Dubai seeking her location.

A sub-inspector of police deployed in security for Ms Bharti received calls seeking her location, the office of the BJP leader said on Thursday. The security officer traced the calls to Pakistan and Dubai. The crime branch of the Madhya Pradesh police registered a case in connection with the incident and began an investigation into it, police said.

"It appears to be a case of cybercrime. We have approached the telecom companies concerned, seeking details of the suspicious WhatsApp numbers," a crime branch officer said. Ms Bharti is currently on a spiritual tour to Uttarakhnad and other Himalayan regions.

This is the first time the security officer of Ms Bharti has received threat calls. The police, meanwhile, strengthened security at Ms Bharti's residence here.



Uma Bharti

■ Mantri to give impetus to 'Lakhpati Didi' initiative  
Strengthen rural infra & SHGs: Shivraj to officialsSHASHI BHUSHAN  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 13

Pitching for a major connectivity push in the rural areas, Union rural development minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday stressed for efforts towards 100 per cent integration of rural habitations with all-weather roads.

Mr Chouhan continued his meetings with senior officials and reviewed various schemes after taking charge of the ministry on Tuesday. While taking into account all the aspects of the departmental action plan for the schemes, the minister issued directions to take strong steps to strengthen the Self Help Groups (SHGs).

The minister said that the target of three crore "Lakhpati Didis" is like a



Shivraj Singh Chouhan

dream for him and called upon everyone to work towards achieving this before the deadline of three years.

Mr Chouhan said that he will soon hold a meeting of state rural development ministers to give impetus to "Lakhpati Didi" initiative and discuss with state chief ministers to sort out issues, if any.

He appreciated the efforts under Deendayal

Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), and called upon the need for strengthening branding and marketing efforts for sale of products made by women SHGs.

Mr Chouhan observed that these women once considered 'Un-bankable' are the 'Lakhpatis of Tomorrow' and SHGs are well poised to solve the decadal problem of rural credit — a true example of women-led development.

The minister mentioned that during FY 2023-24, banks disbursed credit worth ₹2,06,636 crores to over 56 lakh women SHGs — a five-fold increase in the number of SHGs annually credit linked and nearly ten-fold jump in annual credit disbursement during past ten years.

## Naidu 4.0 to be about performance: New Andhra CM

**Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh), June 13:** Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu said on Thursday that people had seen his three versions in the past, and will see his 4.0 avatar which will be about performance. Mr Naidu took oath as the CM for the fourth time at Kesarapalle on Wednesday.

"You have seen 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, now you have come to 4.0 and you will see. That's why I am appealing to all, including officials,

employees and political activists, we have suffered losses (past five years) and we have to recover. Let us all work together and go ahead," Mr Naidu told reporters.

Announcing that the people's government has started, he said in the past five years the state had regressed and added that he would work to see the state regain its glory.

However, he predicted that by 2047, India will be in first or second position in the world and wished to



N. Chandrababu Naidu

see Telugu people on top. "My vision for 2047...Telugu people should be number one in the world. Poverty removal should be done as

every challenge. He commended the military personnel for protecting the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the nation with valour and commitment.

Mr Singh said that he will be conducting regular review meetings to fast-track the progress of the flagship schemes and the initiatives of MoD. Emphasising the growing salience of the Indian Ocean Region in the defence calculus, defence minister has decided on his first visit in his tenure to the Eastern Naval Command, Visakhapatnam, wherein he will be interacting with the officers and sailors.

## '1st priority will be to lower airfare to make it accessible'

## Naidu takes over aviation ministry

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 13

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) MP K.R. Naidu on Thursday assumed the charge of the civil aviation minister. Shortly after taking charge, Mr Naidu said his first priority will be to get the airfare reduced to make air travel affordable and accessible for the common man. He added that the ministry of civil aviation (MoCA) will prepare a 100-day action plan to address immediate challenges, as suggested by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Some of the key initiatives his ministry would take include taking the Udan scheme forward by connecting more Tier 2 and 3 cities, promoting the Digi Yatra facility nationwide, and converting all airports into 100 per cent environmentally friendly facilities, the minister stated.

The 36-year-old three-time MP from TDP is the youngest Cabinet minister in the Modi government's third term and succeeds Jyotiraditya Scindia. While talking to the media, Mr Naidu shared his personal experiences as a passenger and said the government is



Kinjarapu Ram Mohan committed to address the important issues in this sector.

"Since the Covid days, there has been significant fluctuation in airfare prices. As a passenger myself, I have observed these hikes. We are going to review this... We want to make airfare affordable and want to make airways the new railways of India. The common man is a little bit worried about high prices. We still want to bring more people into air travel," said Mr Naidu.

As he took charge, Mr Naidu wrote "Om Shri Ram" 21 times on a blank sheet of paper at 1.11 pm as per the "muhurat". He then waited for a few seconds for the auspicious time before sitting on the chair of the minister and signing official papers. He then called TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu and his mother to inform them of his joining.

## Include GJM chief Gurung in murder case: HC to CBI

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, JUNE 13

In a big blow to Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) chief Bimal Gurung, the Calcutta high court has directed the CBI to include him as an accused and also frame charges against him in the case of murder of All-India Gorkha League (AIGL) president Madan Tamang in Darjeeling 14 years ago. Tamang was hacked to death by Mr Gurung's aides in the hills in broad daylight on May 21, 2010. The CBI probed the murder on the orders of the HC following a plea by Bharati Tamang, the wife of the slain AIGL chief, and chargesheeted 48 GJM leaders, including Mr Gurung, in May 2015.



Bimal Gurung

All the accused surrendered before the city sessions court in Kolkata on December 21, 2016 and got bail. In August 2017, the same court dropped Mr Gurung's name from the list of accused after his counsel submitted that his client was in Kalimpong the day Tamang was murdered and that the CBI had no

proof against him. Ms Tamang had challenged the sessions court order legally. Hearing her petition on Thursday, Justice Samanta of the HC observed that the city sessions court judge had committed an error by dropping Mr Gurung's name. He said in his order, "Complicity against Bimal Gurung has been sufficiently established."

The order stated, "The charge of this case is required to be framed against Bimal Gurung with other accused persons. The alleged portion of the impugned order passed by the learned chief judge of the city sessions court through which Bimal Gurung was discharged from this case is hereby set aside."

## Lok Sabha will elect new Speaker June 26

## Picks can be proposed till June 25 noon

**New Delhi, June 12:** The Lok Sabha will elect its new Speaker on June 26 for which notices for motions supporting candidates can be submitted by members by 12 noon a day prior, the Lok Sabha secretariat said on Thursday.

The 18th Lok Sabha will meet for the first time on June 24 and the session will conclude on July 3. At any time before 12 noon on the day preceding the date fixed for the election, any member can give notice in writing to the secretary general of a motion supporting another member for the office of the Speaker, a Lok Sabha bulletin noted.

"In the present case, notices of motions for the election of the Speaker can be given before 12 noon on Tuesday, June 25," it explained.

While first two days will

be devoted for oath taking of newly-elected members, June 26 has been fixed for the election of the Speaker.

On June 27, President Droupadi Murmu will address a joint sitting of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. The notice for the motion has to be seconded by a third member. Also, it has to be accompanied by a statement by the candidate contesting the poll that he or she is willing to serve as Speaker if elected.

A member cannot propose one's own name, or second a motion, the secretariat pointed out, citing rules.

A member in whose name a motion stands on the list of business will, unless makes a statement conveying unwillingness to move it, will move the motion when called upon to do so, it said. — PTI

## Trinamul MLA Chakraborty granted bail in assault case

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, JUNE 13

Actor-turned-politician and Trinamul Congress MLA from Chandipur Soham Chakraborty, who is accused of assaulting a restaurant owner named Anisul Alam in Kolkata on the night of June 7, got anticipatory bail from the Barasat court in the North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal on Thursday.

Mr Chakraborty, who has been booked by the cops in a case on four bailable charges at the Techno City police station following a complaint by the restaurant owner Anisul Alam, appeared in person at the district court and surrendered himself. The Chandipur TMC MLA also prayed for anticipatory bail, which was granted by the judge against a personal bond of ₹2000.

During his visit to the court, he also held a meeting with district public prosecutor Shantamoy Basu, who is also the district TMC legal cell leader, at his chamber for nearly an hour. Other lawyers, however, protested this. Bhaskar Roy, president of the district bar association, argued that Mr Basu should not have met an undertrial accused like Mr Chakraborty.

"The matter is sub-judice, and hence I have no comments to make," Mr Chakraborty said outside the court.



SHORT TAKES

SC stays release of film *Hamare Baarah*

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court on Thursday stayed the June 14 release of Annu Kapoor's movie *"Hamare Baarah"* after taking note of allegations that the film is derogatory to the Islamic faith and married Muslim women. The SC directive came after a vacation bench watched the movie trailer replete with offensive dialogues. A vacation bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta took note of the submissions of lawyer Fauzia Shakil, representing the petitioner Azhar Basha Tamboli, and asked the Bombay high court to take an expeditious decision on the plea. While staying the release of the film, the apex court said, "We have seen the movie trailer and all the offensive dialogues continue in the trailer." The SC stayed the screening of the film till disposal of the plea by the Bombay HC. The petitioner said the HC vacated the stay on release of the movie by an "unreasoned order". "The high court could not have directed the CBFC to constitute a committee because the CBFC was a party interested in the litigation," Ms Shakil said.

Deploy spectrum of counter-terror ops, says Modi

■ **Continued from Page 1** of arms and ammunition was recovered from them. The first terror strike was made on Sunday when they opened fire at a passenger bus carrying pilgrims en route to the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Katra from the Shiv Khori temple. The bus ferrying pilgrims from Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi fell into a deep gorge following gunfire, killing nine people and injuring 41 others. On Tuesday, terrorists fired at a joint checkpoint of the 4 Rashtriya Rifles and police at Chattergalla in Bhaderwah, while a search party in the Gandoh area of the district was attacked on Wednesday, resulting in injuries to seven security personnel, including a policeman.

IAF aircraft to fly back bodies from Kuwait

■ **Continued from Page 1** injured. The embassy is ascertaining the full details from the concerned Kuwaiti authorities and the company. We offer our deepest condolences to the bereaved families... The embassy is receiving full cooperation from the Kuwaiti authorities." On Thursday, Kuwait said authorities have identified the bodies of 45 Indians and three Filipino nationals killed in the tragic fire incident in a building housing foreign workers. The Gulf Kingdom vowed to promptly investigate the incident and assured full support in repatriating the mortal remains of the victims.

■ 50 held over Reasi attack ■ No contact with terrorists so far

Massive search ops continue in J&K dists to hunt down militants

**Jammu, June 13:** Massive search operations continued on Thursday in forest belts of different districts of Jammu and Kashmir to track down and neutralise terrorists involved in recent attacks in the Union territory, officials said. Fifty people have also been detained in connection with the investigation into the recent terror attack on a bus carrying pilgrims in Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir, the police said on Thursday.

The police joined the paramilitary forces in searches in the Narwal bypass area on the outskirts of Jammu after a woman reported suspicious movement of two persons, they said.

Further details are awaited. Terrorists struck at four places in Reasi, Kathua and Doda districts over the past four days,

6 killed and 3 hurt in blast at explosives unit in Nagpur

**Nagpur, June 13:** Six workers, including five women, were killed and three injured in a blast at an explosives manufacturing factory near Nagpur city on Thursday afternoon, the police said. The incident took place around 1 pm at Chamundi Explosive Pvt Ltd at Dhamna village under the Hingna police station limits, around 25 km from Nagpur. A total of nine injured persons were brought to two private hospitals in the city, said Nagpur police commissioner Ravindra Singhal. Of them, five women and a man died during treatment, he told mediapersons.

Most of the victims were working in the factory's packaging unit when the explosion took place, another police official said. Further probe was on, he added.

Union minister and Nagpur MP Nitin Gadkari took to X to express condolences for the deceased. The BJP leader also appealed to local party workers to cancel a program organised here in the evening to welcome him to the city after he again took oath as Union road transport minister following the Lok Sabha elections, his office said in a statement.

NCP (SP) MLA from Katol and former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh visited the blast site. The factory is located in the Katol Assembly constituency. —PTI



The J&K police during a search operation near the National highway in Jammu on Thursday.

— PTI killing nine pilgrims and a CRPF jawan and leaving seven security personnel and several others injured.

Two suspected Pakistani terrorists were also killed in an encounter with security forces in Kathua and a large quantity of arms and ammunition were recovered from them. The officials said the

Army, police and paramilitary forces resumed search operations on Thursday morning in Kota top in Gandoh, Chattagalla and adjoining areas in Doda district where seven security personnel, including two policemen, were injured in separate gunfights with terrorists on Tuesday and Wednesday.

There has been no fresh contact with the fleeing terrorists so far, they said.

The police had on Wednesday released sketches of four terrorists involved in two attacks in the district and announced a reward of ₹20 lakhs for information leading to their arrest.

Earlier, the police had announced a cash reward of ₹20 lakhs and released the sketch of one of the terrorists involved in Sunday's attack on a bus carrying pilgrims in Reasi district that left nine people dead and 41 injured. Searches are underway in Reasi as well as adjoining Rajouri district. A person who resembled the terrorist's sketch was detained from a bus in Reasi in the afternoon and whisked away for questioning, the officials said. —PTI



MoS for external affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh meets Indians injured in a fire incident at a hospital in Kuwait on Thursday. A fire engulfed a multi-storey building in Kuwait on Wednesday, killing 49 foreign workers, including 45 Indians, and injured 50 others. — PTI

GPS-based tracking to improve drug supply chain in C'garh soon

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, JUNE 13**

State-owned Chhattisgarh Medical Services Corporation Limited (CGMSCL) has deployed GPS based tracking systems to strengthen the supply chain and ensure smooth delivery of medicines to the government health facilities. The CGMSCL supplies life saving drugs and essential consumables to over 1300 health facilities including primary health centres (PHC), community health centre (CHC), district hospitals (DH) and medical college hospitals from its 16 warehouses strategically located to cover all the 33 districts in the state.

