

THE ASIAN AGE

LONDON TUESDAY 25 JUNE 2024



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WINDOWS



Jennifer Lopez attends the Dior Haute Couture Fall-Winter 2024-2025 collection presented in Paris on Monday. — AP

Mamata urges PM to abolish Neet, to let states run exam

Kolkata: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to consider abolishing Neet, and reverting to the system of conducting the exam by states in the wake of the paper leak row. In a letter to the PM, Ms Banerjee also called for strong action against those involved in the alleged irregularities in the Neet-UG exam. "I strongly urge upon you to consider and take steps to restore the previous system of conducting this examination by the state governments and abolish the Neet. "This will help restore confidence of the aspirant students in the system," she said. Full report on Page 3

IB director given 1-year extension

New Delhi: Intelligence Bureau (IB) chief Tapan Kumar Deka was on Monday given a one-year extension till June 2025, according to a personnel ministry order. Mr Deka is a 1988-batch IPS officer of the Himachal Pradesh cadre. He has played a crucial role in combating northeast insurgency.

22 dead in South Korea battery plant inferno

Seoul: Twenty-two people were killed in a massive fire at a South Korean lithium battery plant on Monday, in one of the country's worst factory disasters in years. Over 100 people were working in the factory when workers heard a series of explosions. Full report on Page 6

COUNTERPOINT



No, I am not a visitor... I am a first-time MP!



Opp. hits back as PM calls 1975 Emergency 'black spot' on democracy

PM claims 'people's mandate' for 3rd term: 'Consensus vital'

SHASHI BHUSHAN NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said that the "people's mandate" to his government for a third consecutive term signifies acceptance of its intentions and policies. Lashing out at the Congress over the 1975-77 Emergency, Mr Modi called it a "black spot" on democracy when the nation's Constitution was "discarded".



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the media upon his arrival at the Parliament House complex on the first day of the first session of the 18th Lok Sabha in New Delhi on Monday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

AHEAD OF the commencement of the first session of the 18th Lok Sabha, PM Modi said that this formation of Parliament aims to fulfil the aspirations of the ordinary citizens

the 18th Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Modi said that this formation of Parliament aims to fulfil the aspirations of the ordinary citizens of Bharat. "It

is an extremely important opportunity to achieve new momentum and new heights with renewed zeal and enthusiasm. With the goal, dreams and resolutions of building a 'Sreshtha' (great) and 'Viksit' (developed) Bharat by 2047, the session of the 18th Lok Sabha begins today," he said. He noted that this election was also very significant because, for the

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Show of strength by INDIA bloc's leaders, signals a stormy session

AGE CORRESPONDENT WITH AGENCY INPUTS NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

Ahead of the inaugural session of the 18th Lok Sabha, the INDIA bloc's MPs gathered in the Parliament complex on Monday holding copies of the Constitution and raising slogans. If morning shows the day, then it was clear the current session of the newly-elected Parliament could be rough and stormy as a determined Opposition is all geared up to corner the government on several issues.

In a show of strength, the INDIA bloc Opposition leaders, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, party leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Trinamul Congress' Sudip Bandyopadhyay, DMK's T.R. Baalu, among others, assembled at the spot where the Gandhi statue once stood in the Parliament complex. Holding copies of the Constitution in their hands, the Opposition raised slogans — "long live Constitution", "we will save the Constitution", "save our democracy".

Mr Rahul Gandhi said the Opposition would not allow the Constitution to be "attacked" by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah. "This attack is not acceptable to us and that is why we held the Constitution and took the oath," he said. "Our message is reaching the public and no power can touch the Constitution of India and we will protect it," Mr Gandhi added.

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Samajwadi Party MP Akhilesh Yadav being greeted by Congress MP K.C. Venugopal at the Parliament House complex in New Delhi on Monday. SP MPs Dimple Yadav, Ram Gopal Yadav and Awadhesh Prasad are also seen. — PTI

CBI takes over 5 Neet cases from Gujarat, Bihar and Raj

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA AND AVINASH PRABHAKAR JHA WITH AGENCY INPUTS NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

The CBI on Monday took over the probe of five new cases of alleged malpractices in the medical entrance exam Neet-UG, one each from Gujarat and Bihar and three cases from Rajasthan. The CBI teams from Delhi reached Bihar and Gujarat in connection with the ongoing probe.

The anti-terrorism squad (ATS) of the Maharashtra police, meanwhile, arrested a zilla parishad school-teacher from Latur and registered a case against four persons after it emerged that a racket was being operated to help Neet students willing to pay money to crack the exam. The CBI is likely to take up this case as well. The Centre also made public the rules under the recently notified anti-paper leak law, mandating the National Recruitment Agency (NRA) to prepare norms, standards and guidelines for the computer-based tests among others.

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HC ruling today on Kejriwal bail; SC hearing Wed

Reserving order on stay unusual: Judge

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

The Delhi high court is set to pronounce its verdict on Tuesday on a plea by the Enforcement Directorate seeking a stay on the trial court order granting bail to chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in the money laundering case linked to the excise policy "scam". The order is due to be pronounced at 2.30 pm. A vacation bench of Justice Sudhir Kumar Jain had reserved its order on June 21 after the ED challenged the trial court's decision and put it in abeyance until the final ruling.

Earlier in the day, the Supreme Court observed that reserving orders on stay matter was a bit "unusual" and fixed June 26 for hearing Mr Kejriwal's plea against the high court order granting an interim stay on his bail in the money laundering matter.

An apex court vacation bench of Justices Manoj Misra and S.V.N. Bhatti said it would like to wait for the high court's order



Arvind Kejriwal

A VACATION bench of Justice Sudhir Kumar Jain had reserved its order on June 21 after the ED challenged the trial court's decision and put it in abeyance until the final ruling

on the matter. Senior advocate Abhishek "Manu" Singhvi, representing Mr Kejriwal, sought the interim stay on the bail order to be vacated. Stating that Mr Kejriwal was not a flight risk, Mr Singhvi urged the top court to stay the high court's order before its pronouncement.

Additional solicitor-general S.V. Raju, appearing for the ED, opposed the plea of Mr

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Colourful start to 18th LS as MPs take oath amidst bonhomie, wit

VINEETA PANDEY NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

The 18th Lok Sabha got off to a colourful and cheerful start as the newly-elected members and ministers took the oath, signed the roll of members and took their assigned seats on Monday. Both the treasury benches and the Opposition looked confident and rejuvenated after the three-month-long gruelling election campaign amid the intense heat wave in north India.

The charged-up Opposition bench that seated Faizabad MP Awadhesh Prasad in the front row along with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh

THE MPS from the Samajwadi Party and Telugu Desam Party wore their party colours with pride. While TDP MPs wore a yellow scarf depicting their party symbol and leaders N. Chandrababu Naidu and N.T. Rama Rao's photos

Yadav and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi entertained the House with their wit and humour as the members took the oath. The Opposition heckled Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan and shouted "Neet, NET, Shame" as he took the oath and waved a copy of the Constitution as Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the oath.

Wearing colourful clothes, several in their traditional attire, the newly-elected MPs exchanged pleasantries, hugged, thumped tables and wished other members who took the oath. Several touched the threshold of Parliament House as they entered the building. Many had their family members watching from the visitors' gallery.

The MPs from the Samajwadi Party and Telugu Desam Party wore their party colours with pride. While TDP MPs wore a yellow scarf depicting their party symbol and leaders N. Chandrababu Naidu and N.T. Rama Rao's photographs, the Samajwadi

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Kuki-Zo renew demand for UT status

Tribal groups hold massive rally at Churachandpur in Manipur hills

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, JUNE 24

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) on Monday took out a massive rally to press for their demand for a separate Union territory with legislature status under Article 239A of the Indian Constitution to the hilly areas occupied by the people of Kuki-Zo community in Manipur.

Before the rally began, the public, including presidents of the Zomi

Council, Kuki Inpi, Zo United, and leaders of various tribes, gathered at Churachandpur Public Ground. Leaders from Zo United, Kuki Inpi Manipur, Zomi Council and ITLF addressed the assembly. The rally was flagged off by Zomi Council general secretary Pauneihlal Vaiphei.

The slogan-shouting rally proceeded along Tipaimukh Road, IB Road and then Tedim Road, reaching The Wall of Remembrance near the

US SECY of state Blinken described the high-stakes talks as 'frank' & not 'polemical', with Russia's Lavrov also voicing hope for a lowering of the temperature between the former Cold War foes

DC Office at Peace Ground. A memorandum addressing Union home minister Amit Shah was submitted through Churachandpur DC Dharun Kumar.

The protest march displayed banners and placards with messages such as "Expedite A Political Solution for the Kuki Zo People", "No Political Solution, No Peace", "Forced Union With Meiteis Won't Last" and "Ensure Justice, Peace Will Then Follow".

The local MLA, Saikot Paulienal, who was part of the protest march, said: "If the government wants peace, it has to come and find peace here. We have

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Jostling in Haryana for Kiran Choudhry's seat

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

A political maelstrom has erupted in the Congress camp after the defection of influential Haryana MLA Kiran Choudhry to the BJP. It left Congress leaders jostling for her Tosham Assembly seat.

Tosham, in Bhiwani district, is a bastion of former three-time CM Choudhry Bansilal, widely regarded as the

architect of modern Haryana.

In the race are Ms Choudhry's nephew and former BCCI treasurer Anirudh Choudhry, who wants a Congress ticket. Amid speculation that Ms Choudhry may get a Rajya Sabha berth, the BJP is poised to field her daughter Shruti Choudhry from Tosham in the coming October Assembly elections.

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Bibi says Israel 'winding down' ops in Gaza, warns Lebanon war next

Jerusalem, June 24: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that the current phase of fighting against Hamas in Gaza is winding down, setting the stage for Israel to send more troops to its northern border to confront the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

The comments threatened to further heighten the tensions between Israel and Hezbollah at a time when they appear to be moving closer to war. Mr Netanyahu also signalled that there is no end in sight for the grinding

THE ISRAELI leader said in a lengthy TV interview that while the Army is close to completing its current ground offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, that would not mean the war against Hamas is over

war in Gaza. The Israeli leader said in a lengthy TV interview that while the Army is close to completing its current ground offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, that would not mean the war against Hamas is over.

But he said fewer troops would be needed in Gaza, freeing up forces to battle Hezbollah.

"We will have the possibility of transferring some of our forces north, and we will do that," he told Israel's Channel 14, a pro-Netanyahu TV channel, in an interview that was frequently interrupted by applause from the studio audience. "First and foremost, for defence," he added, but also to allow tens of thousands of displaced Israelis to return home.

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Bollywood actors Rekha, Siddharth and Aditi Rao Hydri pose for photographs during the wedding reception of actors Sonakshi Sinha and Zaheer Iqbal in Mumbai on Sunday. — PTI

Atishi health worse Day 4 of fast, won't go to hospital

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

Delhi water minister Atishi's health condition deteriorated on the fourth day of her indefinite fast on Monday. Doctors have advised her to be admitted to a hospital. Ms Atishi, who has been on an indefinite fast to mitigate the water crisis in the city, has however, refused to be treated at a hospital.

Despite adverse health effects, Ms Atishi said she would continue her hungerstrike until Haryana released the "rightful share of Delhi's water". City ministers Gopal Rai, Saurabh Bharadwaj, Kailash Gahlot and Imran Hussain also visited Ms Atishi at the site of her hungerstrike.

After meeting her, the city ministers wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to resolve the water crisis swiftly. Expressing solidarity, TMC MPs Mahua Moitra, Sagarika Ghose and Pratima Mandal also met Ms Atishi at the protest site. A large number of AAP leaders took out a candlelight march in the evening.

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SHORT TAKES

Complete promotion process: L-G to NDMC

New Delhi: Delhi L-G V.K. Saxena has directed the NDMC to complete the process of promotion and financial benefits under the Modified Assured Career Progression (MACP) scheme of 3,178 employees within a fortnight. Raj Niwas officials said on Monday. Mr Saxena had recently reviewed the status of personnel and services in the NDMC as a part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 100-day action agenda in his third term. "He has issued strict directions that the pending matters pertaining to promotion and financial benefits of employees under MACP, be resolved within 15 days. He has also asked the chairman, NDMC to resolve all other services matters related to employees, that include pending Recruitment Rules, Pensions and LTC etc to be sorted at the earliest," said the official. As many as 3,178 cases of the MACP, that would have ensured automatic promotion for employees serving for years together, have been pending.

Fire safety certificate denied blind school

New Delhi: The Delhi fire department has refused the fire safety certificate to a blind school at Sewa Kutir in northern part of the city citing some shortcomings, according to a letter by the department. The fire department has requested the Government Senior Secondary Special School for Boys with Blindness to rectify the shortcomings. The letter stated that the school building was inspected by an officer of the department on June 6 in the presence of Dr J.L. Sharma (principal) to check the existing fire safety measures and means of escape. The officer found that school building, which comprises the ground and first floor, had only one staircase with a width of 1.25 metre against the requirement of 1.50 metre or and additional staircase 75 cm.

20-yr-old stabbed to death by friend

New Delhi: A 20-year-old man was stabbed to death by two men in west Delhi's Mayapuri area, the police said on Monday. The victim, Raj Kapoor, was found in a pool of blood with stab injuries at his friend Kishan's residence, a police officer. According to the officer, Kapoor had come to the rented accommodation of his friend Kishan, where two of their other friends, Prahlad and Bablu were already present. All four were drinking alcohol when a comment made by Prahlad on Kapoor's wife caused a row between the two. As it escalated, Prahlad and Bablu allegedly stabbed Kapoor and fled. Kishan rushed Kapoor to the hospital where doctors declared him dead, police said.

IMD PREDICTS MORE RAINS IN DAYS TO COME

New Delhi: Cloud cover enveloped Delhi on Monday evening as some parts of the national capital, including Lutyens' Delhi, received light rain, with the weather office forecasting similar conditions for the 24 hours. The weather was muggy till the afternoon but improved towards the evening with the light rain bringing relief from the sultry conditions. Officials said some parts of the city, including Lutyens' Delhi, Pitampura and Palam, received light pre-monsoon showers. Light rain is forecast for other parts of the city. The maximum temperature was recorded at 40.4°C, two notches above the season's average. The minimum temperature was recorded at 31.6°C, four notches above normal. The humidity level oscillated between 62 per cent and 70 per cent. The weather office has forecast generally cloudy skies and thunderstorms with very light rain, accompanied by gusty winds, on Tuesday. The maximum temperature is expected to settle at 40°C while the minimum is likely to be at 31°C. The weather office has also forecast partly cloudy skies with the possibility of thunderstorms and very light rain till June 28. Delhi experienced nine heat-wave days in June against none in 2023 and 2022.

Delhi mantris write to PM, urge him to solve water crisis

AAP says Atishi's health deteriorating due to fast

AVINASH PRABHAKAR JHA NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

Delhi water minister Atishi's health condition deteriorated on the fourth day of her indefinite fast on Monday and doctors have advised her to get admitted to a hospital.

Ms Atishi, who has been on an indefinite fast to mitigate the water crisis in the city, has, however, refused to be treated at a hospital.

Despite adverse health effects, Ms Atishi said she would continue her hunger strike until Haryana released the "rightful share of Delhi's water."

City ministers Gopal Rai, Saurabh Bharadwaj, Kailash Gahlot, and Imran Hussain also visited Ms Atishi at her hunger strike site.

After meeting the water minister, the city ministers wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to resolve the water crisis as a priority.

Later in the evening, a large number of AAP leaders and supporters took out a candle march in protest against the Haryana government's alleged inadequate supply



Officials examine Delhi minister Atishi during her indefinite hunger strike at Bhogal over the ongoing water crisis in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

of water to the national capital.

In the letter to PM Modi, the city ministers said that despite the heatwave conditions, Delhi was not getting its "rightful share" of water from Haryana.

The letter said, "The total water supply in Delhi is 1,005 MGD. Out of this, a huge chunk of 613 MGD comes from Haryana. For the last many weeks, there has been a decline in water coming from Haryana."

The Delhi ministers said that the city was getting 100 MGD less water from the neighbouring state. "One MGD of water ful-

fills the needs of 28,500 people in Delhi in one day. This means that due to the decline of 100 MGD of water, 28 lakh people are not getting water. On one hand, we need additional water and on the other hand, 28 lakh people are not getting water," the letter said.

In the letter, the ministers said, "It has become very important now that water should come from Haryana otherwise there will be chaos in Delhi. Delhi needs its rightful 100 MGD of water for which water minister Atishi has been on hunger strike since June 21. We request you to give priori-

A LARGE number of AAP leaders and supporters took out a candle march in protest against the Haryana government's alleged inadequate supply of water to the national capital

ty to this problem and find a solution to this crisis as soon as possible. So that the water crisis in Delhi can be resolved."

Mr Rai also requested lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena to visit the Wazirabad treatment plant.

"Today, we are appealing to L-G Sir that anytime tomorrow you should go to the Wazirabad water treatment plant along with all of us. You should come there along with your officers and see what the condition is," he said.

"My blood pressure and sugar levels are dropping and my weight has gone down. Ketone level is very high which can have harmful effects in the long run. No matter how much my body suffers, I will continue the fast till Haryana releases water," Ms Atishi said in a video message. The Delhi minister said she was medically examined by doctors on Sunday.

TMC MPs meet Atishi, back demand for water

Say crisis due to BJP, issue will be raised in Parliament

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

A delegation of Trinamul Congress (TMC) MPs met Delhi's water minister Atishi on Monday, the fourth day of her indefinite fast over the water scarcity in the capital, and said they will raise the issue in Parliament. The TMC delegation that included Sagarika Ghose, Mahua Moitra and Pratima Mondal met the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader at the protest site where she sat on the indefinite fast on Friday, alleging that Haryana was not releasing Delhi's rightful share of water in the Yamuna.

"We have come here to support Atishiji. The water scarcity being faced by 30 lakh people of Delhi is only because of the BJP, because as per the treaty between Delhi and Haryana, they should give 613 MGD water every day, but Haryana is giving 100 MGD water less," Ms Moitra told reporters.

"One MDG water meets the needs of around 28,000 people. Delhi's population has grown by three times since 1994. People are facing this water crisis and the BJP government in Haryana is to be blamed," she said. (Prime Minister)



AAP workers participate in a candle light vigil in support of the Delhi water minister Atishi at Jangpura Road in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

Narendra Modi could not get a majority (in the Lok Sabha polls) this time. We were hoping that his arrogance will be reduced a little and they will work for people. He took the oath on the Constitution, but they are not giving the people of Delhi their constitutional rights," Ms Moitra said.

She added that the issue will be raised in Parliament. "We will raise this issue in Parliament and we hope that this struggle will get the people of Delhi their rightful share of water," the TMC leader said. According to Atishi, Delhi has been getting 100 MGD water less for the last three weeks.

This has caused a water shortage in the capital, affecting 28 lakh people, she has claimed.

Meanwhile, hitting out at the AAP government, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said the meeting of ministers at the "air-conditioned" hunger strike site "clearly indicates" that they are now "looking for excuses" to end the indefinite fast.

Mr Sachdeva said the water levels of Wazirabad treatment plant is low as the Yamuna is filled with silt. "Ninety-five per cent of the pond at Wazirabad water treatment plant is filled with silt, which prevents water from staying and causes it to flow away," he claimed.

Top court pulls up DDA over felling of trees at ridge area

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

Observing that brazen acts of tree felling in the national capital cannot be brushed aside lightly, the Supreme Court on Monday sought a "clear" statement from the vice-chairman of the Delhi Development Authority whether trees in the ridge area were cut on the orders of the lieutenant-governor without its permission.

A vacation bench of Justices Abhay S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said it proposes to hold a detailed enquiry into the acts of the DDA which resulted in destruction of several valuable trees and consequentially degradation of the environment.

The apex court said it was very shocking that the trees were cut despite knowing that it cannot be done without its permission.

The bench said: "Such brazen acts in the capital city cannot be lightly brushed aside by this court. If the authorities are not performing their statutory and constitutional duties of protecting the environment, the court has to give a clear and loud signal to all authorities that the environment cannot be damaged in such a fashion."

Noida airport to launch service by April '25 amid construction delays

Noida, June 24: The Noida International Airport is expected to launch its flight service by April 2025, missing its September 2024 deadline due to construction delays. Recently there were reports of delay in construction works at the greenfield airport coming up in the Jewar area of Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar district, some 75 km off Delhi.

The airport were scheduled to launch flight operations by September 2024.

"In view of the current construction status, we expect to begin commercial operations by end of April 2025," the airport said in a statement on Monday.

"We are working together with our EPC (engineering, procurement and construction) contractor Tata Projects Limited and other stakeholders to keep the pace of construction activities and preparations for operational readiness high," the airport said.

It mentioned that agreements have been signed with several airlines for flight connections from Noida International Airport. The airport highlighted that construction work is at advanced stages.

"Construction and development work at the Noida airport is at an advanced stage and we continue to pass important milestones on the road to operational readiness. This is a large and complex project, and the next few weeks of construction activities are crucial," the airport said. — PTI



Congress' student wing NSUI raises slogans during their protest against the alleged irregularities in Neet-UG exams in New Delhi on Monday. — G.N. JHA

Bail order perverse, Kejriwal neck deep in money laundering, says ED

New Delhi, June 24: The Enforcement Directorate on Monday told the Delhi high court that the trial court order granting bail to chief minister Arvind Kejriwal was based on "perverse" findings as it did not consider the material demonstrating his "neck deep involvement" in the offence of money laundering linked to the alleged excise scam. In a written note filed in relation to its plea seeking a stay on the trial court's decision, the agency contended the order suffers from a "jurisdictional defect" since it was not given a proper opportunity to



Arvind Kejriwal

argue its case. It also said the trial judge did not record her satisfaction that "there are reasonable grounds for believing that he is not guilty of such offence" as per section 45 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

On June 20, Special Judge Niyaj Bindu, who sat as the vacation judge, granted bail to Mr Kejriwal in the money laundering case, saying the ED failed to furnish direct evidence linking him to the proceeds of crime in the money laundering case.

On July 21, high court's vacation bench of Justice Sudhir Kumar Jain, however, put an interim stay on the trial court order as it reserved verdict on the issue of stay on a plea moved by the ED.

"Considering the factual and legal perversities in the impugned order granting bail, which fails

to consider a single relevant material placed before the learned Vacation Judge demonstrating the neck deep involvement of the accused Arvind Kejriwal in the offence of money laundering including the generation of proceeds of crime and its subsequent utilisation as well as his vicarious role as national convener of AAP — which was the ultimate beneficiary of the major part of proceeds of crime to the tune of at least ₹45 crores, the impugned order deserves to be stayed and ultimately set aside," the note said. — PTI

Neet row: NSUI stages protest at Jantar Mantar

New Delhi: Congress' student wing NSUI staged a protest against alleged irregularities in Neet-UG and cancellation of UGC-NET exams here at Jantar Mantar on Monday. The NSUI plan to take out a march to gherao the Parliament on the day of the commencement of the first session of the 18th Lok Sabha. Scores of NSUI members gathered at Jantar Mantar to register their protest against the alleged irregularities in the medical entrance exam.

3 held for kidnapping, buying hawker's child

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

Three people, including a woman, were arrested for allegedly kidnapping and selling a one-year-old child near the Tagore Garden Metro station of West Delhi, said the police on Monday.

The accused have been identified as Manish Kumar Gupta (27) and Mohit Tiwari, who kidnapped the child and sold it to a 40-year-old woman Shobha for ₹3 lakh in Sitamarhi in Bihar.

"On June 13, information was received at Rajouri Garden police station that two persons on a motorcycle kidnapped a one-year-old child from a family which was sleeping by the roadside near Tagore Garden Metro station," deputy commissioner of police (West) Vichitra Veer said.

According to the police, the complainant, Poonam,

who hawks goods at red lights, said she was sleeping on the road divider near the Metro station on June 13 when someone took away her child from her arms and fled on a motorcycle.

In its investigation, the police scoured over 100 CCTV footage from the road, shortlisted some 300 motorcycles, and zeroed in on one Manish Kumar Gupta.

On the basis of suspicion, Gupta was arrested from his house in Northwest Delhi's Narela.

"The accused revealed that he committed the crime with co-accused Mohit Tiwari," the deputy commissioner of police said.

Tiwari, who was subsequently arrested from Gonda in Uttar Pradesh, told the police that they had sold the child to one Shobha of Bihar's Sitamarhi. Upon her arrest, Shobha revealed she had purchased the child for ₹3 lakh, the deputy commissioner of police said.

Jilted lover held for hiring goons to burn ex-boyfriend's face

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

A 30-year-old female graphic designer and a henchman, who she had hired to burn the face of her ex-boyfriend, have been arrested in Outer Delhi's Nihal Vihar area, an officer said on Monday.

The woman wanted to take revenge on her ex-boyfriend and colleague for jilting her and getting engaged to someone else, the officer said.

DCP (Outer) Jimmy Chiram said that Omkar (24), who is also a graphic designer, was attacked by three people in the Rannhola area on June 19.

The three came on a motorcycle and attacked him with a knife, cutting him at several places, he said. On June 23, based on a secret input, a trap was laid near Dwarka Mor and

one of the suspects, Vikash, was nabbed, DCP Chiram said. During interrogation, Vikash revealed that he, along with Harsh alias Bali and Rohan, had attacked Omkar with a knife.

He also disclosed the hideout of the woman at whose behest they carried out the attack.

The woman revealed that she and Omkar both were colleagues and had been having an affair for the last three years.

She became infuriated when he became engaged to some other woman and hired the three men for ₹30,000 to carry out an acid attack and also gave them a bottle filled with acid.

The woman also alleged that the victim threatened to upload her private pictures online when she objected to his engagement, the DCP said.

Ghaziabad woman, 2 kids die in fire from LPG cylinder leak

Ghaziabad, Jun 24: A woman and her two daughters were charred to death and three people injured in a fire that broke out at an under-construction house here, the police said on Monday. The blaze, reported at Defence Colony in the city's Teela Mor police station area on Sunday, was caused by a leakage in the LPG cylinder when the woman was cooking.

Nathulal, the house owner, was getting five rooms constructed in the building with the help of one Mukesh who was residing with his family there, Siddharth Gautam, ACP, Shalimar Garden, said.

3 people injured in LPG cylinder explosion in Uttam Nagar area

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

Three people, including a 11-year-old girl, were injured when an LPG cylinder exploded in a residential building in west Delhi's Uttam Nagar area, the Delhi Fire Services (DFS) officials said on Monday.

DFS chief Atul Garg said they received information about the explosion and the collapse of

the building's second floor at 2.15 pm.

"We managed to douse the flames by 3.35 pm. However, during the operation, an 18-year-old boy, Nakul, sustained burn injuries and was rushed to Safdarjung Hospital," Garg said.

He said that 11-year-old Surbhi suffered leg injury after she jumped from the house and was sent to a private clinic for treatment.

percent burns while trying to extinguish the fire and are undergoing treatment, he added.

Chief fire officer Rahul Pal said Priyanka and Himani got burnt while trying to douse the flames and could not escape as the door had got locked. — PTI

'Friend' booked on charges of raping teen in Mehrauli

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

The Delhi police has booked a man for allegedly raping a teenage girl over a year in south Delhi's Mehrauli area, an officer on Monday said. The girl, who is now 18 years old, was a minor at the time of the incident, the officer said.

The matter was reported to police on June 22 by Safdarjung Hospital, where the girl had been admitted for termination of four months pregnancy by her mother.

"The victim alleged that she was in friendship with a

THE MATTER was reported to police on June 22 by a hospital, where the girl had been admitted for termination of four months pregnancy

man for over a year who forced her to make physical relation with her in the month of January 2023 to January 2024 in Mehrauli area," the person said.

The girl revealed the name of the accused after counselling by the Delhi Commission for Women and the investigating officer. "Further investigation is underwa," the officer said.

SHORT TAKES

B'deshi, Rohingya trafficking: 8 arrested

New Delhi: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday charge-sheeted eight people suspected to be a part of a transnational syndicate trafficking Rohingyas and Bangladeshis into India using forged documents. The agency has named Jalil Miah, Hanan Miah, absconder Kajal Sarkar, Adhir Das and Anwar Hussain alias Mama — all of whom were operating from the northeastern state Tripura — in its supplementary charge sheet filed before a special court in Guwahati, an official statement said. "Others charge-sheeted have been identified as absconder Kamal Das, brother of charge-sheeted accused Amol Chandra Das, who was operating from Silchar, besides West Bengal-based Liton Chakraborty," it said, adding the eighth charge-sheeted accused is Bangladeshi national Rabiul Hasan alias Rabiul Hassan.