"A total of 44 vehicles used for medicine delivery across the state have now been GPS enabled and can be monitored online", an official press release issued here on

■ **THE CHHATTISGARH** department has mandated the installation of GPS enabled devices on all its vehicles that are used for delivering medicines and medical consumables

Thursday said. The CGMSCL has mandated the installation of GPS enabled devices on all its vehicles that are used for delivering medicines and medical consumables.

The GPS data coupled with the DPDMS (drug procurement and distribution management information system) application enables one to track and monitor any shipment from warehouse to facilities and thus determine its exact location and estimate approximate time of delivery, the statement said.

It provides details of shipment and also enables management to take cor-

rective actions in case of unnecessary delays, breakdowns, route deviations etc. In Chhattisgarh, there are many health facilities which are located in remote hilly or forested areas and to supply medicines to them CGMSCL vehicles have to traverse harsh and difficult terrain where mobile network is very poor or absent.

Earlier it was difficult to estimate delivery times to such facilities as communication with drivers was hampered due to poor mobile network coverage.

However, with the new GPS based system, the location of the delivery vehicles can be continuously tracked even when it is moving through such areas where either mobile network is absent or its connectivity is poor and thus enabling warehouse managers and facility in-charges to estimate time of delivery easily, the statement said.

No nation has locus standi to comment on J&K: India

*Rejects 'unwarranted' reference in China-Pak statement*

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 13**

India on Thursday rejected the "unwarranted references" to Jammu and Kashmir in a joint statement issued by China and its all-weather friend Pakistan. New Delhi also rejected the references to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). As per reports, the joint statement was issued in Beijing following talks between Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chinese Premier Li Qiang. The Pakistan PM had also met Chinese President Xi Jinping during the visit.

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, "We have noted unwarranted references to the Union territory of J&K in the joint

■ **AS PER** reports, joint statement was issued in Beijing following talks between Pak PM and Chinese Premier Li Qiang. The Pak PM had also met Chinese Prez during the visit

statement between China and Pakistan of June 7. We categorically reject such references." "Our position on the issue is consistent and well known to the concerned parties. The Union territory of J&K and the UT of Ladakh have been, are and will always remain integral and inalienable parts of India. No other country has the locus standi to comment on the same," he said.

The China-Pakistan joint statement said the Pakistani side briefed the Chinese side on the latest developments in J&K.

It said the Chinese side reiterated that the "J&K dispute is left over from history, and should be properly and peacefully resolved in accordance with the UN Charter, relevant UN Security Council resolutions and bilateral agreements".

"Taking strong note of the CPEC that featured in the joint statement, he added, "The same joint statement also mentions activities and projects under the so-called China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, some of which are in India's sovereign territory under forcible and illegal occupation by Pakistan. We resolutely oppose and reject any moves by other countries to reinforce or legitimise Pakistan's illegal occupation of these territories, impinging on India's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Maha quota activist stops indefinite fast

*Gives 1 month to Shinde govt to act*

**SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, JUNE 13**

Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange on Thursday withdrew his hungerstrike by giving a month to the Eknath Shinde government for the implementation of a draft notification that recognises all "sage soyre" (blood relatives) of Maratha community members as Kumbis, an agrarian group classified as an OBC community. The quota activist said that if the government fails to fulfil the demand, they will defeat the candidates of the ruling parties in the upcoming Assembly polls to be held in mid-October.

The activist's announcement comes after assurance given by a delegation of the state government to fulfil his demands within



Manoj Jarange

o n e month. The delegation, comprising Mr Shinde's close aide and Cabinet minister Shambhuraj Desai and Shiv Sena MP Sandipan Bhumre, urged Mr Jarange to give at least a month to the government to act on the community's demands. The Cabinet minister assured him that he would monitor the issue and weekly follow it up.

In a response to the government's request, Mr Jarange pointed out that he had already given five months to the state government as the draft notification was issued on January 27 this year.

NIA chargesheet against 7 men for radicalising youth

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 13**

The National Investigation Agency on Thursday filed chargesheet against seven persons for recruiting and radicalising vulnerable youths as "mujahideens" to operate as terrorist sleeper cells and they were part of a bigger conspiracy by proscribed terrorist organisation Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to prepare 50 such sleeper cells in each district of India by 2025.

The sleeper cells were being prepared to carry out guerrilla attacks on

Indian soldiers, police personnel and leaders of specific religious organisations, the statement issued by the NIA said.

The accused were also involved in the fabrication of explosives for furtherance of the ISIS goal to establish the Caliphate system in India by waging jihad against the government of India, the central anti-terror probe agency alleged. "In a major step towards demolishing the ISIS anti-India module network, the NIA on Thursday charge sheeted seven accused involved in the Bellary IS module case," the agency said.

Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra is elected to RS unopposed

**BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, JUNE 13**

Days after his big defeat in the Lok Sabha elections, Sunetra Pawar, the wife of Maharashtra deputy CM Ajit Pawar, was on Thursday elected to the Rajya Sabha. Sunetra filed her nomination as the Ajit Pawar-led NCP candidate after the party finalised her name in a meeting held on Wednesday evening. She was elected unopposed, being the only candidate in the fray. As per party sources, the decision to field Sunetra is seen as a strategic move by the NCP to strengthen its position in the Baramati region. It will free Ajit to campaign for the upcoming state Assembly polls extensively, while his wife can focus on Baramati.

In the just-concluded LS polls, Sunetra Pawar lost from the Baramati constituency in Pune district, where her sister-in-law Supriya Sule, the daughter of NCP(SP) president Sharad Pawar, registered her fourth consecutive win.

The result was a huge jolt for Ajit, who represents the Baramati Assembly seat, as Ms Sule secured a lead of over 47,000 votes over Sunetra in the Baramati segment during polls. Sunetra was chosen over other aspirants, including Parth Pawar, the elder son of the deputy CM, senior minister Chhagan Bhujbal, former MP Anand Paranjape and senior MLA Baba Siddique.

Neet grace marks to be withdrawn; re-test on June 23

■ **Continued from Page 1** body. It conducts exams for more than 50 lakh school students annually, besides exams at the higher education level," he said.

The minister's comments came on a day when the NTA told the Supreme Court that the decision to award grace marks to 1,563 candidates in NEET-UG for admission to MBBS, BDS and other courses was cancelled and they will be given the option to take a re-test on June 23.

"If these candidates do not wish to take the re-test, then their earlier marks, sans the grace marks, will be given for the purpose of results. The grace marks that were awarded earlier were not at the whims and fancies of the NTA but were based on a Supreme Court formula; there is a basis to those calculations. If there are certain anomalies, those will be rectified and we will ensure that no student is at a disadvantage," Mr Pradhan said.

The results of the Neet-UG were announced by the NTA on June 4, against the anticipated timeline of June 14.

The Centre informed the top court that "if the candidates, out of the 1,563, do not wish to take up the retest, then their earlier marks, sans the grace marks, will be given for the purposes of the results. The results of the re-test will be declared on June 30 and counselling for admissions in MBBS, BDS and other courses will start on July 6."

The NTA has been facing flak amid allegations of irregulari-

ties and the inflation of marks in the medical entrance examination. The education ministry last week set up a four-member panel to review the grace marks awarded to 1,563 students to compensate them for "loss of time" due to a delay in the commencement of the examination at certain centres.

"The panel was headed by former UPSC chairman Pradeep Kumar Joshi and included the National Medical Commission (NMC) secretary, besides others. Each and every grievance has been reviewed and then only the panel made its recommendations," Mr Pradhan added.

During thr hearing on petitions against Neet irregularities on Tuesday, the apex court noted that the sanctity of Neet-UG 2024, had been affected. The NTA, however, denied the charge. The top court, however, refused to stay the counselling process for admissions.

The Congress on Thursday again demanded a Supreme Court-monitored probe into the Neet exam issue. The party asserted that the anger in the country over the matter will "reverberate inside Parliament as well".

The Opposition party also sought the removal of the NTA director-general and claimed that the Centre's attitude towards the ongoing demand for an inquiry into the Neet examination is "irresponsible and insensitive".

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said that in

the last 10 years, the Modi government has ruined the future of crores of youth through paper leaks and rigging.

Mr Kharge said: "Grace marks were not the only problem in the Neet exam. There has been rigging, papers have been leaked and corruption has taken place. The future of 24 lakh students appearing in the Neet examination is at stake due to the actions of the Modi government."

A nexus of exam centres and coaching centres has been formed, where the game of "pay money, get paper" is being played, he alleged.

"The Modi government cannot escape its responsibility by placing the responsibility of its actions on the shoulders of the NTA. There should be a CBI investigation into the entire Neet scam. If the Modi government is not ready for a CBI inquiry then the Congress party demands a fair inquiry under the supervision of the Supreme Court," Mr Kharge said in a post.

During the hearing in the top court, a vacation bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta made it clear that the admission of successful candidates to medical colleges and other institutions will be subject to the outcome of the petitions, which have sought reliefs like the cancellation of the examination held on May 5 on grounds of question paper leaks and other malpractices.

The bench noted the decision to cancel the grace marks awarded

to 1,563 candidates as "fairly reasonable".

At the outset, lawyer Kanu Agarwal, appearing for the Centre and the NTA, said the committee set up to look into the grievances decided on June 12 to "allay the fears of the students". It was of the view that the grace marks be withdrawn and replaced with an option of re-test for these 1,563 candidates, which will be conducted on June 23.

Mr Agarwal said the committee was of the view that the award of grace marks on grounds of loss of time while taking the test resulted in a "skewed situation" as it had to be limited only to the questions that remained unattempted.

In its order, the top court said: "According to the recommendations, it has been suggested that the scorecards of the affected 1,563 candidates issued on June 4 will stand cancelled and withdrawn. These affected 1,563 candidates will be informed of their actual scores without compensatory marks."

The apex court said: "Further, re-examination will be conducted for the affected 1563 candidates. The results of the affected candidates who do not wish to appear for the re-examination will be declared on their actual marks without compensation obtained by them in the examination held on May 5 and the marks obtained by the candidates who will appear in the retest will be considered and their marks based on the examination held on May 5 will be discarded.





THE ASIAN AGE

14 JUNE 2024

Kuwait fire deaths: Lessons in how to fix accountability

In Kuwait’s worst ever fire accident, nearly 50 people, 45 Indians among them, have died and an equal number of people suffered burns or from smoke inhalation and so fatalities may rise. It is tragic that most of the deaths, some a result of jumping from the blazing building, were those of Indian expatriate workers who put in their blood, sweat and toil to eke out a living so they can send back enough money for their families to get by at home.

India which takes huge pride in being the top country in the world to get remittances from Indians working abroad, nearly \$100 billion worth last year, has responded with messages of condolences, sent a minister to the spot and ordered the payment of a token sum as compensation with the Kerala government also contributing and individual businessmen chipping in.

Caring for Indians in trouble wherever they are in the world is a praiseworthy trait of the Indian government, but it has huge lessons to learn from the kind of prompt executive action that the Kuwaitis took with the Emir ordering a probe to fix accountability and the interior minister asking police to immediately apprehend the owner and janitor of the six-storey Al Mangaf building that was home to expat workers. Pakistani, Filipino, Egyptian and Nepali workers were also among the dead.

Action was also ordered to begin checking all such places of residence where some kind of ghettoisation of migrants might be taking place with several guest workers being crammed into small flats just to save costs for the recruiting companies that have to provide housing for expat workers.

Several officials, including second rung officers of the Al-Ahmadi governorate, an official of the municipality of the location as well as the director of the audit and engineering department and the official in charge of ensuring such violations, were spotted. All of them would have to face the might of the law in a monarchy known to act by the book.

Such quick action stands out in contrast to what we see happen in India with those who are to be held accountable doing everything to duck responsibility and whatever they can to upset due process

Force majeure conditions like a storm may have caused the large hoarding to come down in Mumbai, but only after the event were several glaring irregularities exposed — like the hoarding lacking permission and even the petrol pump on which it fell being in operation illegally. How long a luxury car could run in Pune without registration plates was yet another pointer to the laxity or outright corruption that holds our system in thrall.

Whatever action is taken, the dead cannot be helped but, by taking corrective steps after an event, the recurrence of such tragedies can at least be averted. What is it in our system that is stopping it from allowing the full force of the law to dictate terms to those guilty of offences? There are lessons to be learnt even from an extreme tragedy like the accidental fire in Kuwait.

Odisha: Another young BJP CM

The selection of Mohan Charan Majhi as chief minister of Odisha which has elected the BJP to power for the first time ever, ending the unbroken 24-year rule of Naveen Patnaik and his Biju Janata Dal, fits into the pattern the saffron party has employed in several other states and promises to widen the acceptance the party has got in the mineral-rich but impoverished eastern state.

Mr Majhi, a tribal leader and a four-time MLA, supersedes several BJP top guns including Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan. The choice must have a lot to do with the fact that 22.85 per cent of the state’s pollution is made up of tribal people. That Mr Majhi is a non-controversial leader with a clean image must have added to his electability.

The BJP leadership’s search for chief ministers in several states where the party has come to power recently often overlooks the claims of the veterans and ends with the selection of relatively unknown young faces who would pose no questions to it. They are also kept under leash with a couple of deputy chief ministers who would take care of the interests of the several social factions which the party thinks are important for its success.

Odisha is perhaps the biggest paradox India has ever produced. The state with immense natural resources is one of the poorest and there has been no substantial change in the fortunes of the people in the several decades after independence. The state is one of the richest Indian states in terms of its history and culture, but it has not helped the people make advances in their lives. If Mr Majhi’s selection is not just a token which the BJP can go to the town with, and if the party and the new CM mean business, then it will mark a new dawn in the history of the state.

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KAUSHIK MITTER  
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR  
Printer & Publisher

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Subhani



How China stokes unrest globally to contain West



Claude Arpi

At the end of an informal meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing earlier in May, the two leaders hugged each other, something rather unusual for Mr Xi (though he did it with Prime Minister Narendra Modi as well). US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby jokingly commented: “I’m not good at talking about personal human bodily affection one way or the other. I think I’ll leave it to these two gents to talk about why they thought it was good to hug one another.”

Whatever the US spokesman may say, the encounter was significant, as it heralded a still closer relationship between Russia and China. According to Reuters: “Russia, grappling with Western sanctions after its invasion of Ukraine, is increasingly reliant on its booming trade with China, which is challenging US supremacy in areas from quantum computing to espionage and hard military power.... The leaders signed a lengthy statement that sharpened their opposition to a US-led world order and pledged cooperation across fields ranging from space and nuclear technologies to finance and manufacturing.”

It is a fact that for Moscow, though the Chinese economy may be facing serious difficulties, Beijing is an ally of weight.

The Three Battles: At the same time, China is more and more asserting itself all over the planet. Long Kai-feng, a PLA commentator associated with the Kunlun Policy and Strategy Research Institute, a Communist Party of China think tank, recently wrote about “CPC’s 3-Battle Scheme” to erode America’s power prior to a clash in the Taiwan Strait; among other things, the author argues that the outcome of the “Three Battles” will see the US dollar becoming worthless.

Long explains: “On a glob-

al scale, three major battles are in Europe, the Middle East and Asia respectively. The Ukrainian war represents the European front; the Middle Eastern battle will be a conflict between Israel and Palestine, and the Asian theatre might be the second Korean war. After these battles, the US military and dollar dominance established post-Cold War will fall. The US dollar will depreciate, becoming worthless — a trend seen as inevitable.”

The PLA scholar further notes: “Given the current situation, Russia seems poised to win in Ukraine. Reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran and unity in the Arab world are crucial to counter US-Israeli dominance. In East Asia, North Korea is ready, possessing nuclear capabilities and openly challenging US dominance.”

Beijing’s Assertiveness: In

India’s neighbourhood, this translates, for example, in the Maldives falling for Beijing’s promises or in Nepal, a recrudescence of territorial claims in the Kalapani area, clearly influenced by Beijing.

Regarding Africa, China is, of course, deeply involved. In a research paper, Hema Narang from Delhi University believes that infrastructure diplomacy is the key to China’s influence in Africa.

The scholar gives an example: “China gifted Zimbabwe a new Parliament building in 2023. This gift is emblematic of China’s strategy of gifting large-scale projects worldwide, especially in Africa, to establish itself as a modernisation facilitator and gain international prestige. These projects, often grand structures such as government buildings and stadiums, transform the dynamics of donor-recipient relationships, augmenting China’s global reputation and subtly reinforcing material inequalities, while their architectural grandeur and visible labels such as ‘China Aid’ prominently emphasise China’s

Massive quantities of Chinese arms, ammunition, military grade communication and other intelligence gathering equipment were found in Hamas warehouses in Gaza during the raids conducted by the Israel Defence Forces

commitment to development and cooperation.”

She concludes: “In international societies, gifts work in a similar way, establishing prestige for the giver and reaffirming the receiver’s position.”

At the same time, everybody is not fooled by Beijing’s generosity: a “gift” does not always mean a free meal.

The Ukraine War: Another question often asked: Is China supporting Russia in the Ukraine war? There is no doubt that China is a vital partner for Russia, helping Moscow to soften the impact of sanctions imposed by the United States.

When asked if China was providing Russia with weapons, US secretary of state Antony Blinken told BBC: “What’s not happening is the provision of actual arms by China to Russia for use in Ukraine.” However, the US leader added: “About 70 per cent of the machine tools and 90 per cent of the microelectronics Russia imports come from China.”

Without Beijing, Moscow would certainly not have survived the Western sanctions so easily.

The Hamas War: More important perhaps is China’s hand behind the Hamas attack on Israel. A newspaper article says: “The evidence of the PRC green-signalling Hamas’ attack on Israel goes beyond the circumstantial.”

Quoting Guermantes Lailari, a retired US Air Force foreign area officer specialising in counter-terrorism, who recently visited New Delhi, the article says: “Massive quantities of Chinese arms, ammunition, military grade communication and other intelligence gathering equipment were found in Hamas warehouses in Gaza during the raids conducted by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), in the aftermath of the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel by the

Palestinian terrorist group. At least two tunnel engineers from China’s People’s Liberation Army were captured by the IDF, suggesting that extensive Chinese help was given to Hamas to construct the huge network of tunnels under Gaza City. Apart from this, the PLA has been giving military training to Hamas.”

The informant added that the head of Hamas’ military wing, Mohammed Deif, who masterminded the attack on Israel, lived in the China for years, and maintains deep contacts with the PLA.

One More Battle: One more front (or ‘battle’) seems to be in the French enclave of New Caledonia, which witnessed an insurgency from of the local population. While President Emmanuel Macron struggles to restore some order, a question is recurrently asked: Who is behind the unrest?

Paris has put the blame for the violence on extremist independence groups, supported from outside; Gerald Darmanin, the interior and Overseas France minister, asserted that Azerbaijan has some responsibility for the unrest: “It’s not a fantasy, it’s a reality”, he said. The Azerbaijan flag was repeatedly seen in the hands of rioters.

The next question is logically: “Who is behind Azerbaijan?”

Has Russia opened up a second front in its proxy war against France?

Though Azerbaijan has described the allegations “insulting”, and said: “We deny any link between the leaders of the Caledonian freedom struggle and Azerbaijan”, one could also put the question differently.

Who benefits most from the current mess in New Caledonia?

No doubt China is trying hard to make its presence felt in the chain of Pacific islands and an independent Caledonia would be a great boon for Beijing, while President Macron has never been in such a weak position, particularly after the recent European Parliament elections.

Claude Arpi is Distinguished Fellow at the Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence (Delhi), and writes on India, China, Tibet and Indo-French relations

LETTERS

INDIANS IN MISERY

A number of us patriots leave our homeland for Gulf countries to sustain our families and build a better livelihood.

Unfortunately, natural disasters and accidents sometimes shatter our dreams. Recently, a massive fire engulfed a multi-storey building in Kuwait, killing 50 people, among whom 45 were Indians. This tragedy has dismantled many hopes and dreams. The government should address issues reported by Indians working abroad. The Indian Embassy received over 16,000 complaints from Indians between March 2021 and December 2023, most of which concerned salary delays, harassment and poor accommodation. It is imperative that it looks into these matters.

Jakir Hussain  
Kanpur

LIMITED PROGRESS

THE AVERAGE spending on non-food items is seeing a growing trend. It exceeded 50 per cent of household expenses in rural India for the first time in 11 years. The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey over 2022-23 showed money spent on food items decreased from 52.9 per cent in 2011-12 to 46.4 per cent. However, in urban India, it was the opposite as there was a decline in spends on non-food items from 42.62 to 39.2 per cent. The data also revealed a marked rise in consumption inequality and rise of Gini Coefficient. While villages are seeing limited progress, the gap between haves and have-nots is widening.

Vijay Singh Adhikari  
Nainital

BACK TO SCHOOL

BOOKS, lunch boxes, stationery and more — children are back to their daily routine after schools have reopened. As days progress, things will add up, causing many children to suffer from neck and back problems due to carrying overly heavy school bags. Unfortunately, not much attention has been paid, both by parents and schools, to the link between the weight of the school bag and the child’s growing muscles, backbone and spine. Students in developed nations carry their text and notebooks on a 10-gram USB stick. But, sadly in our country, the age-old practice of carrying super-heavy bags is still in vogue.

R. Sivakumar  
Chennai



Mahir Ali

Whither Europe? The centre holds, but it has clearly moved rightward

Shortly after Joe Biden and a phalanx of European leaders gathered in Normandy last week to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings that launched the endgame in the continent’s bitterest conflict, citizens in 27 states began to vote in European parliamentary elections that were predicted to demonstrate a surge in support for precisely the kind of ideologies that purportedly perished in 1944-45.

One aspect of Operation Overlord that seldom scores a mention in current commentary is that the Soviet Union had been pleading for a second front since soon after Operation Barbarossa, when the Nazis swept across its territory three years before D-Day. There were those in Europe who relished the prospect of a combat between the USSR and Nazi Germany, and the Normandy landings were at least partly motivated by the fear that the Red Army would overrun Europe and take sole credit for Hitler’s defeat.

Soviet forces did indeed reach Berlin before their Western allies — and a brief camaraderie made way before long for the Cold War. Stalin’s regime is accurately accused of imposing its will on Eastern Europe. Somewhat more subtly, the US did the same in Western Europe.

One of the CIA’s first missions was to ensure that Italy did not vote in a communist or socialist majority in its first postwar poll. Part of the effort involved incorporating Nazi operatives or collaborators into ‘democratic’ Europe’s postwar establishments.

The precursor of France’s Rassemblement National, whose gains in last week’s polls panicked Emmanuel Macron into calling a snap parliamentary election, was Front National, which was co-founded by Nazi collaborators. RN leader Marine Le Pen has been trying to cleanse the party of its fascist associations, including by distancing it from Germany’s Alternative für Deutschland, some of whose leaders refuse to stop expressing their admiration for the Third Reich. Notwithstanding some recent scandals involving its international associations — kowtowing to the Kremlin, for instance, and spying for China — the AfD did better in the Euro polls than any component of Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s supposedly centre-left coalition, but not as well as the Christian Democrats (CDU).

The CDU’s Ursula von der Leyen, who greeted the European election results by offering the assurance that the centre is holding, hopes to win a second term as European Commission

president. She has lately been courting Giorgia Meloni, whose ‘post-neofascist’ Brothers of Italy came on top in another former Axis state. Ms Meloni postures on the international stage as the acceptable face of Europe’s far right, while her government’s domestic attitudes reflect a clearer image of its perverse inclinations.

A defining feature of European politics in recent decades has been the extent to which the centre (both left and right) has sought to ‘combat’ the hard right by co-opting its ideas, notably (but not exclusively) on immigration. In many parts of Europe, for instance, economic distress is related to ageing societies and diminishing populations. But where is the party advocating better-organised immigration as a possible solution? The focus is identitarian, powered mainly by white Christian nationalism. Hence the EU devotes its energies not to educating the masses but to bribing North African states to detain and brutalise the politically or economically persecuted unfortunate who aspire to a new life on the fringes of a European experiment that they don’t realise has failed.

The second round of the French election, on July 7, will precede the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics barely by a fortnight. Mr

Macron is obviously hoping that the anti-fascist voters will emerge to thwart the likelihood of an FN majority. As many commentators have indicated, though, it could mean cohabiting with the hard right for the remainder of his presidential term, and then handing over to Ms Le Pen in 2027.

Whether or not it crossed voters’ minds, the war in Ukraine was a factor in the EU elections, with some of the far right as well as far left parties calling for accommodation with Vladimir Putin — the D-Day ceremonies also highlighted Russia’s aggression as an echo of Nazi attitudes. Without excusing Mr Putin’s self-serving trespasses, it might have been more fruitful to focus on why Moscow might suspect the intentions of hostile neighbours.

Neither the EU’s dedication to Ukraine nor its devotion to Israel, notwithstanding the latter’s genocidal tendencies, is likely to shift much in the near future, but the future of the anyhow inadequate European Green Deal is in doubt. Add a second Trump administration to the equation, and humanity’s short-term future shifts from gloom to doom, regardless of anything Mr Putin or Xi Jinping might be plotting.

— By arrangement with Dawn



## SHORT TAKES

AT LEAST 22  
KILLED IN MALI  
MINE COLLAPSE

**Bamako, June 13:** At least 22 artisanal gold miners died in southern Mali on Saturday after the shaft they were working in collapsed, the general secretary of the miners' confederation told Reuters on Thursday.

The miners had entered the site in the commune of Kalana illicitly and dug tunnels which later collapsed, the confederation's Taoule Camara said.

Artisanal mining is a common activity across much of West Africa and has increased in recent years due to growing demand for metals and rising prices.

FRENCH CITIZEN  
RETURNS AFTER  
IRAN JAIL ORDEAL

**Paris, June 13:** Frenchman Louis Arnaud returned to Paris on Thursday after his release from an over 20-month prison ordeal in Iran, but a dozen Europeans are still detained in the Islamic republic.

Activists and some Western governments, including France, accuse Iran of exercising a strategy of taking foreign nationals as hostages aimed at extracting concessions from the West. Arnaud was held in Iran from September 2022 and sentenced last year to five years in jail on national security charges.

REVERSE WRONG  
EV TARIFFS,  
CHINA TELLS EU

**Beijing, June 13:** Beijing on Thursday slammed EU tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles as protectionist behaviour and said it hoped the European bloc would correct its "wrong practices" and handle trade frictions through dialogue.

The reaction from China and others, including European and Chinese car makers, points to clear opposition to the EU decision and an eagerness to de-escalate the situation.

Industry insiders say both Europe and China have reasons for wanting to strike a deal in the months ahead.

FISTFIGHT AFTER  
TENSION IN LOWER  
HOUSE OF ITALY

**Rome, June 13:** Tensions in Italy's lower house erupted into a fistfight, sending an opposition lawmaker to hospital, over a controversial government proposal that opponents say will further impoverish the poor south.

Video of the fight that happened on Wednesday shows lawmakers converging on 5-Star Movement lawmaker Leonardo Donno, who opposes the changes, after he tried to hand an Italian flag to regional affairs minister Roberto Calderoli. Calderoli, a firebrand lawmaker from the Lega party with northern roots.

SENATE OKAYS  
MILEI'S KEY  
REFORM BILLS

**Buenos Aires, June 13:** Argentina's Senate has approved key state overhaul and tax bills proposed by President Javier Milei, delivering an initial legislative victory to the leader in his efforts to deliver on his promises of radical change.

Senators voted 37 to 36 to give their overall approval to the overhaul bill after 11 hours of debate as protesters urging lawmakers to reject Milei's harsh austerity clashed with police outside Congress. The lawmakers still must approve individual measures in an article-by-article vote that will stretch throughout the night.