Adani will invest ₹500cr in U'khand

Dehradun: Adani Group will invest ₹500 crore in facilitating warehouses for agriculture sector produces, power and skill development activities in Uttarakhand. According to the group its investment plan aims to provide storage facilities for the coarse grains and horticulture produces in the state. Adani Group corporate affairs (North) head Anand Singh Bhasin has claimed that group plans investments in enhancing storage facilities for agricultural and horticulture crops in Uttarakhand. Mr Bhasin said this will help Uttarakhand farmers to keep their produce safe for a longer period and according to their wishes. This will also help them protect the produce from getting spoiled and rotten.

CM Saini visits Ram temple with mantras

Ayodhya: Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini along with 13 ministers and as many MLAs on Monday paid obeisance at the Ram temple here and said he will approach the Uttar Pradesh government for opening a guest house for the state in the holy city. State Assembly Speaker Gyan Chand Gupta was also a part of the group. Talking to reporters, Mr Saini said, "Had 'darshan' of the unmatched beauty of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya." "Lord Ram stands for dignity and morality. I will remain engaged in serving the people of Haryana with the ideals, dignity and virtues of Ram Rajya. We have received this resolution and blessings only by the grace of Ram Lalla," he said, adding Haryana government will approach the Uttar Pradesh government for opening a guest house in Ayodhya. — PTI

GOVT COMMITTED TO BRING MORE REFORMS: SHAH

New Delhi, June 24: Union home minister Amit Shah lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday for introducing the goods and services tax (GST), which he said has been effective in reducing the prices of household items, and asserted that the NDA government is committed to bringing more reforms to improve the lives of the citizens. According to the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs' (CBIC) data, a majority of household items, including flour, cosmetics, televisions and refrigerators, have become cheaper after the GST implementation. "Standing true to the principles of a people's government, PM Shri @narendramodiji introduced the GST to give relief to the citizens. Today, GST has not only given people respite from a multi-layered tax system but also has been effective in reducing the prices of household items. We are resolved to bring in more reforms to improve the lives of the citizens," the Union home minister wrote on X. The GST, which subsumed 17 local taxes and fees, was implemented on July 1, 2017. — PTI



Amit Shah

Centre notifies rules under anti-paper leak law Neet: CBI takes over 5 more cases

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA and AVINASH PRABHAKAR JHA with agency inputs NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

The Central Bureau of Investigation on Monday took over the probe of five new cases of alleged malpractices in the medical entrance exam Neet-UG, one each from Gujarat and Bihar and three cases from Rajasthan.

The CBI teams from Delhi reached Bihar and Gujarat in connection with the ongoing probe.

The anti-terrorism squad (ATS) of the Maharashtra police, meanwhile, arrested a zilla parishad school-teacher from Latur and registered a case against four persons, after it emerged that a racket was being operated to help Neet students willing to pay money to crack the exam. The CBI is likely to take up this case as well.

The Central agency has already registered its own FIR in connection with the case on a reference from the Union education ministry to conduct a comprehensive probe.

After taking over these new cases, the CBI is now probing six cases of alleged irregularities in Neet-UG.

The Centre also made public the rules under the recently notified anti-paper leak law, mandating the National Recruitment Agency (NRA) to prepare norms, standards and

OPPOSITION IS up in arms over the Centre's refusal to shift NTA chairman P.K. Joshi, who has been 'holding interviews' for the appointment of VCs and directors of premier educational institutes

guidelines for the computer-based tests among others. The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Rules, 2024 have provisions for "engagement of services of other government agencies by public examination authority", "preparations of norms, standards and guidelines" and "reporting of incidents of unfair means or offences" among others.

The Opposition, particularly the Congress, is up in arms over the Centre's refusal to shift NTA chairman P.K. Joshi, who has been "holding interviews" for the appointment of VCs and directors of premier educational institutes across the country.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Anil Desai said addressing the NEET-UG row requires more than arresting a few individuals and claimed the involvement of a broader network in the case. "The entire reputation has been tarnished because of Neet. Simply arresting one or two officers will not resolve the issue. There is an extensive racket at work," alleged the Mumbai South Central MP.



Members of All India Democratic Students' Organisation burn an effigy during a protest in Kolkata on Monday over the alleged irregularities in the Neet-UG results and UGC-NET exams cancellation. — PTI

UPSC moots AI-based CCTV surveillance to check cheating

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

Amid the ongoing agitation against alleged irregularities in competitive exams like Neet and UGC-NET, top recruitment body Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) is planning to introduce facial recognition and Artificial Intelligence-based CCTV surveillance system to prevent irregularities in tests.

In a recently floated tender to invite bids, the UPSC has asked the public sector undertakings to devise two tech solutions

technology to match and cross-check the biometric details of the candidates and to monitor various activities during the examination to prevent cheating, fraud, unfair means and impersonation. Accordingly, the commission has desired to incorporate Aadhaar-based fingerprint authentication (else digital fingerprint capturing) and facial recognition of candidates and QR code scanning of e-admit cards and "live AI-based CCTV surveillance service", which will be used during the examinations.

The tender document read, "The UPSC attaches great importance to the conduct of its examinations in a free, fair and impartial manner. In its endeavor to fulfil these objectives, the Commission intends to make use of the latest digital

Consider doing away with Neet: Didi urges Modi

'Not happy with Centre excluding WB from river talks with Bangla'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, JUNE 24



Mamata Banerjee

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a letter to abolish the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test in wake of the paper leak and allow the state governments to conduct their resocative examinations.

The Trinamul Congress supremo, in another letter to Mr Modi, also opposed any discussion on Teesta Water Treaty and Farakka Water Treaty with Bangladesh without consulting her government.

Objecting to Neet, Ms Banerjee wrote, "...before 2017, the states were allowed to conduct their own entrance examinations and the Central government also used to conduct its own examinations for admission into the medical courses. This system was functioning smoothly and without much problems. This was better attuned to the regional curricula and educational standards. Therefore, states should be given freedom to select medical students through

Joint Entrance Examination (JEE)."

Describing the Neet "unacceptable" she pointed out that the present system has led to massive corruption which benefits only the rich who can afford to pay, while the meritorious students belonging to the poor and middle class suffer and are the biggest victims.

Ms Banerjee urges the PM to consider and take immediate steps to restore the previous system of conducting medical examination.

"I love and respect people of Bangladesh... I convey my strong reservation that no discussion on sharing of Teesta water and the Farakka Treaty should be taken up with Bangladesh without the involvement of the state government," the West Bengal CM said.

Nadda slams Cong over TN hooch tragedy: Why quiet?

'INDIA partners have special liking for sharab ghotala'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

In a bid to increase attacks on the Opposition camp over Tamil Nadu hooch tragedy, BJP president J.P. Nadda, in a letter to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday questioned the "stoic silence" of his party on the tragedy which has left several people dead in the Congress ally DMK-ruled state.

Mr Nadda took the opportunity to slam Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, asking him to stop his "sanctimonious preaching" about the Constitution and ensure the welfare and rights of SC/OBC community in Tamil Nadu, where many of those who lost lives in the hooch tragedy are Dalits.

Mr Nadda, who is the



J.P. Nadda

philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi who was strictly against alcohol consumption, and indulge in patronising illicit liquor trade or liquor scams. Calling the hooch tragedy in Tamil Nadu a "man-made disaster" Mr Nadda invited the Congress president to join the protest against the "state-sponsored disaster" to be held within Parliament precincts.

In his letter to Mr Kharge, the BJP president noted that "56 lives" could have been saved if the illicit liquor mafia and the ruling DMK-INDIA bloc dispensation nexus did not exist.

Mr Nadda said the ghastly images of burning funeral pyres from Karunapuram village in Kallakurichi has shaken the conscience of the entire nation.

'Undeclared emergency existed under BJP's rule for 10 years' Opp. hits back at PM on Emergency

New Delhi, June 24: Opposition leaders hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his "Emergency" remark on Monday, calling the 10 years of his government an "undeclared emergency".

Slamming Mr Modi over his remarks, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the Prime Minister delivered a longer-than-usual customary address "but clearly, even after the moral and political defeat, the arrogance remains". He said the country was hoping that Mr Modi would say something on important issues.

"Narendra Modiji, you are giving advice to the opposition. You are reminding us of the 50-year-old Emergency, but have forgotten the last 10 years of undeclared emergency, which was ended by the people," Mr Kharge said in a post on X. "People have given their

mandate against Modiji. Despite this, if he has become the Prime Minister, then he should work," he added.

Asked about Mr Modi's remarks on Emergency, Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav evaded a direct reply and said, "I thank the wise people of India, who voted to protect the Constitution. The people



Congress MP K.C. Venugopal with DMK MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi and others at the Parliament House complex in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

got tired waiting for achche din (good days). I hope the people will have happy days in the future." Trinamul Congress (TMC) leader Mahua Moitra said the ruling BJP fell short of a majority in the recently-held Lok Sabha polls as the people of the country have realised that it is against the Constitution. "From 303, the BJP is

down to 240 seats. It is running a minority government. It kept saying '400 paar' but could not even get a simple majority." Ms Moitra said, adding that the only reason of this is that the people of the country have understood that there is the BJP on one side and the Constitution on the other. "The people have chosen the Constitution," the TMC MP said.

She also alleged that there was an "undeclared emergency" in the country under the BJP's rule.

"I was not born during the first Emergency, but they (BJP) had been running an undeclared emergency for the last 10 years and the people of the country said it would not be allowed," the TMC leader said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Anil Desai said the Emergency period is long over and the government should focus on the present. — PTI

Rift in Cong, leaders seeks Mumbai unit prez removal

AGE CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, JUNE 24

Even after the impressive Lok Sabha performance, the Mumbai Congress remains a divided house. At least 16 party leaders, including a former minister and legislators, have written a letter to the party high command seeking the removal of Mumbai Congress president Varsha Gaikwad, who has been elected as a Lok Sabha member.

The Congress leaders argued that Ms Gaikwad will not be able to give time for the party in Mumbai as she will be

busy in Parliament. According to sources, several Congress leaders are unhappy with Ms Gaikwad as they think she runs the city unit as her fiefdom.

These leaders have sought time from the Congress leadership to discuss the rejuvenation of the party in Mumbai ahead of the Assembly and the Mumbai civic polls, which are expected to be held this year.

A source from the Mumbai unit of the Congress said that Ms Gaikwad does not take any other senior leader in confidence.

Sena-UBT demands housing quota for 'Marathi manoos'

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, JUNE 24

With the Maharashtra Assembly elections just a few months away, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena has turned back to its "Marathi manoos" agenda. Senior party leader Anil Parab on Monday demanded 50 per cent reservation for Marathi people in new buildings to be constructed in Mumbai.

Mr Parab, who is considered as Uddhav's trusted aide, has moved a private member bill seeking to provide housing for Marathi people with 50 per cent reservation in new buildings in Mumbai. It will ensure the percentage of Marathi people in Mumbai will not reduce further, he said.

"The developers would be mandated to reserve the houses for the Marathi people. Failing to do so, the developer will be liable to imprisonment for six months or a fine of ₹10 lakhs or both," the Sena leader stated in the bill.

Mr Parab, a multiple-time MLC who is now contesting the June 26

Vidhan Parishad (Legislative Council) polls from the Mumbai Graduates constituency, has moved a private member's bill to the state legislature seeking 50 per cent reservation for Marathi people.

"Marathi people are now being denied houses in Mumbai and their percentage is decreasing day by day. To prevent this, there should be a 50 per cent quota for them in new residential projects. Marathi speaking people should get affordable houses in Mumbai," Mr Parab said.

Cong begins talks to chalk out strategy for Jharkhand elections

New Delhi, June 24: The Congress on Monday began consultations to chalk out its strategy for the Jharkhand Assembly polls to be held later this year and evolve ways to strengthen the organisation.

Similar sessions for the poll-bound states of Maharashtra and Haryana, besides Jammu and Kashmir, would also be held this week.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi began deliberations with leaders from Jharkhand during the strategy meeting.

All India Congress Committee (organisation) (AICC) general secretary K.C. Venugopal was also present in the meeting.

"The Congress party is fully dedicated to ensuring the rights of all sections of Jharkhand, including for water, forest, land and the tribal society," Mr Kharge said.

"By doing conspiratorial politics, the BJP has insulted Jharkhand's identity. Every Congress worker has to remain among the public for the upcoming Assembly election," Mr Kharge said in a post in Hindi on X.

"We are all committed to social justice and participation. We discussed the election strategy with the leaders of the Jharkhand

Congress today," Mr Kharge added while sharing pictures of the meeting on the microblogging platform.

Jharkhand Congress chief Rajesh Thakur, state Congress in-charge Ghulam Ahmad Mir and other senior party leaders like Ajoy Kumar attended the meeting.

The Congress' strategy meet for Maharashtra would take place on Tuesday and the party leaders from Haryana would meet on Wednesday.

For Jammu and Kashmir, where the election is yet to be declared, the strategy meeting would be held on Thursday.

The Congress leadership has planned the meetings well in advance after being buoyed by the party's performance in the recently-held Lok Sabha elections.

The Assembly elections in Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand are slated later this year.

The tenure of the Maharashtra Assembly ends on November 26, while that of the Haryana Assembly ends on November 3.

The tenure of the Jharkhand Assembly ends on January 5, 2025.

The Supreme Court has said the election in Jammu and Kashmir should be held before September 30. — PTI

Cong netas vie for Kiran's seat in Haryana

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

A political maelstrom has erupted in the Congress after the defection of Haryana MLA Kiran Choudhry to the BJP. The switchover has left party leaders jostling for her Tosham Assembly seat.

Tosham, Bhiwani district, Haryana is a bastion of former chief minister Choudhry Bansilal — known as the architect of modern Haryana — who has headed the state three times as CM.