IMF RELEASES  
\$336MN TRANCHE  
TO SRI LANKA

**Colombo, June 13:** The IMF has disbursed the third tranche of \$336 million from its \$2.9 billion bailout package to Sri Lanka, even as it cautioned that its economy remains vulnerable and the path to debt sustainability is "knife-edged".

The third tranche under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement was released during an executive board meeting of the International Monetary Fund held on Wednesday.

With the release of the third tranche amounting to \$336 million, the total IMF financial support disbursed so far to Sri Lanka under the bailout package is about \$1 billion.

Israelis advance deeper into  
Rafah as diplomacy falters

Hezbollah strikes 9 Israeli military sites; Houthis attack Greek-owned ship

**Cairo, Beirut, Dubai, June 13:** Israeli tanks advanced deeper into the western area of Rafah, amid one of the worst nights of bombardment from air, ground, and sea, forcing many families to flee their homes and tents under darkness, residents said on Thursday.

Lebanon's Hezbollah said on Thursday it had launched rockets and weaponised drones at nine Israeli military sites in a co-ordinated attack, ramping up hostilities on Lebanon's southern border for the second consecutive day.

The attacks were made in retaliation for an Israeli strike on Tuesday that killed a senior Hezbollah field commander.

The group said in a statement it had fired volleys of Katyusha and Falaq rockets at six Israeli military locations. Its *Al-Manar* television reported more than 100 rockets fired at once.

Hezbollah's statement said it had also launched attack drones at the headquarters of Israel's northern command, an intelligence headquarters and a military barracks.

Meanwhile, a suspected attack on Thursday by Yemen's Houthi rebels saw missiles strike a ship in the Gulf of Aden, authorities said, setting the vessel ablaze, in what would be the latest such assault in their campaign over the Israel-Hamas war.

The attack happened in the Gulf of Aden off Yemen, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre said. It said the vessel can-



Israeli army vehicles surround an ambulance at the entrance of Jenin in the occupied West Bank, during a raid on Thursday. — AFP

ught fire in the attack.

The private security firm Ambrey said a merchant vessel made a radio distress call saying it had been struck by a missile.

The ship "was en route from Malaysia to Venice, Italy," Ambrey said. It added that the ship was "aligned with the Houthi target profile," without elaborating. The Houthis did not immediately acknowledge Thursday's attack.

The attack follows the Houthis launching a boat-borne bomb attack against a commercial ship in the Red Sea on Wednesday. Residents said the Israeli forces thrust towards the Al-Mawasi area of Rafah

near the beach, which is designated as a humanitarian area in all announcements and maps published by the Israeli Army since it began its Rafah offensive in May.

The Israeli military denied in a statement it had launched any strikes inside the Al-Mawasi humanitarian zone.

Israel said its assault aimed to wipe out Hamas' last intact combat units in Rafah, a city which had sheltered more than a million people before the latest advance began. Most of those people have now moved north towards Khan Younis and Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza Strip.

The Israeli military said in a statement it was continuing "intelligence-based, targeted operations" on Rafah, saying forces in the past day had located weapons and killed Palestinian gunmen in close-range combat.

Over the past day, the military said it had struck 45 targets across the Gaza Strip from the air, including military structures, militant cells, rocket lau-

ncers and tunnel shafts.

Israel has ruled out peace until Hamas is eradicated, and much of Gaza lies in ruins. But Hamas has proven resilient, with militants resurfacing to fight in areas where Israeli forces had previously declared to have defeated them and pulled back.

The group welcomed a new US ceasefire proposal but made some amendments, reaffirming its stance that any agreement must secure an end to the war, a demand Israel still rejects.

Israel described Hamas's response to the new US peace proposal as total rejection. But the efforts to secure an agreement are still continuing, according to mediators Qatar and Egypt, backed by the US.

Since a brief week-long truce in November, repeated attempts to ensure a ceasefire have failed, with Hamas insisting on a permanent end to the war and full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

Hamas precipitated the war when militants stormed from Israeli-blockaded Gaza into southern Israel in a lightning strike last October 7, killing around 1,200 people and taking over 250 hostages back to the enclave, according to Israeli tallies.

Israel's invasion and bombardment of Gaza since then has killed at least 37,000 people, according to the territory's health ministry.

Thousands more are feared buried dead under rubble, with most of the 2.3 million population displaced. — Agencies

HUNGARY FINED  
\$216 MN OVER  
ASYLUM LAW

**Brussels, Budapest, June 13:** The European Union's top court ordered Hungary to pay a fine of 200 million euros (\$216 million) on Thursday for persistently breaching the bloc's asylum rules despite a previous European Court of Justice ruling, plus an additional 1 million euros for every day it fails to comply going forward.

In reaction, Prime Minister Viktor Orban wrote on X, "The ECJ's decision to fine Hungary with 200M euros plus 1M euros daily!!!! for defending the borders of the European Union is outrageous and unacceptable." He added that "illegal migrants are more important to the Brussels bureaucrats than their own European citizens".

Hungary had not implemented a 2020 ruling from top EU judges in Luxembourg, the ECJ wrote in a press release. "That failure, which consists in deliberately avoiding the application of a common European Union policy as a whole, constitutes an unprecedented and extremely serious infringement of EU law." — Agencies



Viktor Orban

## Cool La Nina on the anvil



Children walk in a flooded field in Mandera County, Kenya. The El Nino weather condition that added a bit of extra heat to already record warm global temperatures is gone. It's cool flip side, La Nina, is likely to breeze in, just in time for peak Atlantic hurricane season. — AP

Harassment finger at ISI  
by Pak's anti-terror judge

**Lahore, June 13:** An anti-terrorism court judge, hearing the cases related to attacks on military installations in May last year by workers of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party, has accused Pakistan's powerful intelligence agency ISI of harassing him and his family members.

The judge has been hearing the cases against Opposition Leader in Parliament Omar Ayub and other workers of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) related to attacks on military installations in May last year.

Ayub had alleged that last week at a hearing in a case in Sargodha ATC Judge Abbas was made hostile by the intelligence agencies. In March, six judges of the Islamabad High

Court had reached out to the Supreme Judicial Council informing alleged intrusion of intelligence operatives in judicial matters.

The six judges — out of a total strength of eight — wrote a letter to the Supreme Judicial Council members, regarding alleged attempts to pressure judges through abduction and torture of their kin as well as secret surveillance inside their homes.

All IHC judges unanimously acknowledged that intelligence agencies are interfering in their judicial functions. — PTI

## NEW | POLL

Just a handful of competitive states tilt the balance in the US electoral college

## Trump opens up 2-point lead over Biden

**Washington, June 13:** Donald Trump, the Republican challenger in the US presidential contest, opened up a marginal 2 percentage point lead over US President Joe Biden this week in the race to win the Nov. poll, as voters weigh the recent criminal convictions of Trump and of Biden's son, according to a new Reuters/Ipsos poll.

Some 41% of registered voters in the two-day poll, which closed on Tuesday, said they would vote for Trump if the election were held today, while 39%

picked Biden, a Democrat. Some 20% of voters in the poll said they had not picked a candidate, were leaning toward third-party options or might not vote at all in the November 5 election.

Trump's lead was within the survey's roughly 3 percentage point margin of error for registered voters, many of whom remain on the fence with about five months left before the poll.

A prior Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted May 31-June 1 showed Biden with a 2 percentage point lead

over Trump, 41% to 39%.

The latest poll found 10% of respondents would pick Robert Kennedy Jr., an anti-vaccine activist running as an independent, if he were on the ballot with Trump and Biden. Kennedy's share was unchanged from the prior poll.

While nationwide surveys give important signals on American support for political candidates, just a handful of competitive states typically tilt the balance in the US electoral college, which ultimately decides who wins a presiden-

tial election.

Both candidates carry significant liabilities in the first US presidential election rematch in nearly 70 years.

Biden's liabilities include concerns about his age — 81 — as well as strong criticism from a slice of his Democratic Party over his support for Israel's war with Hamas. Protests have roiled US universities in recent months, fueling concerns among Democrats that some young voters could turn against Biden. — Reuters

## U.S. REPORTER TO STAND TRIAL

Russian prosecutors said on Thursday they had sent the case of detained US reporter Evan Gershkovich to court after concluding he had been collecting information for the US Central Intelligence Agency about a Russian tank factory.

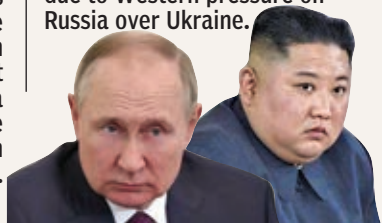
Gershkovich, 32, was arrested on March 29, 2023, in Yekaterinburg on charges of espionage that carry up to 20 years in prison.

**NATO SAYS  
OVER 3,00,000  
TROOPS NOW  
ON HIGH  
READINESS**

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) countries have "comfortably exceeded" a target of placing 3,00,000 troops on high-readiness as the alliance grapples with the threat from Russia, a senior alliance official said on Thursday.

KREMLIN: TIES WITH N. KOREA  
SHOULD NOT BE IN DOUBT

The Kremlin said that Russia's right to develop closer ties with North Korea should not be in doubt or source of fear for anyone. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov made the comments when asked about Western fears that Moscow may revise its policy towards Pyongyang due to Western pressure on Russia over Ukraine.

\$50-bn deal for  
Kyiv, agrees G7

**Borgo Egnazia, Geneva, June 13:** Leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) major democracies agreed an outline deal on Thursday to provide \$50 billion of loans for Ukraine using interest from Russian sovereign assets frozen after Moscow launched its invasion of its neighbour in 2022.

Switzerland government websites were hit on Thursday by the first of an expected wave of cyberattacks ahead of a week-end summit on peace in Ukraine hosted by Bern.

The National Cyber Security Centre said the distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, which make websites or network resources unavailable by flooding them with malicious traffic, resulted in minor outages.

The agreement was the centrepiece of the opening day in southern Italy of the annual summit of G7 leaders, attended for a second successive year by Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The Ukrainian leader will sign a new, long-term security accord with US President Joe Biden on Thursday, as well as one with fellow G7 member Japan. Many of the G7 leaders are struggling at home but determined to make a difference on the world stage as they also seek to counter China's economic ambitions.

— Agencies

Secrets of Chinese  
Army in \$1 papers

**Taipei, June 13:** Chinese state media said on Thursday that a military history buff found a collection of confidential documents related to the country's military in a pile of old papers he bought for under \$1.

The collector reported the documents to security units after recognising their sensitive nature.

The reports didn't say what the documents were or whether anyone had been arrested, other than to say two people involved in the second-hand book and magazine business involved were being questioned. The purchaser, identified as a retiree named Zhang, is an avid fan of military history.

China's opaque state security bodies and the Communist Party-controlled legal system often make it difficult to tell what is considered a state secret. Chinese and foreign consultancies operating in China are under probe by state security bodies for possessing information about the economy that in other countries would be considered part of the public record.

China's military has grown massively, and it now boasts the world's largest Navy, an Air Force with cutting-edge stealth fighters and a huge missile force that appears intended to back the country's claims to the self-governing island of Taiwan. — AP



Protesters demonstrate against US former president and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump in Washington, DC, on Wednesday. — AFP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	76,810.90	0.27
Nifty 50	23,398.90	0.33
S&P 500*	5,412.98	-0.15
Dollar (₹)	83.55	0.00
Pound Sterling (₹)	106.80	0.21
Euro (₹)	90.24	0.45
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	71,275*695	0.97
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	82.58	-0.02
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.988	-0.025
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.3	0.005

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Suven Pharma to acquire Sapala stake for ₹230 cr

Suven Pharmaceuticals on Thursday said it will acquire 67.5 per cent stake in Hyderabad-based Sapala Organics for ₹229.5 crore. The company has entered into a definitive agreement for investment in Sapala Organics, it said in a regulatory filing. The company stated that it expects to complete the acquisition of the remaining equity stake in the target firm after FY2026-27, subject to the completion of customary closing conditions.



Samsung, Paytm to integrate key features in wallet

Consumer electronics brand Samsung has partnered with Paytm parent One97 Communications Ltd to integrate travel and entertainment services to Samsung Wallet in India. Through the partnership, users of Samsung Galaxy smartphones can access Paytm's suite of services, including flight and bus bookings, movie ticket purchases, and event bookings, through the digital wallet, the company said.

Vodafone Idea to allocate shares to Nokia, Ericsson

Debt-ridden telecom operator Vodafone Idea will allocate shares worth ₹2,458 crore to vendors Nokia India and Ericsson India to clear their partial dues, a regulatory filing said on Thursday. The board of Vodafone Idea Ltd has cleared allotment of shares on preferential basis at about 35 per cent higher price compared to the follow-on offer price of the company, and comes with a lock-in of 6 months.

Kia exports 2.5L cars from unit in Anantapur

Kia, the South Korean automaker, said it has crossed the vehicle export milestone of 2,50,000 units. Since 2019, Kia has shipped 2,55,133 units to over 100 markets across the globe from its Anantapur manufacturing facility. These include South Africa, Chile, Paraguay and Latin America. The Kia Seltos has been the major contributor, accounting for 59 per cent of it's overall overseas dispatches.

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Credit demand from firms on rise: SBI chief

New Delhi, June 13: State Bank of India (SBI) chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara has said there is a growing demand for credit from the corporate sector and loans worth ₹5 lakh crore are in the pipeline. Unlike the past few years, when the corporates had sufficient cash surplus on their balance sheet, they have started looking for credit to fund working capital requirements and capacity expansion, he said.

"Now we have come to a stage where they (corporates) have started approaching banks for augmenting their capacity or for working capital purposes. Of course, this I can say with confidence because when we look at our unavailed term loan percentage, it has come down from 25 per cent to 18 per cent and when we see the working capital utilisation, even that has improved," he said. So, all these are confirming that private sector opportunities are going to be there and SBI will be in a position to create value for the sector, he said.

At the same time, he said, "When we look at our pipeline for the new proposals, that is also quite healthy, somewhere around ₹5 trillion or so".

With regard to retail agriculture and MSME (RAM) lending, Khara said, SBI can grow the book at 16 per cent during this year as well despite the high interest rate.