In the race are Ms Choudhry's nephew and former BCCI treasurer Anirudh Choudhry, who

wants a Congress ticket. Amid speculation that Ms Choudhry may get a RS berth, the BJP is poised to field her daughter and former Congress MP Shruti Choudhry from Tosham in the October Assembly elections. Ms Choudhry and her daughter Ms Shruti had recently dumped the Congress to join the BJP. As Haryana gears up for the Assembly polls in October, the BJP's manoeuvre and the unfolding of the Choudhry clan's new political chapter are set to be the key factors in shaping the electoral landscape in the Jat-dominat-



Kiran Choudhry

ed Tosham.

The long-standing factional feud within the family of the former CM has intensified in the wake of Ms Choudhry's new political innings with the BJP and has ruffled feathers within the Congress, as she used her

dominance in the allocation of tickets in at least six to eight Assembly constituencies in Bhiwani and other districts.

A former manager of the Indian cricket team Mr Anirudh has already kick-started his campaign. His father, Ranbir Singh Mahindra, had also served as the BCCI president and as a legislator in the Haryana Assembly. Congress leader and ex-CM Bhupendra Singh Hooda is also consolidating his stock in the region through Bansilal's elder son Mr Mahindra and grandson Mr Anirudh.

Ms Choudhry's stint with the Congress was

marked by fracas with Mr Hooda, contrasting with the amicable relations between the latter and her brother-in-law Mr Mahindra. These dynamics often posed challenges for her political stature.

Mr Mahindra, drifted away from Bansilal when he was the Haryana CM, was in the prime of his politics. After the death of his younger brother and Ms Choudhry's husband Surendra Singh, the ties were restored for a brief time but turned sour in 2006 when their father died leaving behind the family entangled in an ongoing legal battle.

SHORT TAKES

Mishap at Odisha steel plant, 2 killed

Bhubaneswar: Two workers were on Monday killed and some others sustained critical injuries after a mechanical structure reportedly caved in at a steel plant in Odisha's Dhenkanal district. As per reports, a mechanical structure of Rungta Mines Ltd's steel plant fell on the workers while they were on their duty. Two workers died on the spot while the others sustained grievous injuries. Around six to seven who sustained critical injuries were rushed to the local district headquarters hospital. The deceased were identified as Bisu Majhi and Vivekananda Sahu. They hailed from West Bengal. They were engaged in the construction work at the plant, it was learnt. Reports said the incident sent shockwaves in the area. Angry workers resorted to protests alleging a lack of adequate safety measures. "They do not value human lives. So, we demand arrest of factory manager," alleged a protester.

Indus treaty: India, Pak review projects

Jammu: Delegations from India and Pakistan on Monday flew to J&K's Kishtwar district with neutral experts and began inspection of two power projects under the Indus Water Treaty, officials said. About 40 people reached Jammu Sunday evening and flew to Kishtwar this morning for inspection of various under-construction power projects in the Chenab valley region, the officials said. This is the first visit by a Pakistani delegation to J&K in more than five years under the dispute settlement mechanism of the 1960 treaty. India and Pakistan signed the IWT after nine years of negotiations, with the World Bank being a signatory of the pact which sets out a mechanism for cooperation and information exchange. — PTI

Diphtheria situation in control in Odisha

Bhubaneswar: Odisha health minister Mukesh Mahaling on Monday said the diphtheria situation in the state is now under control and no new cases have been detected in the past 10 days. Diphtheria cases were detected in four close-knit villages spread across the districts of Rayagada, Kalahandi and Koraput. Six people died of the disease since June 13 in Rayagada. "However, no new case has been found in the last 10 days," Mr Mahaling told media persons after a meeting he held with the district collectors concerned. Currently, no diphtheria patient is undergoing treatment in government hospitals, a health department official said. "Vaccination programmes are in full swing in the area. Besides, the rural development department has been asked to construct motorable roads to remote villages," the minister said. — PTI

Both leaders express 'happiness at substantive progress' of ties EAM, UAE minister discuss new areas with 'untapped potential'

Dubai, June 24: External affairs minister S. Jaishankar has reviewed with his United Arab Emirates counterpart Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan the multifaceted India-UAE comprehensive strategic partnership and discussed new areas with "untapped potential" to enhance collaboration, an official statement said on Monday. Mr Jaishankar, who was in the UAE on Sunday, also exchanged views with Mr Al Nahyan on regional and global issues. He visited the iconic BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi and participated in the 10th International Yoga Day celebrations before meeting Mr Al Nahyan. The two foreign ministers "reviewed the multifaceted India-UAE com-

prehensive strategic partnership," the ministry of external affairs (MEA) said in New Delhi on Monday. They expressed "happiness at the substantive progress in diverse areas of bilateral cooperation, including commercial and economic collaboration, fintech, education, culture, and people-to-people connect," it said in a statement. The ministry said the two ministers "discussed new areas with untapped potential for further enhancing collaboration" and also exchanged views on regional and global issues. "Taking to X after meeting his UAE counterpart, Mr Jaishankar said, "Very pleased to meet UAE FM @ABZayed today in Abu Dhabi." "Productive and deep



S. Jaishankar

conversations on our ever-growing Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Appreciated the discussion and his insights on regional and global issues," he said. The ministry said in a statement that Mr Jaishankar's visit to the UAE, within two weeks of his re-appointment, "signifies the importance India attaches to its relations with the country". It added that the visit marks the "continuation of high-level contact between the two countries". "Last year, we have also witnessed important milestones in our bilateral relations like the implementation of a local currency trade settlement agreement, the launch of UAE's domestic credit/debit card based on India's RuPay card stack, the setting up of a campus of IIT Delhi in Abu Dhabi, fintech collaboration, and commencement of work on IMEEC, among others," it said. Mr Jaishankar visited the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 14. Taking to X, he called the temple, which received one million visitors in less than four months, a "visible symbol of India-UAE friendship". — PTI

38 mountain rescue teams on 2 routes for Amarnath

Srinagar, June 24: Thirty-eight Mountain Rescue Teams of the Jammu and Kashmir police, SDRF, NDRF, BSF and the CRPF will be deployed for the Amarnath Yatra, officials said on Monday, as a senior police officer briefed them on their specific duties and emphasised the importance of ensuring the pilgrims' safety. The 52-day pilgrimage to the holy cave shrine of Amarnath, located at a height of 3,880 metres, will commence from the twin tracks — the traditional 48-kilometre Nunwan-Pahalgam route in Anantnag and the 14-kilometre shorter but steeper Baltal route in Ganderbal — on June 29. More than 4.5 lakh pilgrims paid their obeisance at the natural ice Shiva Lingam formation inside the cave shrine last year. Additional director general of police (law and order) Vijay Kumar on Monday conducted a comprehensive review meeting with the Mountain Rescue Teams (MRTs) of the police, State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Border Security Force (BSF) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), an official said. He said the MRTs — consisting of 13 teams from the police, 11 from the SDRF, eight from the NDRF, four from the BSF and two from the CRPF — will be deployed for the pilgrims' safety. — PTI



Firefighters try to douse a fire that broke out in a commercial building at Bohri Kadal in Srinagar on Monday.

'We find no error in impugned judgment' 'Populist measure': SC dismisses Haryana plea over marks policy

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a plea filed by the Haryana Staff Selection Commission challenging a Punjab and Haryana high court verdict that set aside a 2022 notification which provided for five per cent additional marks to residents of the state in recruitment examinations on "socio-economic" criteria. Termining the Haryana government's policy a "populist measure", a vacation bench of Justice Abhay S. Oka and Justice Rajesh Bindal refused to interfere with the high court order, which had held as unconstitutional the socioeconomic criteria prescribed by the Haryana government to grant addi-

ATTORNEY-GENERAL defended the policy and said the Haryana introduced the grace marks policy to give chance to those who were deprived of the security of public employment marks he goes up. They are all populist measures. How do you defend such an action that somebody is getting five marks extra?" Attorney-general R. Venkataramani defended the policy and said the Haryana government introduced the grace marks policy to give opportunities to those who were deprived of the security of public employment. The top court was hearing an appeal filed by the Haryana SSC against the high court's May 31 order. On May 31, the high court struck down the state government's policy of granting five per cent bonus marks on the socioeconomic status of the candidate, who is a state resident, to the total percentage of marks in the CET for groups C and D posts.

Didi pulls up WB officials over land grab complaints

Calls performance of TMC-run municipalities 'worst'

RAJIB CHOWDHURY KOLKATA, JUNE 24



Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal CM

In an unprecedented outburst, West Bengal chief minister and Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee on Monday called the performance of the municipalities, run by her party in the state, "worst" and pulled up its heads over lack of services and complaints of land grab. She said at a meeting in state secretariat Nabanna, "A group of officials and police has muffled. They are settling people in the vacant plots as soon as they find it. Already, the central government is not providing funds. How many areas would I have to take care of?" Ms Banerjee claimed, "Why don't you understand that the identity of Bengal is being destroyed

because of you pocketing money? You are either selling government lands or grabbing it after getting it. It's the worst performance of the municipalities." She alleged, "I don't know why they were set up. All ask for setting up municipalities. But what is the benefits if people don't get services? Why isn't any conservancy system there in Howrah? Garbage is not cleared from the road. They tumble out of vats. What are those who are at the helm doing? Why aren't they taking care?" Ms Banerjee added, "We have a solid waste management system in place. Recycling happens in it. But tenders are issued whimsically. I don't know how much cut they are getting. Some get it, others don't. They must be getting their cut by sharing it with others. Everyone has ganged up. I'm sorry for making these comments. I'm not at all happy."

Prajwal sent to JC till July 8 over sex abuse

Bengaluru, June 24: A court here on Monday remanded former MP Prajwal Revanna, who was arrested on charges of rape and sexual abuse against several women, to 14 days judicial custody. As his custody under the Special Investigation Team (SIT), which is probing the cases, ended on Monday, he was produced before the magistrate, who remanded him to judicial custody till July 8.



Prajwal Revanna

Meanwhile, Revanna's bail application came up before the Additional City Civil and Sessions Judge, and the court reserved the orders for June 26. The 33-year-old grandson of JD(S) patriarch and former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda had failed in his bid to retain the Hassan parliamentary constituency in the recent polls. SIT officials arrested Revanna soon after he landed a Bengaluru airport from Germany on May 31. He had left for Germany on April 27, a day after Hassan went to Lok Sabha the polls. A "blue corner notice" seeking information on his whereabouts had earlier been issued by the Interpol, following a request by the SIT via the Central Bureau of Investigation. Meanwhile, a court here on Monday remanded JD(S) MLC Suraj Revanna, who has been arrested in connection with a case of alleged sexual abuse of a man, in the custody of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) till July 1. — PTI

Paths cleared for PM, VIPs, why not for everyone?: HC

Mumbai, June 24: The Bombay high court on Monday said when streets and footpaths are cleared for the prime minister and other VIPs for one day, why can't it be done on a daily basis for everyone else too. Having a clear footpath and a safe place to walk was every person's fundamental right and the state authorities were obligated to provide the same, a division bench of Justices M.S. Sonak and Kamal Khata. The state cannot perpetually just wonder what can be done to work out the problem of unauthorised hawkers encroaching upon footpaths in the city and has to now do something drastically, the bench said. The high court last year took suo motu (on its own) cognizance of the issue of illegal and unauthorised hawkers and vendors in the city. On Monday, the bench said while it knows the problem is large, the state and other authorities, including the civic body, cannot just leave it at that and called for some drastic action. "When the prime minister or some VIPs come, the streets and footpaths are immediately cleared...And it stays so till they are here. How is it done then? Why can't it be done for everyone else? Citizens are ratepayers...They need to have a clear footpath and safe place to walk," the court said. — PTI

Varsity probes charges of Islamic propagation in MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, JUNE 24

The Vikram University in Ujjain in MP has constituted a committee to probe charges of propagating Islam levelled against a professor of minority community in the institute. The university vice-chancellor Akhilesh Kumar Pandey on Monday said that he has received complaints against guest professor Anis Shiekh of Institute of Pharmacy alleging that he propagated Islam in a WhatsApp group which also has members belonging to Hindu community. Besides, the professor was also accused of discriminating against students in the valuation of exam papers on the basis of religion, the vice-chancellor said. The probe panel will submit its report within 15 days, he said. Mr Sheikh has been directed not to come to the department till the probe is complete, the vice-chancellor said.

Modi claims 'people's mandate' for 3rd term

Continued from Page 1

second time since Independence, the people of the country have given a government the opportunity to serve for a third consecutive term. "This opportunity, coming after 60 years, is a very proud event in itself. When the people of the country choose a government for a third term, it signifies their acceptance of its intentions and policies. They have affirmed their trust in its dedication to the people, and I express my heartfelt gratitude to my fellow citizens for the same," the PM said. Mr Modi mentioned that over the past 10 years, his government has continuously strived to establish a tradition "because we believe that while a majority is necessary to run a government, consensus is crucial to govern a country". Hitting out at the Congress over the imposition of Emergency, the Prime Minister said: "Today, we are meeting on the 24th of June. Tomorrow is the 25th of June. For those dedicated to upholding the dignity of our Constitution and who believe in Bharat's democratic traditions, the 25th of June is an unforgettable day. Tomorrow marks 50 years since a dark chapter was written into India's democracy." "The new generation of Bharat must never forget how the Constitution was completely disregarded, torn apart, and the country

was turned into a prison, with democracy utterly suppressed. These 50 years since the Emergency remind us to protect our Constitution and democracy with pride. The countrymen must resolve that such a travesty will never be allowed to happen again. We commit ourselves to ensuring a vibrant democracy and fulfilling the common man's dreams as outlined by the Indian Constitution," the PM added. Pointing out that the nation has great expectations from members of Parliament, the Prime Minister urged all MPs to use this opportunity for public welfare and service, taking every possible step in the public interest. "The people also expect constructive contributions from the Opposition. Despite the disappointment so far, I hope that in the 18th Lok Sabha, the Opposition will play its role effectively and uphold the dignity of our democracy. I trust the Opposition will live up to these expectations," he said. The Prime Minister noted that the common man expects debate and diligence in the House and do not expect tantrums, drama, and disturbance. "They seek substance, not slogans. The country needs a good and responsible Opposition, and I am confident that the MPs elected to the 18th Lok Sabha will strive to meet these expectations of the common man," Mr Modi said.