SBI reported a 16 per cent growth rate in RAM to about ₹21 lakh crore during FY24.



● WITH REGARD to retail agriculture and MSME lending, Dinesh Kumar Khara said, SBI can grow the book at 16 per cent during this year as well despite the high interest rate.

Emphasising that the bank has a very elaborate process of assessing the risk and underwriting RAM, he said that the current book looks pretty good.

"We don't have any challenges, he said, adding, "We can comfortably grow 16 per cent as far as our RAM book is concerned. We don't envisage that the interest rate impact will be seen in terms of the quality of the loan book.

"When we are making assessment for underwriting, we are quite cognizant of the likely interest rate scenario, and the ability of the borrowers to repay loan in time. That is the reason why our RAM book has not witnessed much challenge and we can afford to continue at 16 per cent," he said. Asserting that there is no stress on housing and vehicle loans, Khara said, the gross NPA in the whole retail portfolio is 0.7 per cent.

— PTI

INDIA TO REMAIN ASIA-PACIFIC'S FASTEST GROWING NATION: MOODY'S

New Delhi, June 13: Moody's Ratings on Thursday said India will remain the Asia-Pacific region's fastest-growing economy in 2024, sustaining last year's domestically driven momentum.

In a report titled Credit Conditions Asia-Pacific H2 2024 Credit Outlook, Moody's Ratings said Indonesia, the Philippines and India led the way in terms of growth in first half of 2024 and should continue to outperform pre-Covid growth numbers on the back of rising exports, local demand and government spending on infrastructure.

"India will remain the region's fastest-growing economy, sustaining last year's domestically driven momentum. We anticipate policy continuity after the general election, and a continued focus on infrastructure development and encouragement of private sector investment," the rating agency said.

Moody's said stronger portfolio inflows are likely in India and ASEAN economies, because of robust corporate credit metrics and appealing valuations.

Last month, the rating agency projected India to grow 6.8 per cent in the current year, followed by 6.5 per cent in 2025, on the back of strong, economic expansion along with post-election policy continuity.

— PTI

Mid, small-cap indices grow 10% in a month

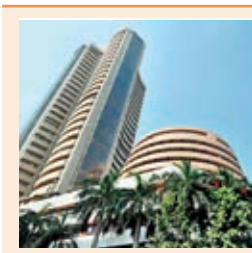
BSE's m-cap rises to new high of over ₹431.67 lakh crore

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JUNE 13

The broader market indices representing mid-cap and small-cap companies in the last one month have outperformed as they have risen over 10 per cent compared to over 5 per cent rise in the benchmarks Sensex and Nifty-50.

The BSE mid-cap index hit an all time high of 45,576.53 and closed 0.79 per cent up at 45,521.86. BSE mid-cap index is up 10.55 per cent in the last one month period and 62.64 per cent in the last one year period.

BSE small-cap index hit an all time high of 50,707.92 and closed 0.89 per cent up at 50,678.94. The BSE small-cap index has gained 11.89 per cent during the last one month period and 58.98 per cent



● OUTPERFORMANCE OF midcaps and small caps is supported by robust earnings growth. Consensus anticipates the underlying earnings of midcap and smallcap indices to grow at a CAGR exceeding 20 per cent.

in the last one year period. Meanwhile, on Thursday Sensex made a new high of 77,145.46 while Nifty-50 clocked fresh high of 23,481.05 intra-day but their closing was lower on profit taking.

BSE's market capitalisation rose to a new high of over ₹431.67 lakh crore or \$5.17 trillion.

The Sensex has gained 5.54 per cent during last one month and 21.65 per cent during last one year period. The Nifty-50 gained

5.86 per cent in last one month and 25.02 per cent in last one year period.

"It is important to highlight that the outperformance of midcaps and small caps is supported by robust earnings growth. Consensus anticipates the underlying earnings of midcap and smallcap indices to grow at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) exceeding 20 per cent over the fiscal year 2024 to 2026, surpassing the mid-teens growth

seen in the Nifty 50. The higher valuations of the midcap and smallcap indices reflect this stronger underlying earnings trajectory," said Mythili Balakrishnan, co-fund manager, Alchemy Capital Management.

Foreign portfolio investors were net sellers by ₹3,033 crore while domestic institutions net sold equities worth ₹553.88 crore.

"The key equity indices, the Sensex and the Nifty-50, began trading at all-time highs on Thursday, followed by the good performance of global markets, boosted by a good U.S. inflation report, which raised anticipation of a likely interest rate cut by US Federal reserve," said Neeraj Sharma, technical analyst, Asit C. Mehta Investment.

FMCG is big opportunity: Tata

New Delhi, June 13: India's consumer market represents a long-term structural opportunity, driven by population, a growing middle class, rapid urbanisation, increasing disposable incomes and raising aspirations, said N Chandrasekaran, chairman, Tata Consumer Products on Thursday.

The Tata group's FMCG arm is well positioned to capitalise on the significant opportunity, he said, while addressing the annual general meeting (AGM) of Tata Consumer

Products Ltd (TCPL).

Chandrasekaran, who is also the chairman of Tata Sons, said the India economy has been growing very strongly and the current momentum continues to be high.

India is likely to maintain similar growth momentum in the coming years, he said, adding that the global economic landscape has been rather volatile with the geopolitics reshaping supply chains, energy security, and overall resilience. The baseline forecast for

● INDIA'S CONSUMER market represents a long-term structural opportunity, and it is driven by a young population, a growing middle class, rapid urbanisation, increasing disposable incomes.

the world economy is to continue to grow over 3 per cent during FY25.

However, "India has been growing very strongly with the economic

growth rate of 8.2 per cent for the fiscal 2023-2024. Looking at the future, the momentum continues to be high and India should maintain similar growth momentum in the coming years," he said.

Notably, India's consumer market represents a "long-term structural" opportunity, and it is driven by a young population, a growing middle class, rapid urbanisation, increasing disposable incomes, and raising aspirations," Chandrasekaran said.

— PTI

Paint sector set to double capacity

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 13

With around ₹19,000 crore investments lined up, the production capacity of the organised paints sector is set to nearly double to 7.8 billion litre per annum (blpa) by 2027, according to Crisil.

A large part of the new capacity, around 2.4 blpa will be operational this fiscal, with the new player alone adding 1.3 blpa, primarily in the decorative

segment, which accounts for 75-80 per cent of the total production, as per Crisil.

While volume will continue to rise at a healthy pace of 10-15 per cent annually in line with past trends, sizable capacities coming on-stream will lead to increased competition for market share.

Manufacturers could price products aggressively to draw customers and

● A LARGE part of the new capacity, around 2.4 blpa will be operational this fiscal, with the new player alone adding 1.3 blpa, primarily in the decorative segment.

utilise their expanded capacities, especially in the value segment, which accounts for over half of the total revenue.

"The volume growth of

10-15 per cent this fiscal will be driven by steady demand from retail and business-to-business segments - catering to construction, real estate, and automobiles. Rising disposable incomes, increasing consumer preference for quality and branded products, rising home sales, and an expected recovery in rural demand will be supportive," said Poonam Upadhyay, director, Crisil Ratings.

Surrender value of policies to go up

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, JUNE 13

From October, life insurance policies will get a surrender value even if they are surrendered after first policy year. Until now, policyholders got the surrender value only if two full years' premiums have been paid.

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) in its recent master circular on life insurance products has also reduced surrender charges on traditional savings plans.

According to analysts of Emkay, insurers can offset the impact of higher payouts to the surrendering policyholders in non-par saving products by slightly



reducing the guaranteed rate, moving to a trail-based commission or adding clause of first-year commission claw back in case of early surrenders besides taking some hit on their margins.

Shrikant Chouhan, head Equity Research at Kotak Securities said, "Based on our preliminary calculations, surrender income (for life insurers) could

decrease by approximately 55-70 per cent. Insurance companies might offset this by adjusting distributor terms or making changes to internal rate of return calculations."

The Irdai has clarified that life insurers can offer a higher guaranteed surrender value (GSV) than those mandated. This value will vary on the premium size, policy term, paying term and other factors.

Life insurers are expected to deliver value for money for both continuing and surrendering policyholders, said Alok Rungeta, managing director and chief executive officer, Future Generali India Life Insurance Company Ltd.

Nirmala to chair 53rd GST Council meeting

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JUNE 13

The 53rd meeting of the goods and services tax (GST) Council, to be chaired by union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, will be held on June 22.

The GST Council is likely to review several key pending issues, including the taxation of the online gaming sector and rate rationalisation among others. The last meeting of the Council was held on October last year. The agenda for the 53rd meeting is yet to be circulated amongst the Council

members. This would be the first Council meeting after Lok Sabha elections.

As per the sources, the GST Council is likely to review the decision to levy 28 per cent GST on full value of bets for online gaming companies, which came into effect from October 1, 2023.

Earlier, in its meetings in July and August, the GST Council had approved amendments to the law to include online gaming, casinos and horse racing as taxable actionable claims, and clarified that such supplies would attract 28 per cent tax on full bet value.

Mumbai, Delhi see housing prices rise

New Delhi, June 13: Mumbai is ranked third and Delhi fifth among top 44 cities globally in terms of appreciation of housing prices during Jan-March 2024 period, according to Knight Frank.

Mumbai ranked 6th and Delhi 17th in the same period last year. Manila is at first position with a 26.2 per cent annual growth in

prices, followed by Tokyo at 12.5 per cent.

In its report 'Prime Global Cities Index Q1 2024', real estate consultant Knight Frank said that Mumbai recorded an 11.5 per cent year-on-year (YoY) growth in prime residential prices in Jan-March 2024. Delhi rose with a growth of 10.5 per cent YoY.

— PTI



WAREHOUSE SPACE SUPPLY TO HIT 300MN SQFT

New Delhi, June 13: Total availability of premium warehousing space is expected to rise nearly 40 per cent to 300 million (3,000 lakh) sq ft by the end of 2025, according to the Credai and CRE-Matrix report.

Realtors' body CREDAI and data firm CRE-Matrix released a report on warehousing space, which has emerged as one of the key segments in the Indian real estate sector. "Currently, overall grade A (premium) warehousing stock stands at 216.2 mn sq ft," it said.

Third party logistics, manufacturing and e-commerce players are major demand drivers, the report noted.

Credai president Boman Irani said the Indian real estate sector's strong fundamentals mirror India's economic growth, as evidenced by the exponential rise of specialised segments like warehousing.

"With e-commerce, retail expansion, and global companies entering India, we foresee a robust demand and supply growth for grade A warehouses. Pune, Delhi-NCR, and Mumbai Metropolitan Region lead this transformation, with India's favourable policies, competitive manufacturing costs, and ample labour, making it as a prime investment destination," Irani said.

CRE Matrix and IndexTap CEO and co-founder Abhishek Kiran Gupta said India's warehousing stock is 1/5th of China and this booming Indian middle class needs more storage space than ever before.

He said around 85 mn sq ft of warehousing space is expected to be completed in the next 7 quarters, taking the total warehousing stocks to 300 mn sq ft grade A stock milestone by 2025-end.

— PTI

DIGITAL | HELP

Firms this week unveiled plans to integrate ChatGPT into iPhone, iPad, Mac

OpenAI gains access to Apple's network

Cupertino (US), June 13: When Apple chief executive officer Tim Cook and his top deputies this week unveiled an arrangement with OpenAI to integrate ChatGPT into the iPhone, iPad and Mac, they were mum on financial terms.

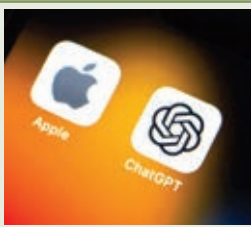
The left unanswered during the announcement that which company is paying the other as part of a tight collaboration that has potentially lasting monetary benefits for both.

But, according to people briefed on the matter, the partnership isn't expected to generate meaningful revenue for

either party - at least at the outset.

The arrangement includes weaving ChatGPT, a digital assistant that responds in plain terms to information requests, into Apple's Siri and new writing tools. Apple isn't paying OpenAI as part of the partnership, said the people, who asked not to be identified because the deal terms are private.

Instead, Apple believes pushing OpenAI's brand and technology to hundreds of millions of its devices is of equal or greater value than monetary payments, these people



● THE IPHONE maker aims to make money from AI by striking revenue-sharing agreements whereby it gets a cut from AI partners that monetize chatbots on Apple platforms.

ple said.

Under the current structure, the partnership could become costly for OpenAI, which needs to pay Microsoft to host ChatGPT on that company's Azure cloud-computing systems. The more people use ChatGPT, the

more OpenAI's expenses rise.

ChatGPT will be offered for free on Apple's products, but OpenAI and Apple could still make money by converting free users to paid accounts. Today, if a user subscribes to OpenAI on an Apple

device via the ChatGPT app, the process uses Apple's payment platform, which traditionally gives the iPhone maker a cut.

Apple's deal with OpenAI isn't exclusive, and the iPhone maker is already discussing offering Google's Gemini chatbot as an additional option.

Eventually, the iPhone maker aims to make money from AI by striking revenue-sharing agreements whereby it gets a cut from AI partners that monetize chatbots on Apple platforms, according to the people.

— Bloomberg





SHORT SINGLES

B'desh close in on Super 8 berth

Shakib Al Hasan regained form with a sublime half-century before leg-spinner Rishad Hossain struck twice at a crucial juncture as Bangladesh inched closer to Super 8s with a 25-run win over Netherlands in the T20 World Cup match at Kingstown, St Vincent, on Thursday. Set a target of 160, the Netherlands ended at 134 for eight in their allotted 20 overs at the picturesque Arnos Vale Ground, which was hosting an international for the first time in 10 overs.

The result meant Sri Lanka were knocked out of the tournament.

Shakib roared back to form with a 46-ball 64 as Bangladesh posted a competitive 159 for five after being asked to bat. Besides Shakib, Tanzid Hasan struck 35 off 26 balls and Mahmudullah chipped in with 25 off 21.