Colourful start to 18th Lok Sabha

Continued from Page 1

MPs wore pink a "gamcha" and traditional red caps. Surprisingly, the saffron scarves often worn by the BJP leaders were not much visible this time. Before the start of the session, President Droupadi Murmu administered the oath to BJP member Bhartruhari Mahtab as the pro-tem Speaker. She had also named K. Suresh (Congress), T.R. Baalu (DMK), Radha Mohan Singh and Faggan Singh Kulaste (both BJP) and Sudip Bandyopadhyay (TMC) in the panel to assist Mr Mahtab in administering the oath to newly-elected members of the Lok Sabha. However, as Mr Mahtab took the chair, the Opposition, which was pitching for K. Suresh for the post, stood up to protest and when Mr Mahtab called the names of the members in the pro-tem speaker's panel to take the oath first, the 3 Opposition MPs walked out of the House. The Opposition raised the slogan "violation of Constitution" when the panel was sworn in. In the beginning itself, Mr Mahtab announced that Mr Rahul Gandhi had resigned from the Wayanad seat. As the House convened, the Opposition showcased Faizabad MP Awadhesh Prasad as a victory trophy and made him sit in the front row in between SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, to send across a message to the BJP that temple construction did not convert into votes for it in Faizabad, the constituency that comprises Ayodhya. The BJP was heavily dependent on the Ram Mandir as part of its Hindutva vote plank. In a prestige battle, Mr Awadhesh Prasad defeated two-time sitting BJP MP Lallu Singh from Faizabad by a margin of 54,567 votes.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the first to take the oath. As Mr Modi walked to be sworn in, the treasury benches shouted "Modi Modi". Countering them, the Opposition led by Rahul Gandhi stood up and waved copies of the Constitution. Home minister Amit Shah was also greeted in a similar manner. After Mr Modi, Mr Radha Mohan Singh and Mr Faggan Singh Kulaste (both BJP) took the oath as part of the pro-tem speaker's panel, followed by Cabinet ministers and ministers of state. TMC member Kalyan Banerjee entertained the MPs with his wit and humour. So, when JD(U) MP and now minister of fisheries, animal husbandry and dairying Rajiv Ranjan Singh, alias Lallan Singh, walked up to take the oath, Mr Banerjee commented "dost dost na raha" and added "bahut purana dost hai". The Opposition has been wooing the JD-U and TDP to join them in alliance and help form the government. When D. Purandeshwari of the BJP took oath, TMC's Swagat Ghosh asked if she was being made the Speaker. And, when Jansena MPs from Andhra Pradesh took the oath, the Opposition whispered to them to join the "other side". "Aap is taraf aa jao", leading to a burst of laughter in the hall. TDP MP and civil aviation minister Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu greeted the Opposition members with folded hands after taking the oath and he was greeted back warmly. Many members spoke in their native language. Union Minister and BJP's sole Kerala MP Suresh Gopi recited the names of God Krishna and Guruvayurappan before taking the oath. Several Congress MPs held copies of the Constitution while taking the oath. The oath-taking will continue till Tuesday.

HC ruling today on Kejriwal bail

Continued from Page 1

Kejriwal, and said the high court was about to pronounce the verdict on its stay application. The top court noted that the high court had on June 21 asked the parties to file written submissions till June 24 and observed that the order was likely to be pronounced in a day or two. Justice Misra, however, observed that the stay order is normally pronounced the same day and not reserved. "It's unusual," he observed, and added the court would like to wait for the high court order to get the clear picture on the issue. At the outset, the top court told Mr Singhvi that pronouncing any order at this stage would be prejudging the issue. "We will be pre-judging the issue if we pass any order at this stage. It is not some other court but the high court," the bench told Mr Singhvi. The high court had on Friday paused Mr Kejriwal's release after the trial court granted him bail on June 20.

THE TOP court noted that the high court had on June 21 asked the parties to file written submissions till June 24 and observed that the order was likely to be pronounced in a day or two. The AAP national convener, who was arrested by the ED on March 21, could have walked out of Tihar Jail on Friday had the high court not granted the interim relief to the anti-money laundering agency. In its bail order, the trial court had held that prima facie Mr Kejriwal's guilt was yet to be established and that the ED had failed to furnish direct evidence linking him to the "proceeds of crime" in the money laundering case. The excise policy was scrapped in 2022 after the Delhi lieutenant-governor ordered a CBI probe into alleged irregularities and corruption involving its formulation and execution. According to the ED and CBI, irregularities were committed while modifying the policy and undue favours extended to the licence-holders. The speakers at the protest march reiterated that the primary objective of the peaceful protest was to urge the Central government to accelerate efforts in finding a political resolution to the escalating violence in Manipur. peace, while emphasising the demand for Union territory status with a legislature under Article 239A of the Constitution. The speakers at the protest march reiterated that the primary objective of the peaceful protest was to urge the Central government to accelerate efforts in finding a political resolution to the escalating violence in Manipur.

Kuki-Zo renew seek for UT status

Continued from Page 1

been knocking at the doors of various Central authorities in our quest for peace, but it has been elusive." In the memorandum submitted to home minister Amit Shah, the IITLF reiterated their political demands for the Kuki-Zo people in Manipur. The memorandum expressed gratitude for the renewed efforts to curb violence in Manipur and restore



THE ASIAN AGE

25 JUNE 2024

It's up to govt, Opp. to make Parliament count

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's opening statement at the start of the 18th Lok Sabha that the government wants to go ahead and speed up decisions by taking everyone together by maintaining the sanctity of the Constitution reflects the mood of the nation while his reading that the people do not want drama and disturbance but substance sets the ideal tone for the functioning of Parliament for the next five years.

It is important that the Prime Minister who led a government side which evicted almost every Opposition member from the House in its previous edition has now changed the tone and talked about the need to build consensus. The fact that his party, the BJP, approached the people seeking 370 seats in the Lok Sabha which is necessary to amend key Constitutional provisions but were to contend with a number which does not suffice even to pass ordinary laws. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) mustered a simple majority with the help of the Janata Dal (United) and the Telugu Desam Party who joined the alliance as late as January and February, respectively, this year. It will serve the party, the government and the country at large if Mr Modi makes an honest attempt, and succeed, in creating consensus on important matters, instead of imperiously and unilaterally announcing them.

The PM's call for consensus is an acknowledgment that he will respect the mandate of the people. It is now for the Opposition, especially the INDIA bloc, to follow the PM in his shoes.

The Prime Minister's call for consensus is an acknowledgment that he will respect the mandate of the people. It is now for the Opposition, especially the INDIA bloc, to follow the Prime Minister in his shoes. The government almost had a free run in the previous Lok Sabha because the Opposition was an emaciated and divided entity. It has changed dramatically this time around: the combined Opposition's number comes close to that of the BJP which on its own commanded a majority in the last two Lok Sabhas. It is the unity of the INDIA alliance that impressed the voter who asked the Opposition

bloc to act as an effective check-and-balance mechanism in Parliament. The partners may be following different ideological moorings and may even be fighting one another on the street; but their performance within the House must align with the mandate people have given them.

The Prime Minister is on the dot when he says the nation needs speedy decisions and not drama; he is in fact reading the minds of the ordinary men and women who would want the government to be mindful of their travails. It has been widely perceived that unemployment and inflation are the two spikes that spoiled the calculations with which the party faced the general elections. There have been great announcements that ranged from elimination of black money to Make-in-India to Viksit Bharat but they failed to translate into action that would bring positive changes in the lives of the people. The people who run the government under Mr Modi will do well to realise that substance prevails over drama when it comes to governance.

A government side whom the people gave a working majority in Parliament with a warning to perform and an Opposition with an enhanced count with the responsibility to be effective and active are good news for democracy. What remains to be seen is how the two sides will honour their commitments before going back to the people for a fresh mandate five years later.

Is EAM ignoring TN concerns?

Just two days after external affairs minister S. Jaishankar was on Sri Lankan soil, exuding bonhomie with a wide range of political leaders, including President Ranil Wickremesinghe, 22 fishermen from Tamil Nadu were arrested near Deft Island and three mechanised boats, along with their catch, were seized by the island nation's navy. The fishermen, who have hence been incarcerated, had been on a long sabbatical till a week before that and were hopeful of making up for the loss incurred during the 61-day annual fishing ban when the Navy struck.

Of course, it has now become *de rigueur* for that Navy to pick up Indians from their traditional fishing ground in the Palk Straits that the latest seizure of boats has only added to the pile of over 150 impounded mechanised vessels stuck at various ports of Sri Lanka. While the fishing community in Rameswaram is angry over the detention of the men and their boats, what others are wondering is: What sweet nothing did Jaishankar whisper into the ears of Wickremesinghe and other Lankan leaders without expressing consternation over their Navy's recurring highhandedness.

Exulting over the latest sojourn of Jaishankar, who has already been there in January 2021, March 2022, January 2023 and October 2023, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said that the visit 'underscores the central place Sri Lanka occupied in India's 'Neighbourhood First' Policy' and spoke about 'deeper long-term economic cooperation.' It forgot that the real thorn in the flesh of diplomatic relations that needs to be removed is the continuing arrests in Palk Straits that have left the fishing community with a sense of insecurity and fear over the neighbour.

Since Jaishankar is very much aware of the persisting problem as he receives an SOS every time an arrest is made and asked to intervene, it is surprising that he did not take up the matter with the island nation's leaders. Don't the interests of fishermen come under the 'Neighbourhood First' Policy? If the MEA wants 'a stronger India-Sri Lanka partnership,' should not Jaishankar have sorted out the fishermen's problem first?

THE ASIAN AGE

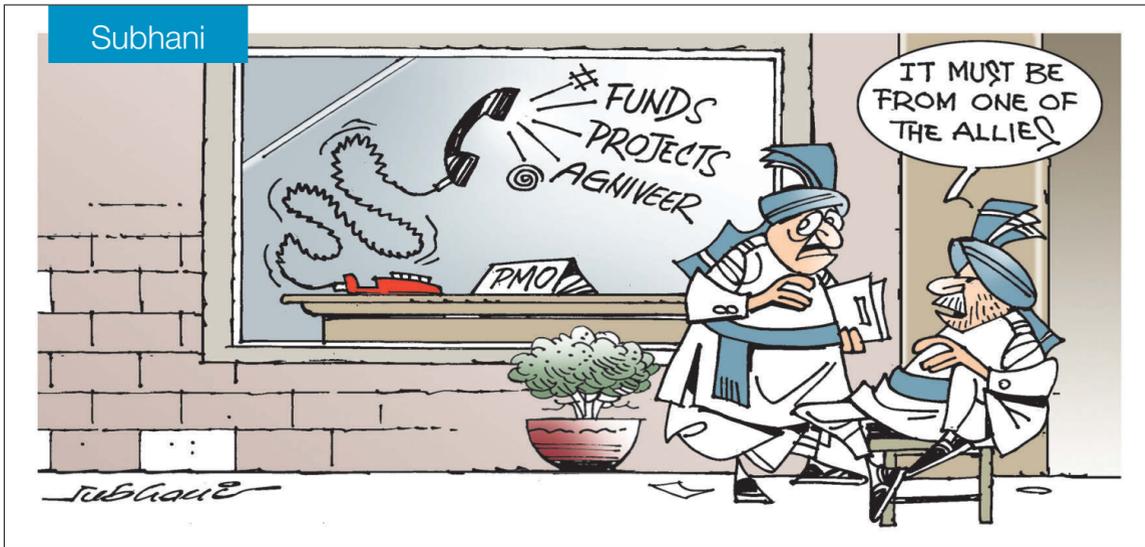
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Subhani



Politics of deep divides, prejudice & reservation



Shikha Mukerjee

The accusations of prejudice, amounting to negative discrimination against a Dalit candidate on the criteria used for the appointment of the pro-tem Speaker of the 18th Lok Sabha, a job that ends with the swearing-in of the 543 newly-elected representatives, expose the deep divide not only within the political class, but about social prejudice, justice and a dynamic interpretation of equality.

The Congress, probably in anticipation of a fight, declared that its eight-time MP, Kodikunnil Suresh from Kerala, who is incidentally a Dalit, ought to be the pro-tem Speaker, because that was what convention required. The BJP-dominated House, despite its minority status in terms of seats, insisted that its candidate, the upper caste Bhartruhari Mahatab from Odisha, best fulfilled the criteria of seniority that is used for appointment of the pro-tem Speaker, as per the Westminster model.

The multiplicity of ways in which a person can be identified creates the spaces for divergences and its consequent confrontations to proliferate, instead of celebration of the uniquely diverse population of India. This is as true for the appointment of the pro-tem Speaker as it is for the permanent state of collision over reservation for the backward classes, the socially and educationally underprivileged, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as well as the Economically Weaker Section, a category that was confirmed in 2019 through the 124th amendment to the Constitution.

Political and ideological differences on how the backward classes and the EWS ought to be identified and categorised, whether it should be an inclusive or exclusive identification, contributes to the di-

visions and parallel perspectives. No political party can afford to declare that it stands against the principle of reservation, which is India's solution through its own model of affirmative action on the millennia old problem of social discrimination based on the caste system, its endemic poverty, inequality and injustice. To do so would be politically suicidal because after 18 elections for choosing representatives to the Lok Sabha and more than 18 elections in almost every state for choosing legislators, the discriminated are fully aware of the power they possess and have learnt to exert as voters and as vote banks.

Ideologically, there are parallel perspectives on who can be identified as deserving of the benefits of reservation and how that can be accommodated in a structure with a 50 per cent cap put on reservation as a principle by the Supreme Court's interpretation of the Constitution. After the cancellation of reservation for Muslims based on the identification of sections of the community as belonging to the backward classes by the BJP's Basavaraj Bommai government in Karnataka in 2023 and the party's 2024 Lok Sabha election campaign spearheaded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who declared that reservation for Muslims was a Muslim League agenda that aimed to overturn the basic structure of the Constitution, there is no doubt that a line has been drawn. The purpose of the line is to exclude a community.

On the other side of the line are various political parties, most of whom are partners of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance and other regional parties that are now with the National Democratic Alliance headed by the BJP, like the Telugu Desam Party in

There are issues within the principle of reservation that need to be addressed as much by the ruling alliance as by the Opposition or the coalition that believes it is in wait mode to supplant the BJP-led NDA.

Andhra Pradesh and the Janata Dal (United) in Bihar. There are differences within these parties on what percentile of Muslims in states like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu will be included as beneficiaries of affirmative action through reservation, but the in-principle adoption of the right to reservation underlies the various legislation passed, regardless of the number of litigations and judgments by the high courts and the Supreme Court.