In their chase, Netherlands lost two wickets with just 32 runs on the board, and most importantly, with the powerplay about to end.

**Brief scores:** Bangladesh 159/5 in 20 overs (Shakib Al Hasan 64 not out; Paul Van Meekren 2/15, Aryan Dutty 2/17) lost to Netherlands 134/8 in 20 overs (Sybrand Engelbrecht 33, Vikramjit Singh 26; Rishad Hossain 3/33).

Felt like playing in Ranji game: Dube

Accustomed to batting on bel- ters in India, big-hitting all-rounder Shivam Dube conceded that the two-paced tracks for the T20 World Cup matches here left him bamboozled to such an extent that it almost felt like playing a Ranji Trophy game. The Chennai Super Kings star regained some form with a 35-ball 31 in the seven-wicket win over USA that propelled India into the event's Super Eight stage on Wednesday.

"I was struggling with my form and focusing on my process," Dube said about his successive failures against Ireland and Pakistan at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in New York.

"But here, there was no pressure. All the support staff and coaches backed me and told me, 'It's difficult, but you have the ability to hit sixes, so apply it.'

"I've never doubted myself for what I've done in the past. I just think that these conditions do not demand what I've done at CSK. These conditions require a different approach, so I was batting differently today," he added.

Nassau Stadium set for demolition

The makeshift Nassau County cricket ground, which was built specifically for the T20 World Cup, is all set to be demolished after the New York leg of the event came to an end with India's seven-wicket victory over co-hosts USA in New York. Built in just over 100 days, the stadium became notorious for its challenging drop-in pitches, which were sourced from Adelaide. The massive structure sat on the edge of the 930-acre Eisenhower Park in Long Island, New York.

The stadium had 10 drop-in pitches, four for the main ground and six for the adjacent training facility in Cantigue Park.

"After the last match is held at East Meadow on June 12, the stadium will be dismantled, the parts shipped back to Las Vegas and another golf event, and Eisenhower Park will return to normal, but with a world-class cricket pitch left behind," a *New York Times* report had stated a few days ago.

The stadium that "almost popped up overnight" will be dismantled over a period of six weeks.

# RUTHLESSFORD

## Rampaging Sherfane powers West Indies into Super 8



Sherfane Rutherford of West Indies celebrates after scoring half-century against New Zealand during their T20 World Cup match at the Brian Lara Cricket Academy in Tarouba, Trinidad and Tobago, on Wednesday. West Indies won by 13 runs.

— AP

SCOREBOARD

**West Indies:** Brandon King c Conway b Neesham 9, Johnson Charles b Boult 0, Nicholas Pooran c Conway b Southee 17, Roston Chase c Ravindra b Ferguson 0, Rovman Powell c Conway b Southee 1, Sherfane Rutherford not out 68, Akeal Hosein c Neesham b Santner 15, Andre Russell c Ferguson b Boult 14, Romario Shepherd lbw Ferguson 13, Alzarri Joseph b Boult 6, Gudakesh Motie not out 0. Extras (lb-3, w-3) 6. **Total (For 9 wickets in 20 overs) 149.**

**Fall of wickets:** 1-1, 2-20, 3-21, 4-22, 5-30, 6-58, 7-76, 8-103, 9-112.

**Bowling:** Trent Boult 4-1-16-3, Tim Southee 4-0-21-2, Lockie Ferguson 4-0-27-2, James Neesham 4-0-27-1, Glenn Phillips 1-0-9-0, Mitchell Santner 2-0-27-1, Daryl Mitchell 1-0-19-0.

**New Zealand:** Devon Conway c Chase b Hosein 5, Finn Allen c Russell b Joseph 26, Rachin Ravindra c Russell b Motie 10, Kane Williamson c Pooran b Motie 1, Daryl Mitchell b Motie 12, Glenn Phillips c Powell b Joseph 40, James Neesham c King b Joseph 10, Mitchell Santner not out 21, Tim Southee c&b Joseph 0, Trent Boult c Chase b Russell 7, Lockie Ferguson not out 0. Extras (lb-1, w-3) 4. **Total (For 9 wickets in 20 overs) 136.**

**Fall of wickets:** 1-20, 2-34, 3-39, 4-54, 5-63 6-85, 7-108, 8-108, 9-117.

**Bowling:** Akeal Hosein 4-0-21-1, Romario Shepherd 3-0-36-0, Andre Russell 4-0-30-1, Alzarri Joseph 4-0-19-4, Gudakesh Motie 4-0-25-3, Roston Chase 1-0-4-0.

## Pacer Arshdeep comes of age

MOSES KONDETY  
NEW YORK, JUNE 13

From dropping dummies in previous World Cup games to pulling off stunners at crucial junctures in the current, like in the match against Pakistan, to turning in terrific spells, Arshdeep Singh has come a long way.

On Wednesday, the left-arm pacer set up India's victory over USA to take them to the next stage of the tournament.

His 4 for 9 in four overs was a jaw-dropper and added teeth to the Indian attack. The 25-year-old is keeping his feet on the ground though.

"It feels really good when you perform for the team and you get the right result as well. The emotions stay the same irre-

spective of the result," he said after the match.

"The main thing is to adapt to the conditions and situations whether we are batting or bowling first. If there is help on the wicket, we try to get early wickets and restrict them to a low total and if we are batting first, we try to make as many as possible and give the bowlers a good enough chance to restrict the opposition," he explained.

Asked if he was making a conscious effort to improve his batting, given his performance with the willow in the Pakistan game, Arshdeep said: "We are always learning, always trying to get better at all the skills, be it bowling, batting, or fielding, because you never know when the team need those



runs. It can be two runs, four runs, anything. So, you just have to give your best. And I am trying to work as hard as possible

with Vikram (batting coach Rathour) bhai regarding my batting as well. In the last game, Jassi (Jasprit Bumrah) bhai was supposed to go before me, but I just went in after asking (captain) Rohit. I told them I will go up (the order) regardless of whatever you say," he said.

Having qualified for the Super Eight, Arshdeep said the team was not looking too far ahead.

"I remember a quote Vikram Rathour (batting coach) told us in the team meeting 'stay where your feet are.' So right now, we are just enjoying the win here and we'll fly to Florida and focus on the next game. So, whatever happens right now, we stay in the present and prepare for that," he said.

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
WEST INDIES	3	3	0	0	6	+2.569
AFGHANISTAN	2	2	0	0	4	+5.225
UGANDA	3	1	2	0	2	-4.217
PNG	2	0	2	0	0	-0.434
NEW ZEALAND	2	0	2	0	0	-2.425

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

## Afghanistan eye Super Eight spot

**Tarouba (Trinidad), June 13:** Afghanistan will eye another all-round effort to crush an inexperienced Papua New Guinea here and enter the Super Eights of the T20 World Cup, and the result will have another underlying effect — knock out New Zealand.

The win will carry Rashid Khan's side to Super Eight from Group 'C' alongside the West Indies, who have qualified on Thursday with a win over New Zealand.

It will also mean curtains for the 2021 finalists New Zealand who have lost two out of two.

That Rahamanullah Gurbaz (156 runs) and Fazalhaq Farooqi (9 wickets) are currently leading the chart of run-makers and wicket-takers respectively is a just reflection of their fine run in this ICC showpiece.

The PNG might be a spirited side, but it looks way beyond their abilities

to overcome a formidable Afghanistan.

**PAK WORRY OVER USA-IRELAND CLASH**

In a strange scenario, a non-playing Pakistan will be more keen on the result of USA and Ireland Group 'A' match at Lauderdale, Florida on Friday.

A win for USA, currently second in this group with four points, will put an end to the World Cup campaign of Pakistan, who have two points from three matches.

Of course, it will also take the co-hosts into the Super Eight from this group along with India.

Ireland are a competitive side with experienced players in their ranks, but they look woefully out of sync here and the task might be heavier against the US, who are playing some very good T20 cricket at the moment.

— PTI



The win over PNG will carry Rashid Khan's side to Super 8 from Group 'C'.

— AP

FINAL OLYMPIC | QUALIFIER

## India archers eager to grab team quotas

**Antalya (Turkey), June 13:** The Indian archers will be eager to excel and grab men's and women's team quotas in the four-day final Olympic qualifier beginning here on Friday.

India have so far booked a men's individual berth through Dhiraj Bommadevara.

The men's team will have Bommadevara, Pravin Jadhav and veteran Tarundeep Rai who is aiming a fourth Olympics, having made his debut in Athens 2004.

All eyes in the women's section will be on former world No. 1 Deepika Kumari who had a two-week training session

under legendary South Korean coach Kim Hyung-Tak ahead of this event.

Making a comeback after becoming mother in December 2022, Deepika won a World Cup silver in Shanghai in April this year.

She will be joined by Bhajan Kaur and Ankita Bhakat in the women's team.

The last qualifier will give archers another opportunity to upgrade into team quotas in men's and women's events so that six archers can vie for the elusive Olympic medal at Paris Games in less than two months' time.

— PTI

## SHRUTI BECOMES 1ST INDIAN TO WIN 3-STAR GP EVENT

**New Delhi, June 13:** Veteran Shruti Vora has become the first Indian rider to win a three-star Grand Prix event, the Equestrian Federation of India announced on Thursday.

Shruti scored 67.761 points in the CDI-3 event held in Lipica, Slovenia, from June 7 to 9. The Indian finished ahead of Moldova's Tatiana Antonenco (Aachen), who scored 66.522. Austria's Juliane Jerich (Quarter Girl) completed the top-3 with a score of 66.087. "I am extremely delighted with the result," Shruti said.

— PTI

## Prannoy & Sameer enter Australian Open quarters

**Sydney, June 13:** Indian shuttlers H. S. Prannoy and Sameer Verma progressed to the men's singles quarterfinals of the Australian Open with contrasting victories over their respective opponents here on Thursday. While fifth seed Prannoy, a former world No.1, took just 46 minutes to get the better of Misha Zilberman of Israel 21-17, 21-15 in the round of 16, Verma had to toil hard for one hour two minutes to upset eighth seed Loh Kean Yew of Singapore 21-14, 14-21, 21-19.

Prannoy will be up

against second seed Kodai Naroaka of Japan in the next round, while Verma will take on Chinese Taipei's Chun-Yi Lin on Friday.

However, it was curtains for Kiran George in the men's singles event as he lost 20-22, 6-21 against seventh seed Kenta Nishimoto of Japan.

Among the Indian women shuttlers, eight seed Aakarshi Kashyap beat Australia's Kai Qi Bernice Teoh 21-16, 21-13 to progress to the quarterfinals, where she will be playing third seed Yu Po Pai of Chinese Taipei.

But the tournament ended for Anupama Upadhyaya and Malvika Bansod in the women's singles second round.

While Anupama lost 11-21, 18-21 against sixth seed Putri Kusuma Wardani of Indonesia, Malvika was shown the door by another Indonesian, eight seed Ester Nurumi Tri Wardoyo 17-21, 21-23.

The mixed doubles pair of B. Sumesh Reddy and N Sikki Reddy, however, continued to march ahead as the Indian duo defeated Australia's Kai Chen Teoh and Kai Qi Bernice Teoh 21-11, 21-11.

— PTI

## AITA CONFIRMS BOPANNA WILL PAIR WITH BALAJI AT OLYMPICS

**New Delhi, June 13:** The All India Tennis Association (AITA) on Thursday confirmed that Rohan Bopanna will pair with N. Sriram Balaji in the men's doubles event at the Paris Olympics. The 44-year-old Bopanna has picked Balaji as his partner for the Games as the veteran Indian aims to take his final shot at an Olympic medal.

"The All India Tennis Association is thrilled to announce that Rohan Bopanna and N. Sriram Balaji have qualified for the Paris Olympics 2024 in the tennis doubles event. Their journey to the Olympics marks a significant milestone for Indian tennis," AITA said in a press release.

The decision was made at the selection committee meeting, chaired by former Davis Cup Captain Nandan Bal.

— PTI



'What a wonderful start to my journey!'

16 >>



# delhi THE AGE

FRIDAY | 14 JUNE 2024

## SCREW LOOSE FANS

The murder case involving Kannada star Darshan Thoogudeepa is a classic example of an over-enthusiastic fan wading into the personal life of the actor, who in turn behaves like an angry hero of sorts and ends up getting the fan mercilessly killed by another hardcore fan

VIKRAM SHARMA

Back in December 1980, when The Beatles frontman John Lennon was shot dead by a deranged fan in New York, it shook the world. It was the most telling example of just how fans can go to extremes. Over the years, star-struck fans going berserk in support of their celebrities have been a constant across the globe. Back home in India, where celebrities are literally worshipped by fans, fan frenzy has been a regular affair, albeit in different ways. Sometimes, it's an obsessed fan who wades into the private lives of celebs, judging and making comments about them, or a group of "hurt" fans who resort to violence to teach anyone a lesson who makes a "negative" comment against their idol. But the recent murder case involving Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa touches a new low when it comes to star worship, wherein one fan gets inside his personal space while the other fan mercilessly kills him upon receiving instructions from the actor himself.

### ABNORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES

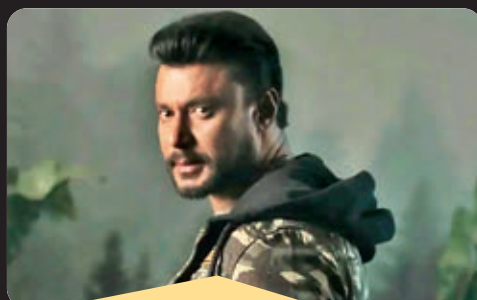
Actor **Harshvardhan Rane** expressed concern about these extreme situations to the *Hyderabad Chronicle*. "Even John Lennon's killer gave many reasons, which I do not want to discuss as I feel it's not normal. Such abnormal circumstances are not very rare. Unfortunately, they do happen a lot," he says, referring to the recent Darshan case. Harshvardhan says one can't blame a certain fan or a certain star for creating this mania because it's a medium where one tends to basically confuse fandom, confuse love with hurt, and maybe confuse admiration with obsession. "It's a two-edged sword, and if you've seen a film about a fan of a writer who captures the writer and demands a certain kind of ending to a story, that's also, you know, a situation," he points out. So, it is two different emotions getting mixed up, and a healthy way to avoid this would be to maintain healthy communication and distance, he feels.