The 2024 Lok Sabha election campaign revealed that one other line has been drawn, creating a divide within the political establishment between parties that are for and parties against the inviolability of the 50 per cent cap put on reservations for the backward classes and the economically weaker sections. Unsurprisingly, the BJP, as Mr Modi campaigned, is against any change to the 50 per cent cap. Equally predictably, the Congress and the INDIA parties are for a change of the 50 per cent cap if it is justified.

The confrontation between defending the status quo, which is a conservative position, and the liberal-progressive perspective that change based on data for which a Caste and Social and Economic Census of the population is imperative, is a deep divide. It reflects an ideological conflict on democracy and the interpretation of the fundamental principles of equality and justice.

It is not enough for Prime Minister Modi to declare that he will defend the Constitution of Dr B.R. Ambedkar against those who want to overturn it. Nor is it enough for the Congress, JD(U), TDP, DMK, the Trinamul

Congress, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Samajwadi Party and the Left parties to insist that a caste census based overhaul of the principle of reservation and the inclusion of communities excluded by the original version of the reservation principle is necessary for democracy, equality and justice.

There are issues within the principle of reservation that need to be addressed as much by the ruling alliance as by the Opposition or the coalition that believes it is in wait mode to supplant the BJP-led NDA. In Maharashtra, for instance, there is the Maratha reservation demand that no political party in the state opposes, but at the same time, no political party has done the hard work of negotiating how that reservation can be brought about.

A national debate, not a campaign confrontation, is vitally necessary on reservation for the backward classes and EWS for starters. There is no consensus on how going forward, the backward or economically weak is to be measured, because all changes to the principle and the policies that flow from it on reservation-affirmative action have to be worked through for the longest possible term. The piecemeal approach that is reflected in the differences in state-legislated reservations and benefits that is the unfortunate fallout of the ambivalence within the provisions of the Constitution is messy and needlessly divergent.

While a "one size shop fits all" is neither desirable nor ought it to be advocated, a statement of principles and purposes based on a consensus is overdue in that part of the divide that is liberal-progressive and committed to expanding, strengthening and deepening the fundamentals of democracy. On the conservative side of the divide, a statement of principles and objectives is imperative because within the NDA, a consensus on what constitutes affirmative action is quite impossible.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist based in Kolkata

LETTERS
5-STAR ABOMINATIONS

The Kaziranga National Park in Assam is now embroiled in a controversy over the proposed construction of three five-star hotels within its boundaries. The reports are that two of these hotels are by the Taj Group and one by Hyatt. These hotels come in between an important elephant corridor that would not only disrupt the critical habitat but also disturb the natural movement of elephants. It was also reported that these projects do not have the environmental clearances. There are many hotels around Kaziranga, and it is also just a two-hour drive from Tezpur, a major town. People who come to enjoy the wild rarely look for luxury.

Noopur Baruah
Tezpur, Assam

BARAMULLA TRAIN

ON JUNE 20, the Indian Railways achieved a big milestone by successfully conducting a trial run of an eight-coach MEMU train on the world's highest railway bridge, Chenab Bridge, in Jammu and Kashmir. This trial run paves the way for the beginning of regular rail services from Reasi to Baramulla. The Chenab Bridge is part of the Railways' mega plan to provide direct connectivity to the J&K Valley. This achievement is a monumental leap towards integrating the Kashmir Valley seamlessly with Jammu and the broader pan-India network.

Amarjeet Kumar
Hazaribagh

FIRST CASUALTY

THE UNION government has kept up its tradition of increasing the prices of some commodities after the elections are over. This time it is CNG. For the past 40 years, we have seen the government raise the prices of petrol, diesel and CNG only after elections. On one hand, it is unable to control inflation, while on the other, this hike will increase transportation costs, leading to a rise in prices of food and other commodities. Let's hope the damage is contained and it does not touch prices of fuel.

D.B. Madan
New Delhi

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.



Aakar Patel

After recent poll results, will we witness a change in 'Godi Media'?

After 2014 India became familiar with the phenomenon of the "Godi Media", a phrase coined by the Magsaysay Award-winning journalist Ravish Kumar. It refers to the media in the lap of the Prime Minister, whose name rhymes with Godi.

In his book of a few decades ago, American scholar Noam Chomsky wrote that the media in democratic nations was not really independent and did not do the task of informing the public, particularly about the overreach of the State. Instead, it engaged in what he called "manufacturing consent" in favour of the government and business interests. He said the mass media are ideological institutions carrying out propaganda, by reliance on market forces, self-censorship and without overt coercion, through a particular model.

The defining aspects of such a model were the following. First, that the media was owned by corporate interests; second, that its revenue model depended on advertising; third, that the government made it dependent by giving access only to a select few pliant reporters and anchors and by withholding licences; fourth, that this compromised and pliant media marginalised dissent and attacked the political Opposition, acting as a government mouthpiece; and fifth, it created "bogeyman" distractions that took attention away from real issues.

As may be noted by alert readers, all these conditions apply to the media in India. On some

of these, such as licencing and advertising, the media is even more dependent than that in the West. Having said that, it is quite revealing to see that the revenues of India's six listed news media companies has not risen in the last decade. The total sales of these companies in 2014 was Rs 6,325 crores and the total in 2023 was Rs 6,691 crore. The total profits in 2014 were Rs 761 crores and in 2023 they were Rs 254 crores.

Adjusted for inflation, these six listed companies (representing some of the nation's largest news channels and newspapers) are half the size they were in 2014.

So, the question really is: why is the "Godi Media" acting against its own interests? They have not only made no money or benefited in their business, but actually shrunk. There are several reasons that are obvious. Two of them are that the nature of the media has changed in the last 20 years. Online advertising has taken a large share and most of this is money that goes to two companies, Google and Facebook. The other reason is that the economy has not been in good shape, particularly the part of it related to consumption. Neither of these is disputable. However, I felt that to understand what was going on, I spoke to people in the channels. I asked them four questions: What incentives are there for channels to back the government and attack the Opposition? To what extent are news channel operations dependent on advertising (and other favours) from the government? Do

ratings generally indicate audience preference for content that is communally polarising over that which might be conventional news? Do ratings indicate audience preference for journalism that bolsters and justifies the government?

The answers I got were interesting. To the first two questions, the replies were that "if there were ways to make money, media would find a way to do so with a taller spine" and that "political pressure is not the number one cause, it is the broken revenue model". The broken model refers to the shrinking of media revenues that we have seen. Another reply was that "revenue from government has become dependency to large extent given falling revenues overall", and so one could not antagonise the hand that was feeding one.

Another reason was that large parts of the media were now owned by magnates like Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani, for whom the media was a side business and served a larger purpose.

On the second set of questions related to content, they said that there was no evidence to suggest that divisive or communal material received more TRP ratings compared to other stories, but material that was polarising did not lead to any dip in viewership, meaning that it was acceptable to the audience. Sometimes, however, what was in the news at the moment received "pick-up" when it was broadcast as hate speech. For instance, when the govern-

ment associated Muslims with the Covid-19 pandemic, it triggered a slew of coverage that alleged Muslims were deliberately spreading the coronavirus. They also said that the overt majoritarianism under Narendra Modi has produced a condition where "existent bigotry is given a platform to be amplified", as many channels now show. Interestingly, there was no evidence to show that supporting the government and attacking the Opposition produced higher viewership or was popular, so there was another motive for doing so.

This was the feedback that I was given when I asked what people inside why the "Godi Media" was doing what it was doing and I hope it helps readers understand the phenomenon a little more.

Lastly, the election results mean that the Opposition can no longer either be ignored or attacked in the way that it has been. For this reason, it will be interesting to see how it behaves from here on and whether there is any change in its behaviour. One hopes there is because as a journalist one has been witness to what has been undoubtedly the worst and most shameful phase of Indian journalism. It is a phase that we need to put behind us for the betterment of our democracy, our politics and our society.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar_patel

SHORT TAKES

PRINCESS ANNE IN HOSPITAL WITH HEAD INJURY

London, June 24: Princess Anne, King Charles' younger sister, is in hospital after suffering a head injury on Sunday, Buckingham Palace said, adding the royal was expected to make a full recovery from the incident which was believed to have involved a horse.

The palace said on Monday that the 73-year-old, the only daughter of the late Queen Elizabeth, had suffered minor injuries and a concussion following the incident, and was now recovering at Southmead Hospital in Bristol, west England.

77 MIGRANTS ON YACHT RESCUED OFF GREECE

Athens, June 24: A group of 77 migrants were rescued off a crippled sailing yacht after a large overnight operation in the southern Aegean Sea, Greek authorities said on Monday.

Nobody was reported missing or injured following the rescue between the islands of Amorgos and Astypalaia, Greece's Coast Guard said. Three Coast Guard vessels, four merchant ships in the area and two smaller private boats took part in the rescue after passengers on the yacht phoned emergency services for assistance. The nationalities of the migrants were not immediately known.

HOMELESS MAN TURNS IN \$2,100 IN AMSTERDAM

The Hague, June 24: A homeless man found a wallet containing around \$2,100 on an empty train at Amsterdam station and handed it to the police, receiving a gift voucher for his honesty. Hadjer Al-Ali, who has been homeless for 18 months, found the wallet at Amsterdam central station while he was "doing his rounds" looking for empty plastic bottles to exchange for cash.

Police said the 33-year-old turned in the wallet with "approximately 2,000 euros... but unfortunately no identity papers or anything that would allow us to contact the owner."

RESUMING TIES: IRAN AGREES TO BAHRAIN TALKS

Tehran, June 24: Iran and Bahrain have agreed to launch negotiations on how to restore diplomatic relations, the Iranian foreign ministry said.

Bahrain cut ties with Iran in 2016, following in the footsteps of Saudi Arabia after Riyadh's diplomatic missions in Iran were attacked by angry protesters denouncing the Saudi execution of a prominent Shiite Muslim cleric.

Iran's acting foreign minister, Ali Bagheri, met his Bahraini counterpart Abdullah bin Rashid al-Zayani on the sidelines of the Asian Cooperation Dialogue summit in Tehran.



Mark Butler

CURBS ON VAPE SALES IN OZ FROM NEXT WEEK

Melbourne, June 24: Australia plans to outlaw the sale of vapes outside pharmacies from next week under some of the world's toughest restrictions on electronic cigarettes, the health minister said.

The government had reached a compromise with the minor Greens party to get the legislated restrictions through the Senate this week, health minister Mark Butler and the party said. "Our world-leading laws will return vapes and e-cigarettes to what they were originally sold to the Australian community and to governments around the world as therapeutic products to help hardened smokers kick the habit," Butler said in a statement.

"From Monday next week, it will be unlawful to supply, manufacture, import or sell a vape outside a pharmacy in Australia," he said.

The ban applies to all vapes regardless of whether they contain nicotine. There are currently no curbs on what retail outlets can sell vapes. Many products do not disclose that they contain nicotine.



Firefighters work at the site of a burnt lithium battery manufacturing factory in Hwaseong, South Korea, on Monday. — AP

S. Korea battery plant fire claims lives of 22 workers

Hwaseong, June 24: Multiple powerful explosions set a lithium battery factory on fire in South Korea on Monday, killing 22 workers, most of them Chinese nationals, as it burned out of control for nearly six hours.

The blaze ripped through a factory run by primary battery manufacturer Aricell in Hwaseong, an industrial cluster southwest of the capital Seoul. It was eventually largely extinguished.

Eighteen Chinese workers and one Laotian were among the dead. The nationality of the remaining deceased worker was not yet confirmed, fire official Kim Jin-young told reporters, citing information from company officials.

The blaze began at 10:31 am (01:31 GMT) after a series of battery cells exploded inside a warehouse with some 35,000 units, Kim said. What had trig-

gered the explosion remains unclear, he said.

A Reuters journalist saw firefighters moving up to six bodies out of the factory. Due to the intensity of the blaze, rescuers were finding it difficult to identify the dead, Kim said.

Two people were being treated for major burns, officials at the scene said. Live TV footage showed firefighters spraying the damaged steel and concrete building. Parts of the upper level had collapsed, and large chunks of the building looked like they had been blown out into the street by explosions.

Aerial footage showed massive white smoke clouds billowing from the structure and explosions rolling through the building. Kim Jae-ho, fire and disaster prevention professor at Daejeon University, said the fire had spread too quickly for workers to escape. — Reuters

EIGHT KILLED IN INFERNO NEAR MOSCOW

Moscow, June 24: Two people jumped to their death from the top floors of a burning eight-storey former Russian electronics research institute on Monday and at least six others died in the fire, state-run TASS news agency reported.

Black smoke billowed from the building outside Moscow and flames roared up its walls. Some people were trapped on the top floors but were unable to escape. One man was shown jumping from the upper floor of the building by the Baza Telegram channel. Another, with serious burns, fell from the upper floors, footage published by Shot Telegram channel showed. — Reuters



Imran Khan

HASTEN HEARING IN TOSHA KHANA CASE, SAYS IMRAN

Islamabad, June 24: Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on Monday moved the Supreme Court, seeking an expedited hearing of his appeal against his disqualification by the election commission in the Toshakhana corruption case.

In December last year, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder challenged in the Lahore High Court (LHC) the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) ruling of disqualifying him for five years for not declaring Toshakhana gifts in his statement of assets and liabilities.

Barrister Ali Zafar, the lawyer representing 71-year-old Khan, on Monday submitted a request for an early hearing of the appeal against the former premier's disqualification, the Express Tribune newspaper reported. The application argues that the PTI leader faces ongoing challenges to his role as party chief following a disqualification by the electoral watchdog.

The petition also underlined that cases challenging the ECP's decisions are currently pending in Islamabad and Lahore High Courts. — PTI

Gunmen kill 20 in Russia's Dagestan

Moscow, June 24: A spate of attacks on churches, synagogues and police in Russia's Dagestan region on Sunday killed at least 20 people and injured dozens more, a regional official said, updating an earlier toll.

"As a result of the terrorist attack that took place yesterday in Makhachkala and Derbent, 46 people were injured, among them civilians and law enforcement officials," Dagestan's health minister Tat'yana Belyayeva said. "Unfortunately, 20 people had been killed," she added, updating a previous toll of 19.

The attacks have stoked

fears over Islamist violence in the historically restive North Caucasus.