TURN TO PAGE 13



**"A STAR USING ONE DIE-HARD FAN TO KILL ANOTHER DIE-HARD FAN WHO WAS INTERFERING IN HIS PERSONAL LIFE IS A FIT EXAMPLE OF THE BIZARRENESS OF THE STAR WORSHIP SYNDROME."**

— RAM GOPAL VARMA, filmmaker



### DARSHAN'S ARREST

Darshan, known to his fans as "Challenging Star," was arrested at his Musiri farmhouse on Tuesday. His co-star and girlfriend, Pavithra Gowda, and 11 of his aides were also arrested for the murder of Renuka Swamy, a fan of Darshan. He made lewd comments against Pavithra, who reportedly instigated Darshan to "punish" him. Darshan hired Raghavendra, the convenor of his fan club. Darshan thrashed Renuka with a belt while his aides beat him with sticks until he fell unconscious. He was slammed against the wall and suffered multiple fractures, leading to his death. Tracing the identity of the body using CCTV cameras and forensic analysis led the police to three men who allegedly kept Renuka captive in a shed. One of them turned out to be Raghavendra, who eventually spilled the beans, leading to the actor's arrest.



**Jan 2024:** A police officer was severely injured at the pre-release event of actor Mahesh Babu's film *Guntur Kaaram* after a large number of fans gathered at the Namburu crossroads in Guntur, resulting in a stampede-like situation.



The 38-year-old rapper Badshah recently said during an episode of *The Great India Kapil Show* that he was requested to take a selfie by a fan while he was urinating.



**Jan 2008:** Megastar Chiranjeevi's fans attacked the car of actor Rajasekhar and his family with stones and iron rods. Rajasekhar suffered minor injuries, while his elder daughter Shivani injured her neck. The fans were incensed by Rajasekhar's remark that Chiranjeevi had no experience in politics.

### FAN WOES



**Jan 2020:** Actor Rajnikanth's fans went on a rampage after his movie *Darbar* was not screened in 11 theatres in Tamil Nadu's Dindigul.

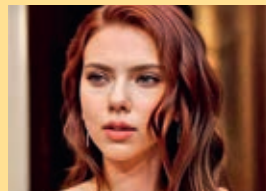


**Jan 2023:** Actor Balakrishna's fans created a ruckus inside a movie theatre in the US during the screening of his movie *Veera Simha Reddy*.



**Sept 2023:** Shah Rukh Khan fans tore down posters of Salman Khan-starrer *Tiger 3* in a theatre in Thane, Maharashtra. Soon a fight erupted between both fan groups, the video of which went viral.

**June 2024:** Cops detained a Delhi-based woman outside Salman Khan's farmhouse. The 24-year-old die-hard fan of Salman wanted to marry him.



**April 2024:** Actress Scarlett Johnson alleged that an obsessed fan had been harassing her for almost one year and sought protection from him.



## 'I WAS SLEEPING WHEN FIRING HAPPENED, WOKE UP TO GUNSHOT'

Mumbai Police record Salman's statement in the shocking incident outside his residence in April



Mumbai Police has recorded statements of Bollywood star Salman Khan and his actor brother Arbaaz Khan in connection with the incident of firing outside the family's residence here in April, an official said on Wednesday.

A four-member crime branch team went to Galaxy Apartments in Bandra and recorded a nearly four-hour statement, while his brother's statement lasted more than two hours, according to the official.

While recording their statements, the crime branch officials asked Salman and Arbaaz around 150 questions. In his statement, Salman told police that he was home on the day of the incident, having returned late at night. The sound of a bullet that hit his flat's balcony woke him up, the official said, citing the statement. Arbaaz was at his Juhu residence at the time, but his statement too was recorded as he was aware of the history of threats issued by the Lawrence Bishnoi gang to Salman, the official said. Two motorbike-borne men fired multiple rounds outside Salman Khan's residence in the early hours of April 14.

— PTI

## Stars need to do a reality check on remuneration: KJO



...AS B'WOOD REELS UNDER CRUSHING OVERHEADS

>> ON PG 13



AJULI TULSYAN

THE ASIAN AGE

 In our quest to understand the transformative impact of community blood donation, we've conversed with individuals who are actively engaged in this noble cause, embodying the spirit of compassion and collective action.

## CALL TO ACTION

Sonu Sood, actor, humanitarian, and philanthropist says, "I feel it's very important to raise awareness about blood donation. It's a reminder to your soul that, with a small gesture, you can save a life. You never know when someone is struggling to get that particular blood group, and a donation you made could have saved them and their entire family."

The actor believes that you don't need to be rich, famous, successful, or influential to help others. "Blood donation is something that doesn't require any of that. It's important to raise that awareness. As children, we should be taught in schools that, when we grow up, it should become a part of our lives to donate blood," he says adding, "It's important to even motivate your family members and your children to do it. I'm glad that I have been a part of this drive many times, and I will continue to do so."

## THE GIFT OF LIFE

Asif Hussain Sohail, founder, Sakina Foundation, "Over the past 14 years, every drop of blood donated has been a gift of life," says Asif.

Through their collective efforts, the foundation have saved over 15,000 lives. "Thalassemia and cancer patients are a priority for us, as blood is critical for their treatment. Patients from Gandhi, Osmania, and Niloufer hospitals contact us regularly for their needs, as they cannot afford to pay for blood services. "This year alone, we successfully collected 5,000 units of blood. Across Telangana, India, we have organised over 100 camps,

# A blood connection

World Blood Donor Day (WBDD) is celebrated on June 14 every year to honour and thank those who donate their blood voluntarily, giving the most precious gift of life



Top left: Dr Suresh Kumar Saini; Top right: Asif Hussain Sohail  
Bottom left: Josephine Michaluk

**MANY INDIVIDUALS, SUCH AS THE GUARDIANS OF THALASSEMIA CHILDREN OR CANCER PATIENTS IN CONSTANT NEED OF BLOOD, STRUGGLE TO ACCESS DONORS."**



**DR ADITI KISHORE, gynaecologist and obstetrician, founder of Aarohi Blood Bank**

found gift, seen in the joy of a mother whose child receives blood or in the vitality of someone saved after an accident. "Donors also benefit, receiving a health check-up and assurance of their well-being. Research highlights its role in reducing excess iron and mitigating risks like blood clots or strokes.

Voluntary donation ensures blood banks are well-stocked, addressing the annual deficit of 3 lakh units," says Dr Aditi, whose centre prioritises thalassemia children, underscoring its commitment to the community. "Many individuals, such as the guardians of tha-

**"YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN SOMEONE IS STRUGGLING TO GET THAT PARTICULAR BLOOD GROUP, AND A DONATION YOU MADE COULD HAVE SAVED THEM AND THEIR ENTIRE FAMILY."**

— SONU SOOD, actor, humanitarian, and philanthropist

## Did you know?

### NEARLY SIX DECADES OF LIFESAVING

● According to the Guinness World Records official website, Josephine Michaluk has donated 203 units of blood throughout her life, saving the lives of countless people. She has been donating blood regularly for nearly six decades, beginning in 1965 at the age of 22. Josephine gives up one unit of her blood every time she donates.

● According to the American Red Cross, 37% of the USA's population is Type O+.

### A LEADING DONOR

Dr Suresh Kumar Saini, a prominent blood donor from Indri, Distt. Karnal (Haryana), India, has been included in the India Edition of the World Book of Records for being the highest blood donor in the Armed Forces of India, having donated blood 130 times and platelets 93 times, totaling 223 donations.

thalassemia children or cancer patients in constant need of blood, struggle to access donors," she adds.

### EVERY DROP COUNTS



Jatindar Singh

Jatindar Singh, a marine engineer, donates every six months, primarily in Hyderabad. Despite frequent travel, he prioritises local donations due to work commitments. During vacations, he contributes to the Red Cross and various NGOs. He urges others to donate, emphasising the impact on saving lives and supporting communities. "Every healthy individual should consider donating," he says.



## RESHMI AR

Fida Husain explores MF Husain's legacy on Indian art, his own journey, and his upcoming book detailing the iconic artist's final years.

## AN ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF ART

"Living with MF Husain was like having an encyclopaedia of art at home. One cherished memory is when he would ask me to put up a 13-ft canvas on the wall, and he would start painting while blasting Madhuri tunes and dancing around in his chair," says Fida.

## FIDA HUSAIN TO PEN UNCLE MF'S DAYS IN EXILE

MF Husain's nephew shares intimate memories and insights about his uncle's life and work

## THE LEGACY GOES ON

His legacy lives on through shows and prints. "I have many of his works, including the Horses and Mother Teresa series. In Dubai, he was inspired by the Palestinian insurgency, with one piece auctioned high by the Ruler of Qatar," he says.

## BOOK ON MF HUSAIN'S LAST YEARS

"The book covers his exile years and shares lesser-known aspects from the last six years with me," says Fida. Influenced by his art in Dubai, Fida adds, "I draw Cubist-style pieces as a hobby."

## PRESERVING MF'S LEGACY

"I create digital prints, serigraphs, carpets, and curtains

that engage with common people," he says. "I learned from his interactions, humour, and zest for life. He painted till his last moments. I have many projects to keep his legacy alive."

## MF HUSAIN'S SENSE OF HUMOUR

Flying to London, he wore two socks on one foot and searched for the other. When his driver pointed it out, he laughed and clapped.

## HUSAIN'S EXPERIENCES IN EXILE INFLUENCE HIS ART

"His art during exile resonated with Arabs and flourished among investors. It helped promote Indian diversity and gained worldwide praise."



**"ONE CHERISHED MEMORY IS WHEN HE WOULD ASK ME TO PUT UP A 13-FT CANVAS ON THE WALL, AND HE WOULD START PAINTING WHILE BLASTING MADHURI TUNES AND DANCING AROUND IN HIS CHAIR." — FIDA HUSAIN**



# ALIA TURNS AUTHOR

The stellar actress' debutant book's protagonist is named after her dearest feline



Alia is set to launch her first book

Alia Bhatt turns a new leaf, the actor will launch her first picture book for children, titled *Ed Finds A Home* on June 16.

The actor took to her social media to announce the same, which shows her along with an animated character of a girl and a dog.

Alia is a strong advocate for environment as well as has been vocal for conservation of wildlife and cruelty against animals.

*Ed finds a Home* is part of a series to inspire love for nature and animals amongst the new generation, and will be launched soon.

*Ed* is inspired by Alia's cat Edward, and has been part of the actor's many enterprises. The actor launched her children's apparel *Ed-a-Mamma*, in 2020.



# BRIDGERTON CAST ADVISES ON LOVE

The stars of Netflix's Regency-era drama rife with romance and heartbreak, offered some dating and relationship advice for fans

Nicola Coughlan and Luke Newton, who play Penelope Featherington and Colin Bridgerton, dominate the third season's storyline with their friends-to-lovers story arc. At Wednesday's London premiere for the second part of season 3, which hits Netflix on Thursday, the pair joked about how fans often suspect that they are dating in real life because of their on-screen chemistry.

"We can't do anything," Coughlan quipped after noting that it's often a "reflex" for her to interact with Newton in a friendly manner because they've known each other and worked together for many years. Newton said that the speculation points to fans' investment in their characters' relationship. "It's really sweet, it's so lovely that there's that much thought into it and how much they ship Colin and Pen," he said. "It's a beautiful thing."

With their character's dreamy relationship attracting so much attention, Coughlan offered some advice to viewers looking for their storybook romance. "Don't compromise yourself," she said. "Wait for the right person because you're worth it."

Newton said he "agreed with all of the above." Here's the advice the rest of the cast shared for the romantics watching *Bridgerton*:

Simone Ashley, who plays Kate Bridgerton and was at the heart of the second season's storyline, said watching the show makes viewers "want to fall in love."

Ashley added, "The same feeling that the show brings — pass that on to someone else. Make someone else feel as amazing as the show makes you feel."

Golda Rosheuvel, who plays Queen Charlotte, said communication is "everything" in a relationship and noted that in this season, communication is vital to keeping Colin and Penelope's relationship alive.

— AP



## OFF THE WEB



## FANTASTIC 'BUJJI'

The highly anticipated film *Kalki 2898 AD* features an astounding creation: 'Bujji,' a life-size futuristic vehicle and the trusted best friend of Prabhas' character. The invention of 'Bujji' was made possible when director Nag Ashwin collaborated with Anand Mahindra. The Mahindra group chairman recently had the opportunity to meet and experience the innovation that was showcased at a special event in Hyderabad and charmed audiences during the 'B&B: Bujji and Bhairava' prelude.



Simone Ashley



*Bridgerton* cast joked about how fans often suspect that Nicola Coughlan and Luke Newton are dating in real life because of their on-screen chemistry; the actors break silence on the conjectures



# A slice of sobo style

With ace designers and international brands setting shop in India's most expensive heritage precinct (Kala Ghoda), here's a peek into the socio-economic and cultural fabric of the country's oldest art district

NEIL PATE

Whether you're going prêt-à-porter shopping in your Loubs or scouting for some uber-cool watering hole in your green mean machine, the crescent-shaped heritage stretch of Kala Ghoda in SoBo (a portmanteau for South Bombay) has become the ultimate 'adda' for India's rich and famous.

Dilapidated British-era buildings that once housed offices, dingy bookstalls, tea stalls, raddi shops, and dusty godowns, have given way to flagship stores of luxury labels and international fashion brands. Several ace designers have their flagship stores in this posh heritage art district – Sabyasachi (Horniman Circle), Anita Dongre (Sassoon Building), Masaba (Khattau Building), Ensemble (Great Western Building), House of Hermes and Christian Louboutin literally rub shoulders here. Many have converted these century-old majestic neoclassical heritage buildings into 25,000 sq. ft to 50,000 sq. ft flagship stores. Buzz is that Parisian luxury store Galeries Lafayette too plans to open its flagship store in SoBo's Fort area.

## MELTING POT

A decade ago, the area was frequented by gamblers, drug peddlers, hookers, and ruffians. Today, the entire area is bursting with pub crawlers, culture vultures, fashionistas, tourists, swashbucklers, hawk-ers, and gawkers. There is a bohemian air in Kala Ghoda. There is a little something for everyone if you are willing to loosen your purse strings! Till three decades ago, Shaina NC's Golden Thimble and Tarun Tahiliani's Ensemble were the two most prominent designer stores in Kala Ghoda.

Today, the coveted Rampart Row is dotted with some of the best designers and fashion houses – Kunal Rawal (Rhythm House), Payal Singhal, – Falguni Shane Peacock (Bhoglal Hargovin-das Building), Pernia's Pop-Up Shop, sartorial siblings Shantanu and Nikhil Mehra to name a few.

Reminiscing the good old days, fashion designer Shaina NC says her fashion boutique store was set up 60 years ago by her mother (Munira Chudasama). "I have a lot of sentimental values attached to Kala Ghoda. It has always been a melting pot for creative souls –



The Anita Dongre store at the heritage Sassoon Building, Kala Ghoda



painters, sculptors, writers, designers," Shaina says. Seeing the area transform into India's high-street retail hub, she adds, "India is changing and the world is taking note of us. There is healthy competition. Inter-national brands and fashion houses are now coming here. This reflects people's aspirations."

## CHANGE IS INEVITABLE

Mehmood Curmally (62), one of the ex-owners of the iconic Rhythm House Music Store that



“WHAT RESONATES WITH ME THE MOST ABOUT THIS LOCALE (KALA GHODA) IS THE FLAWLESS FUSION OF ITS ILLUSTRIOUS HISTORY AND THE PREVAILING SPIRIT OF CONTEMPORARY INGENUITY.”

– ANITA DONGRE, ace fashion designer

shut down in 2016 has seen the paradigm shift. "We could see the area go through a change even before we decided to shut down our store. Kala Ghoda has always been an art and culture district. It is one of the most sought-after addresses in the country," Curmally says.

Today, the first floor of the Rhythm House building with its wrap-around balcony houses top fashion designer Kunal Rawal's elegantly restored flagship store. A few steps around the corner stands the magnificent turquoise Keneseth Eliyahoo Synagogue (aka Blue Synagogue). It was built by Sir Jacob Sassoon around 1884. "It is a majestic building. People are stunned when I tell them that the Jewish synagogue was restored with donations from a Hindu (Jindal) family. The Kala Ghoda Association was created at the turn of the century to help restore the former glory of the area," explains Bharat Gothoskar, a heritage evangelist and founder of Khaki Tours.

## HERITAGE VALUE

On any given day, Kala Ghoda is

buzzing with tourists, shoppers and officer-goers. The heritage buildings have the Victorian Neo-Gothic architectural style, Indo-Saracenic Revival, or Neoclassical styles. Pointing out to old art galleries in the area, Curmally says, "Kala Ghoda has some of the finest art galleries. I only hope they continue to be art galleries in the future too." Jahangir Asgar Jani, an artist working in multi-mediums feels Kala Ghoda is getting completely gentrified like Soho, London. "Earlier, one could see a barefoot MF Hussain walking around. The kurta-pajama and Kolhapuri chappal-wearing gentry are disappearing. Today there

are only high-end fashion houses and luxury stores here. Money always takes over things that are radical," says Jani.

## LABOUR OF LOVE

Many compare the aesthetics and heritage pull of Kala Ghoda and Fort area with London's Soho. Ace fashion designer, Anita Dongre, a



The iconic Rhythm House and Kala Ghoda statue



The Hermes store in a heritage building at Horniman Circle



Shantnu and Nikhil have a store in the heritage Dresswalla House

## KALA GHODA

A statue of King Edward VII (the then Prince of Wales) once stood there. The name Kala Ghoda means Black Horse. It was unveiled in June 1879 by Sir Richard Temple, the then Governor of Bombay.

champion of sustainable fashion, who has her flagship store in the iconic Sassoon Building (built in 1850) says, "The charming architecture and historic buildings create a unique atmosphere that transports you to a bygone era. Kala Ghoda is not merely a static relic of the past. It's a dynamic hub of art that's ever-evolving. What resonates with me the most about this locale is the flawless fusion of its illustrious history and the prevailing spirit of contemporary ingenuity," says Anita. Her designs have been donned by the likes of Frieda Pinto, Priyanka-Chopra-Jonas, Hillary Clinton, and Kate Middleton, Duchess of Cambridge to name a few.

Sharing her journey of restoring the Sassoon Building to its glory, Anita says, "The timber floors, a testament to timeless craftsmanship, have been lovingly maintained. The high ceilings and wooden stairs continue to exude their original charm. A true gem



The bylanes of Kala Ghoda are dotted with restaurants and bars

lies in the stained-glass elements, carefully revived to showcase their intricate beauty. Of special note are the remarkable tiles adorning the second-floor balcony, a stunning relic from 1850 that has been thoughtfully preserved."

## HIGH RENTALS

The rental cost of these big stores in the Fort area is mind boggling. There were reports that ZARA paid a staggering ₹30 crore annual rent for its 50,000 sq.ft. flagship store near Flora Fountain for a five-year lease agreement. "The monthly rents can range between Rs 1 crore to Rs 4 crore depending on the size, location, and lease term," says a senior executive from a leading SoBo real estate agency. The fact that designers and international brands are still here,

## VINTAGE VALUE

• Babasaheb Ambedkar wrote bits of India's Constitution at the corner of the now-closed Wayside Inn

• Rhythm House clientele included Maharani Gayatri Devi of Jaipur, Kishori Amonkar, Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhosle, The Police, Sting, Pandit Ravi Shankar, Zakir Hussain, Ian Anderson, RD Burman, AR Rahman, Anoushka Shankar, Peter Andre, Shammi Kapoor, Jackie Shroff to name a few



“INDIA IS CHANGING AND THE WORLD IS TAKING NOTE OF US. INTERNATIONAL BRANDS AND FASHION HOUSES ARE NOW COMING HERE.”

– SHAINA NC, fashion designer, BJP leader

# Stars need to do a reality check on remuneration: KJO

## AGE CORRESPONDENT

Filmmaker Karan Johar is the latest to voice concern over Bollywood buckling under the weight of exorbitant overheads.

The filmmaker said the rising costs of the entourages of the stars was not the biggest worry for the producers, since they can always be trimmed, but the excessively high fees charged by the stars themselves.

The filmmaker, who also runs a talent agency, said stars need a reality check about the money they demand.

"It's very critical for all the actors to understand exactly how the times are, how the climate of our movies is, how tough and difficult it is to manoeuvre through making a motion picture of any magnitude or size," Johar said. "Every single movie star today has to review what they're asking for, since a lot of them are not really in touch with reality."

It is an established fact that the fees charged by the stars have gone up excessively, and so have the demands of the battery of staff who accompany the actors. With films performing poorly, producers and filmmakers have been voicing the



need for performance-based compensation, as well as back-end deals such as profit-sharing percentages and box office slabs.

At the press conference, when the filmmaker was asked by the media about the Kangana Ranaut slapping incident, he diplomatically responded that he did not condone violence or physical abuse of any kind. (Significantly, Kangana has never missed an opportunity to take a dig at Karan Johar and the film industry.)

# SCREW LOOSE FANS

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

"It cannot reach a point where the lines are blurred and people take such extreme measures. It's really unfortunate in this case," he adds.

## RGV'S TAKE

Interestingly, filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma took to X saying: "A star using one die-hard fan to kill another die-hard fan who was interfering in his personal life is a fit example of the bizarreness of the star worship syndrome. Fans wanting to order how their stars should run their lives is an unavoidable side effect of the same syndrome."

## UNHEALTHY PHENOMENON

Actor Nawab Shah, who has worked in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada films, says the obsession of fans with prioritising the lives and opinions of stars over their own is an unhealthy phenomenon. "It can result in a distorted sense of reality, decreased self-esteem, and a diminished focus on personal growth and achievements," says Shah. Shah blames social media for this dangerous



“ONE CAN'T BLAME A CERTAIN FAN OR A CERTAIN STAR FOR CREATING THIS MANIA BECAUSE IT'S A MEDIUM WHERE ONE TENDS TO CONFUSE FANDOM, CONFUSE LOVE WITH HURT, AND MAYBE CONFUSE ADMIRATION WITH OBSESSION.”

– HARSHVARDHAN RANE, Actor

“IT CAN RESULT IN A DISTORTED SENSE OF REALITY, DECREASED SELF-ESTEEM, AND A DIMINISHED FOCUS ON PERSONAL GROWTH AND ACHIEVEMENTS.”

– NAWAB SHAH, actor

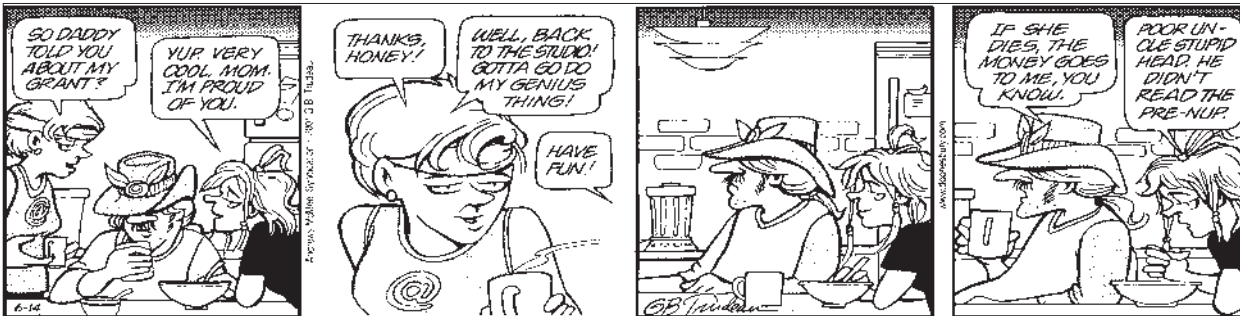
trend. "Social media is killing the minds of this generation," says the actor, remarking that even Alfred Hitchcock could not think of this bizarre plot (referring to Darshan's case).



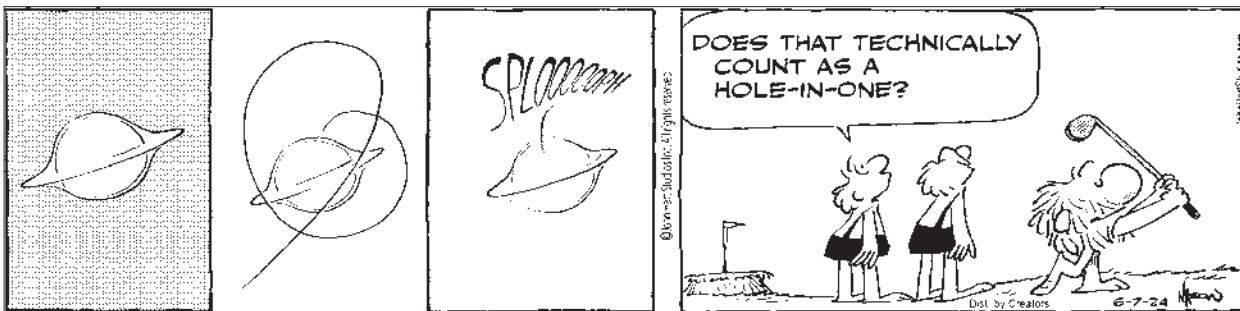
## CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



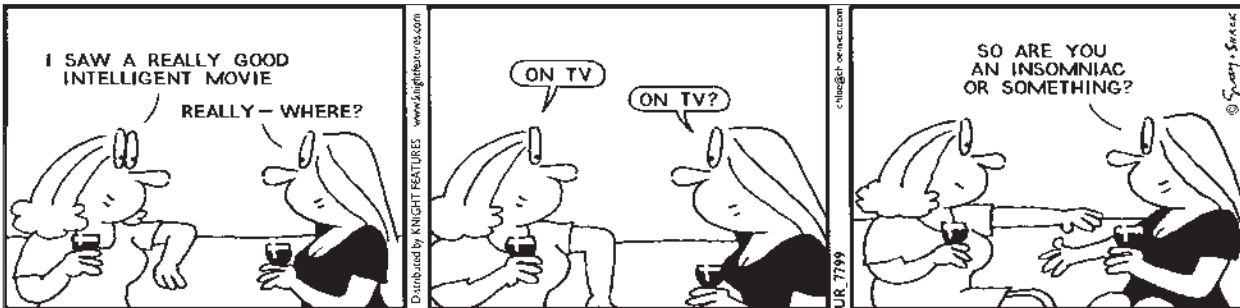
## DOONESBURY | Garry Trudeau



## B.C. | Johnny Hart



## UP AND RUNNING | Gray and Shack



## BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



## ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



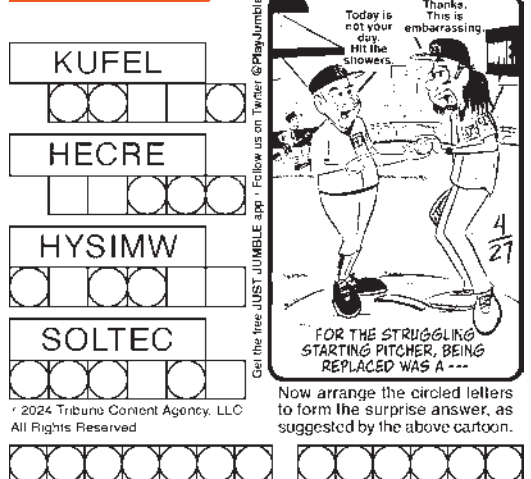
## Dennis the Menace



## hocus focus



## jumble



Yesterday's Jumbles: USURP AROSE COBALT ASSIGN  
Answer: The sod company's approach to marketing and getting new customers was — GRASS ROOTS