Sunday's attacks come just three months after Islamic State (IS) group fighters killed more than 140 in a Moscow concert hall, the deadliest attack in Russia for almost 20 years.

Moscow said on Monday it had concluded an "anti-terrorist operation" and killed five of the assailants behind the coordinated attacks in Makhachkala and Derbent.

The incidents also had echoes of the kind of insurgent violence that marred the North Caucasus during the 1990s and 2000s. — AFP

Will act on gambling probe findings: Sunak

Edinburgh, June 24: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said on Monday he would act on any findings of wrongdoing from an internal investigation into a damaging betting scandal that could punish him further at a July 4 election he is expected to lose.

His Conservative Party trails the opposition Labour Party by around 20 points in polls and Sunak's campaign has failed to take off amid a series of mis-steps, including his decision to leave D-Day commemorations early.

The campaign has been further damaged by revelations that several party officials and candidates are being investigated for

allegedly betting on the date of the election before it was announced.

Sunak has said he was "incredibly angry" to hear of the allegations, which are being investigated by the Gambling Commission, and told reporters he was not aware of any other candidates being investigated.

"We have been in parallel conducting our own internal inquiries, and will of course act on any relevant findings or information," Sunak told broadcasters after a campaign event in Edinburgh.

Labour leader Keir Starmer criticised Sunak's handling of events, saying it showed weakness. — Reuters

Israel to wind down ops in Gaza, target Lebanon

Israel strikes kill 11 in Gaza, tanks push further into Rafah

Jerusalem, Cairo, June 24: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that the current phase of fighting against Hamas in Gaza is winding down, setting the stage to send more troops to its northern border to confront the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

The comments threatened to further heighten the tensions between Israel and Hezbollah at a time when they appear to be moving closer to war. Netanyahu also signalled that there is no end in sight for the grinding war in Gaza.

Meanwhile, two Israeli air strikes targeting aid supplies killed at least 11 Palestinians in Gaza on Monday, medics said, as Israeli tanks pushed deeper into Rafah in the south and fought their way back into areas in the north they had already subdued months ago.

One strike at a food distribution centre in Gaza City, near the Shati historic refugee camp, killed three people. Another, near Bani Suhailla town in the southern Gaza Strip, killed at least eight, including guards who accompany aid trucks, the medics said.

There was no immediate comment from Israel, which denies attacking aid efforts and accuses militants of causing harm to civilians by operating among them.

The Israeli leader said in a lengthy TV interview that while the Army is close to completing its current ground offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, that would not mean the war against Hamas is over. — Agencies



Displaced men walk with a donkey-drawn cart carrying their belongings as they flee the northwest of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, on Monday. — AFP

NEW VIDEO OF 3 HOSTAGES IN BLOOD EMERGES

Jerusalem, June 24: Crammed in the back of a pickup truck, smeared with blood, three Israeli hostages are being filmed by their captors.

This is how Hersh Goldberg-Polin, 23, and Eliya Cohen, 26, and Or Levy, 33, all abducted on Oct. 7, were taken, a video made public on Monday shows. Their kin, desperate for PM Benjamin Netanyahu to agree to a hostage deal with Hamas, approved its publication. — Reuters

Hamas' destruction is new stop on visitors' Israel tour

Kibbutz Nir Oz, June 24: A new kind of tourism has emerged in Israel in the months since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack. For celebrities, politicians, influencers and others, no trip is complete without a somber visit to the devastated south that absorbed the brunt of the assault near the border with Gaza.

Jerry Seinfeld, Elon Musk, Michael Douglas, former presidential candidate Nikki Haley, Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner are a few who have visited, at times posing for photos in front of burned-out homes. Many Israelis, including soldiers and security officials, are also visiting on organised trips.

● **JERRY SEINFELD**, Elon Musk, Michael Douglas, former presidential candidate Nikki Haley, Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner are a few who have visited, at times posing for photos in front of burned-out homes. Many are visiting on organised trips.

"It's our personal story, but it's also the story of all of the state of Israel," said Irit Lahav, spokeswoman for Kibbutz Nir Oz, who gives many of the tours. A quarter of the approximately 400 Nir Oz residents fell victim to the attack. Hamas militants killed more than 20 and kidnapped over 80. — AP

PALESTINIAN UNITY TALKS IN CHINA PUT OFF

Cairo, Ramallah, June 24: Reconciliation talks between Hamas and Fatah due to be held in China this month have been delayed and no new date has been set, officials of the Palestinian factions told Reuters on Monday.

After hosting a meeting of Palestinian factions in April, China said Fatah — which is led by President Mahmoud Abbas — and Hamas had expressed the will to seek reconciliation through unity talks in Beijing. — Reuters

ODESA WAREHOUSE AFIRE

A RUSSIAN CRUISE missile hit a warehouse in the southern port city of Odesa, sparking a fire over thousands of square metres (yards), Ukrainian officials said on Monday. "Rescuers are now working to prevent the fire from spreading to the entire building," governor Oleg Kiper said.

PRESIDENT VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY told the new chief of Ukraine's state guard service to clear its ranks of people discrediting it after two of its officers were accused of plotting to assassinate Zelenskyy and other senior officials, including military intelligence chief Kyrylo Budanov.



POLAND'S PRESIDENT Andrzej Duda is in China on a visit that brings the leader of a Nato member to a country that has backed Russia in its full-on invasion of Ukraine. "I am trying to maintain friendly relations with China. Poland has always had decent relations with China and I would like that to be continued," Duda said.

POLITICIAN ON TRIAL OVER NAZI SLOGAN

Berlin, June 24: A prominent German far-right politician who plans to run for the governor's job in an eastern state later this year went on trial for the second time on Monday on charges of knowingly using a Nazi slogan at a political event.

Bjorn Hocke was fined 13,000 euros (\$13,900) last month for using symbols of an unconstitutional organisation, a verdict his lawyers are appealing against. The trial that opened on Monday at the state court in Halle involves a second alleged use of the same slogan.

The first case centred on a speech in Merseburg in May 2021 in which Hocke, a high-profile figure in the Alternative for Germany party, used the phrase Everything for Germany! Judges agreed with prosecutors' argument that he was aware of its origin as a slogan of the Nazis' SA stormtroopers. Hocke, a former history teacher, has said he's innocent and argued it was an everyday saying. — AP

EU adopts curbs against Russia, including LNG

Brussels, June 24: European Union countries adopted a 14th package of sanctions on Russia that aims to close some loopholes and hits Russia's gas exports for the first time, EU foreign ministers said on Monday.

Western powers imposed sweeping sanctions on Moscow after Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which has been progressively ramped up since. The new restrictions on gas aim to reduce Russia's revenues from liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports by banning trans-shipments off EU ports and a clause allowing Sweden and

RUSSIA VOWS RETALIATION AGAINST U.S. FOR ATACMS MISSILE ATTACK

Moscow, June 24: The Kremlin on Monday directly blamed the United States for an attack on Crimea with US-supplied ATACMS missiles that killed at least four people and injured 151, and Moscow formally warned the US ambassador that retaliation would follow.

The war in Ukraine has triggered the biggest con-

frontation between Russia and the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and Russian officials have said that the conflict is entering the most dangerous escalatory phase to date.

"You should ask my colleagues in Europe, and in Washington, why they are killing Russian children," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. — Reuters

Finland to cancel some LNG contracts. The measures stop short of an EU ban on LNG imports, which have risen since the start of the war. — Reuters

UK | STUDENT Abnormal bursts of electrical activity in the brain trigger epilepsy seizures

World's first epilepsy device fitted in skull

London, June 24: A scholar from England has made medical history as the first in the world with severe epilepsy to trial a new device fitted in his skull to control seizures, it was reported on Monday.

The neurostimulator, which sends electrical signals deep into his brain, has reduced Oran Knowlson's daytime seizures by 80 per cent. Oran has Lennox-Gastaut syndrome, a treatment-resistant form of epilepsy which he developed at the age of three. Since then he has suffered

several daily seizures ranging from two dozen to hundreds, the BBC reported.

The surgery, lasting around eight hours, took place in October 2023. It was part of a trial at Great Ormond Street Hospital here when Oran, who is now 13, was 12. The surgery was part of a trial in partnership with University College London, King's College Hospital and the University of Oxford.

Epilepsy seizures are triggered by abnormal bursts of electrical activity in the brain.

The device, which emits a constant pulse of current, aims to block or disrupt abnormal signals. His mother, Justine, told the BBC he was happier and had a "much better quality of life".

"We've seen a big improvement, seizures have reduced and are less severe. He's a lot more chatty, he's more engaged. He's turned 13 and I definitely now have a teenager — he's happy to tell me no. But that adds to his quality of life when he can express himself better," she said.

Consultant paediatric neurosurgeon Martin Tisdall said: "We are delighted that Oran and his family have seen such a huge benefit from the treatment and that it has dramatically improved his seizures and quality of life." Oran is part of the CADET (Children's Adaptive Deep brain stimulation for epilepsy trial) project, external — a series of trials assessing the safety and effectiveness of deep brain stimulation for severe epilepsy. — PTI

NEW LEASE OF LIFE

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Oran Knowlson

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quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	77,341.08 0.17
Nifty 50	23,537.85 0.16
S&P 500*	5,483.93 0.35
Dollar (₹)	83.47 0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	105.74 0.035
Euro (₹)	89.50 0.13
Gold (10gm) (₹)	71,800.216 0.30
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	85.59 0.41
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.974 0.001
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.265 0.008

*As of 8:30 PM IST

MapmyIndia founders set up new biz ClarityX

Digital navigation firm MapmyIndia founders have set up a new entity ClarityX, which will operate in the domain of AI-based data analytics and consulting services, a top company official said. MapmyIndia co-founder and CMD Rakesh Verma said "We are now setting up an AI-driven data analytics and consulting company ClarityX which is independent of MapmyIndia, and will provide to all enterprises."



Route Mobile, Billeasy to offer metro ticketing

Enterprise communication firm Route Mobile has partnered with Billeasy E Solutions to provide WhatsApp-based metro rail ticketing services in Nagpur, Hyderabad, and Pune. Presently, 15 Indian cities have active metro services, and Route Mobile has now enabled WhatsApp-based ticketing services for four of them, including the Delhi Metro. The company first launched the service for Delhi Metro in 2023.

Musashi arm begins making axles for EVs

Musashi Auto Parts India, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Japanese firm Musashi Seimitsu Industries, said it has started the production of e-axles for electric vehicles (EV) in India. The company said it plans to invest a total of ₹160 crore in its EV business in phase I. This significant investment will be used to establish new assembly lines for EV transmission components and upgrade existing facilities.



Waaree secures order to supply solar modules

Waaree Energies on Monday said it has secured a solar module supply contract for a 412 MWp project. It will supply bi-facial solar modules with capacities ranging from 540-545 Wp (watt peak) each for the project, expected to be commissioned by March 2025, it said. "The company secures module supply contract for Acciona Energy's subsidiary Juna Renewable's 412.5 MWp Project in Rajasthan," it said.

India's CAB hits record surplus of \$5.7 bn: RBI

Services exports grow by 4.1% on y-o-y basis in Q4 of FY24

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, JUNE 24

India's current account balance (CAB) recorded a surplus of \$ 5.7 billion (0.6 per cent of GDP) in the fourth quarter (Q4) of FY24 due to higher service exports and private transfer receipts, said Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data.

The CAB, which includes activity around industries, capital market, services, and the money entering the country from other governments or through remittances, has turned surplus after ten quarters. A surplus is indicative of an economy that is a net creditor to the rest of the world. A deficit reflects a government and an economy that is a net debtor.

The CAB was in deficit of \$8.7 billion (one per cent of GDP) in the third quarter of FY24 and \$1.3 billion (0.2 per cent of



● **CPI INFLATION** in 2024-25 is projected to be only 0.5 percentage point above target, and core inflation is extremely benign. The fight against inflation has understandably come at a cost to growth.

GDP) a year ago.

"Services exports grew by 4.1 per cent on a y-o-y basis in Q4 of FY24 on the back of rising exports of software, travel and business services. Net services receipt at \$42.7 billion was higher than its level a year ago (\$39.1 billion), which contributed to the surplus in the CAB during Q4 of FY24," said the RBI.

India's current account deficit (CAD) moderated to more than half at \$23.2 billion (0.7 per cent of GDP) during FY24 from \$67 billion (2 per cent of GDP) during the previous

year on the back of a lower merchandise trade deficit.

CAD is a measurement of a country's trade where the value of the goods and services it imports exceeds the value of the products it exports.

Meanwhile, the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (SLBC) can be more effective in financial inclusion through better coordination with government and NGOs in credit planning. Deepening financial inclusion and expanding credit availability are part of the goals for RBI's centenary, referred to as RBI@100, he said at the recent conference of convenors of SLBCs.

moting growth.

The CPI inflation in 2024-25 is projected to be only 0.5 percentage point above target, and core inflation is extremely benign. The fight against inflation has understandably come at a cost to growth, he noted.

Economic growth in FY25 is estimated to be 0.75-1 percentage points lower than the 8.2 per cent growth in FY24, he said.

In another development, RBI deputy governor Swaminathan J said that State Level Bankers' Committees (SLBC) can be more effective in financial inclusion through better coordination with government and NGOs in credit planning. Deepening financial inclusion and expanding credit availability are part of the goals for RBI's centenary, referred to as RBI@100, he said at the recent conference of convenors of SLBCs.

S&P retains India's growth forecast at 6.8%

New Delhi, June 24: S&P Global Ratings on Monday retained India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth forecast for the current financial year at 6.8 per cent and said high interest rates and lower fiscal spur would temper demand.

In its economic outlook for Asia Pacific, S&P Global Ratings said India's economic growth continues to surprise on the upside with the econo-



my growing 8.2 per cent in fiscal year 2023-24.

"We expect growth to moderate to 6.8 per cent

this fiscal year, with high interest rates and lower fiscal spur tempering demand in the non-agricultural sectors," the rating agency said.

For the FY26 and FY26-27, S&P projected growth rates of 6.9 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively.

S&P's estimates for FY25 is lower than that of the Reserve Bank of India, which earlier this month has projected the Indian economy to expand at the

7.2 per cent in the 2024-25 fiscal year.

While another rating agency Fitch estimates India's growth at 7.2 per cent in FY25, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) estimates India's GDP to grow at 7 per cent.

Moody's Ratings and Deloitte India estimates India's GDP to grow at 6.6 per cent in 2024-25 fiscal, while Morgan Stanley projects growth rate of 6.8 per cent. —PTI

PASSENGER VEHICLE BIZ TO GROW 3-5% IN FY25: REPORT

Mumbai, June 24: PV sales are projected to grow at a moderate 3-5 per cent this financial year on account of a high-base effect of FY24, shrinking order book and subdued demand for entry-level variants, according to the report by credit ratings agency CareEdge.

The robust growth of 90 per cent with volumes at 90,432 units in FY24, electric car sales in the passenger vehicle (PV) segment is likely to clock volume of around 1.3-1.5 lakh units in FY25, it said. In FY22 and FY23, the PV industry experienced substantial year-on-year volume growth due to pent-up demand post-Covid and new product introductions, it said.

Utility vehicles played a significant role, with volumes increasing by 41 per cent in FY22 and 33.2 per cent in FY23.

"Strong demand for new model launches and SUVs coupled with the expectation of interest rate cuts in H2 of FY25 is expected to keep the sales momentum rolling," said Arti Roy, associate director at CareEdge Ratings. —PTI

Fin. inclusion schemes review soon

New Delhi, June 24: The finance ministry has called a meeting of heads of Public Sector Banks (PSBs) on Tuesday to review progress of various financial inclusion schemes, including PM Vishwakarma, Jan Suraksha and Mudra Yojana. The meeting is scheduled to be chaired by financial services secretary Vivek Joshi. According to sources,

● **TARGETS FOR** the PM JanDhan Yojana would be reviewed. Status of inoperative accounts under PMJDY and issuance of RuPay cards will also be reviewed.

the meeting would review the progress of various flagship schemes, including PM Vishwakarma, StandUp India, PM SVANidhi, among others.

Other financial inclusion related issues would also be discussed in the meeting, sources said.

Besides, sources said, targets for the PM JanDhan Yojana would be reviewed. Status of inoperative accounts under PMJDY and issuance of RuPay cards will also be reviewed.

Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) offers life insurance

cover of ₹2 lakh, in case of death due to any reason, to people in the age group of 18-50 years, having a bank or post office account. On the other hand, pradhan mantri suraksha bima yojana offers insurance cover of ₹2 lakh for accidental death or total permanent disability and ₹1 lakh for partial permanent disability to people in age group of 18-70 years. —PTI

Sebi lens on Quant Mutual Fund

New Delhi, June 24: Quant Mutual Fund has said it is being enquired by markets watchdog Sebi and it is fully committed to cooperating with the regulator throughout any review.

The statement came after the media reported that securities and exchange board of India (Sebi) is investigating Quant Mutual Fund over alleged front-running activities.

As per the reports, the regulator has conducted search and seizure operations at Quant Mutual Fund's office in Mumbai and Hyderabad.



Front-running refers to an illegal practice in the stock market where an entity trades based on advanced information from a broker or analyst before the information is made available to its clients. In a note to investors late

last night on Sunday, the fund house said, "Recently, Quant Mutual Fund has received inquiries from Sebi, and we want to address any concerns you may have regarding this matter."

"We want to assure you that Quant Mutual Fund is a regulated entity, and we are always fully committed to cooperating with the regulator throughout any review.

We will provide all necessary support and continue to furnish data to Sebi on a regular and as-needed basis," the fund house said. —PTI

DIGITAL | AIDE Tech built with firm's advanced large language model

Meta brings AI to WA, FB, Insta

New Delhi, June 24: Meta on Monday announced the availability of its AI assistant 'Meta AI' in India on WhatsApp, Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, and meta.ai portal.

With this, people can use Meta AI in feeds and chats across its apps to get things done, create content, and deep dive into topics, without having to leave the app they are using, according to a statement by the social media.

"Meta AI, a AI assistants, now arrives in India on WhatsApp, Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, and meta.ai. And it's built with Meta Llama 3, our most advanced LLM to date," Meta said announcing the rollout in India in English.



● **THE COMPANY** first announced Meta AI at last year's Connect, and since April, it has been bringing the latest version of Meta AI built with Llama 3 to users across the world.

The company first announced Meta AI at last year's Connect, and since April, it has been bringing the latest version of Meta AI built with Llama 3 to users across the world.

"With our most powerful large language model (LLM) under the hood, Meta AI is better than ever. We're share our next-generation assistant with even more people and can't wait to see how it

enhances people's lives," it said.

From asking Meta AI in WhatsApp group chat for recommendations on restaurants, to seeking ideas on places to stop on a road trip, or even asking Meta AI on the web to create a multiple choice test, Meta AI works in multiple ways for users.

"Moving into your first apartment? Ask Meta AI to 'imagine' the aesthetic

you want so that you can create a mood board of AI-generated images for inspiration on your furniture shopping," the Meta announcement said citing examples.

Users can also access Meta AI when scrolling through Facebook feeds. "Come across a post you're interested in? You can ask Meta AI for more info right from the post. So if you see a photo of the northern lights in Iceland, you can ask Meta AI what time of year is best to check out the aurora borealis," it said.

On the Meta AI's imagine feature, it said, using the word imagine while interacting with Meta AI directly or in a group chat, can help users create and share images. —PTI

Adani Group sees big opportunity in infra

New Delhi, June 24: Adani Group's chairperson Gautam Adani on Monday cited record earnings, robust cash positions and the lowest debt ratios to state that his conglomerate was stronger than ever.

Adani group being an infrastructure company at the very core, is well positioned to capitalise on the opportunities, he said. Speaking at the annual shareholders meeting of Adani Enterprises, he reflected upon the crisis his conglomerate faced last year following a damning report by a US short seller.

"We were faced with baseless accusations made by a foreign short seller that questioned our deca-



des of hard work. In the face of an unprecedented attack on our integrity and reputation, we fought back and proved that no challenge could weaken the foundations on which your Group has been established," he said.

"Typical short sellers target gains from financial markets. This was different. It was a two-sided attack and dragging us into a political battlefield," Gautam Adani said. —PTI



PROSUS WRITES OFF ITS INVESTMENT IN START-UP BYJU'S

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JUNE 24

Private equity investor Prosus has written-off its investment in ed-tech start-up Byju's. The company had a 9.6 per cent stake in Byju's.

The investor has written-off the investment due to a significant decline in the ed-tech giant's equity value. "A fair value loss of \$493 million was recognised in other comprehensive income in the current year," Prosus said. Prosus had invested over \$500 million.

Prosus is also fighting a legal battle with Byju's in Karnataka High Court after the ed-tech firm filed a petition dragging a group of investors on an extraordinary general meeting seeking CEO Raveendran's removal from the company.

The investor had written-off a 19.4 per cent stake in Zest Money in 2023. It has invested a total \$8.9 billion in India since 2018.

Prosus also holds a 32.6 per cent stake in Swiggy which is set to make its public debut. Prosus operates and owns PayU, which reported a 22 per cent year-on-year growth on a consolidated basis to \$1.1 billion in FY24.

CRICKHIT



ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP

SHORT SINGLES

Prioritise national duty: WI skipper

Their T20 World Cup campaign may be over but West Indies skipper Rovman Powell has hailed the team for bringing "buzz" back to the Caribbean cricket and urged his players to prioritise national duty over the lure of franchise commitments.

"There's a buzz around the region now in playing for West Indies so hopefully that continues, hopefully we continue on the right path," Powell said.

Powell acknowledged the allure and financial incentives of franchise cricket, which make it challenging for the West Indies, a smaller cricket board, to consistently field their best team.

"It's been good so far for the last year or two. Hopefully guys can always and will mainly choose to play for West Indies. It's always a case for me as a captain to continue to motivate guys to play for West Indies. "The driving force of franchise cricket and the money that comes with franchise cricket make it always difficult for a small board like West Indies to field their best team," he added.

Minister denies SL team club visit

Sri Lankan Sports Minister Sharin Fernando on Monday challenged the critics to prove that the alleged night club visit had caused the cricket team's premature exit in the ongoing T20 World Cup in the Americas. Sri Lanka could not progress to the Super 8s stage, finishing third in Group 'D' behind South Africa and Bangladesh, who made the grade.

"I challenged them (critics) to prove it, and I will resign if they can prove it," Fernando said referring to a comment reportedly made by his predecessor.

It has been alleged that the team was late for a practice session due to their late night-out.

Fernando had taken over the ministry in November 2023 from Roshan Ranasinghe, who was removed from the post by president Ranil Wickremesinghe following his action to sack the Sri Lanka Cricket management and appoint an interim committee.

The International Cricket Council had subsequently suspend Sri Lanka's membership due to government interference.

PCB set for change after WC flop show

Pakistan's shambolic T20 World Cup campaign in the USA is all set to trigger a churning in the country's cricket board and lead to the formulation of a code of conduct for players, who are drawing criticism for taking their families along and making paid appearances at promotional events during the tournament.

A reliable source in the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) confirmed that Chairman Mohsin Naqvi is livid with the performance of some senior officials and held them responsible for the indiscipline prevailing in the team, which could not go beyond the league stage. "You can expect the PCB to lose senior management level officials and also enforce some strict policies for the players in future," the source said.

He said a policy decision on players not being allowed to have their families in ICC and other major events is also expected to be announced soon by the PCB as part of its clean-up operation.

ROHOT SHARMA

Captain's knock from Rohit puts India in semis

MOSES KONDETY
GROS ISLET (ST LUCIA),
JUNE 24

India dealt a body blow to Australia, beating them by 24 runs to put them in danger of crashing out of the T20 World Cup. Chasing India's imposing 205 for 5, the Aussies could only manage 181 for 7 at the Darren Sammy National Cricket Stadium.

The win put India in the semifinals, in which they will play England in Guyana on Thursday. It will be a repeat of the 2022 T20 World Cup semifinal in Adelaide (Australia), which eventual champions England had won by 10 wickets.

On Monday, opener Travis Head played a good hand and kept Australia in the game till the 17th over, in which he got out after blasting a 43-ball 76 that contained nine fours and four sixes.

Arshdeep Singh got David Warner (6) in the very first over but failed to hold on to a catch on his follow through that let captain Mitchell Marsh (37) off in third over. The Australian cashed in on the chance to thump two boundaries and a six in that over.

From the other end, Travis Head turned the heat on Jasprit Bumrah, hitting him for three boundaries in the fourth over. The Indian spearhead had the last laugh though, dismissing the dangerman with a slower one which the Aussie skied to Rohit Sharma.

Earlier, India went past 200 thanks to Rohit's pyrotechnics with the bat. Opening the innings, the Indian captain cut the Aussies to size with some power hitting — 92 runs in 41 balls, 7x4, 8x6. The right hander switched to charge mode as early as the third over, in which he slammed fast bowler Mitchell Starc for four sixes and a boundary.

However, pacer Josh Hazlewood pulled it back for Australia by conceding



Captain Rohit Sharma plays a shot during India's Super Eight match against Australia at the Darren Sammy Cricket Ground in Gros Islet, Saint Lucia, on Monday. — AP

just two runs in the next over.

Mitchell Marsh pressed in pacer Pat Cummins into the attack. Rohit welcomed him by hitting the first ball onto the roof of the stadium. Four more boundaries and a single

took him to his half-century, the fastest of the tournament, in just 19 balls.

Marsh threw everything at the Indians, without success. Leg-spinner Adam Zampa came into the attack and went for 16 runs that included two

sixes by Rohit. Seamer Marcus Stoinis too could not stem the run flow as the Blues raced to 114 for 2 at the halfway stage.

However, Rohit soon got out, to a Starc dipper delivered from around the wicket that angled in and

SCOREBOARD

India: Rohit Sharma b Starc 92, Virat Kohli c David b Hazlewood 0, Rishabh Pant c Hazlewood b Stoinis 15, Suryakumar Yadav c Wade b Starc 31, Shivam Dube c Warner b Stoinis 28, Hardik Pandya not out 27, Ravindra Jadeja not out 9. Extras (lb-1, w-2) 3. Total (For 5 wickets in 20 overs) 205.

Fall of wickets: 1-6, 2-93, 3-127, 4-159, 5-194.

Bowling: Mitchell Starc 4-0-45-2, Josh Hazlewood 4-0-14-1, Pat Cummins 4-0-48-0, Adam Zampa 4-0-41-0, Marcus Stoinis 4-0-56-2.

Australia: David Warner c Yadav b Arshdeep Singh 6, Travis Head c Sharma b Bumrah 76, Mitchell Marsh c Patel b Kuldeep Yadav 37, Glenn Maxwell b Kuldeep Yadav 20, Marcus Stoinis c Pandya b Patel 2, Tim David c Bumrah b Arshdeep Singh 15, Matthew Wade c Kuldeep Yadav b Arshdeep Singh 1, Pat Cummins not out 11, Mitchell Starc not out 4. Extras (b-5, lb-1, w-3) 9. Total (for 7 wickets in 20 overs) 181.

Fall of wickets: 1-6, 2-87, 3-128, 4-135, 5-150, 6-153, 7-166.

Bowling: Arshdeep Singh 4-0-37-3, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-29-1, Avar Patel 3-0-21-1, Hardik Pandya 4-0-47-0, Kuldeep Yadav 4-0-24-2, Ravindra Jadeja 1-0-17-0.

SUPER EIGHT

GROUP 1						
TEAMS	P	W	L	N/R	Pts	NR
INDIA	3	3	0	0	6	+2.017
AUSTRALIA	3	1	2	0	2	-0.331
AFGHANISTAN	2	1	1	0	2	-0.650
BANGLADESH	2	0	2	0	0	-2.489

GROUP 2						
TEAMS	P	W	L	N/R	Pts	NR
S. AFRICA	3	3	0	0	6	+0.599
ENGLAND	3	2	1	0	4	+1.992
WEST INDIES	3	2	1	0	2	+0.963
USA	3	0	3	0	0	-3.906

SA edge Windies to enter semifinal

North Sound (Antigua), June 24: South Africa's golden generation of white-ball cricketers took a big step towards erasing the "eternal chokers" tag by keeping their composure to enter the semifinals of the T20 World Cup, beating a formidable West Indies by three wickets in a thrilling rain-truncated Super 8s game here.

After part-time magician and full-time wrist spinner Tabraiz Shamsi (3/27), along with his slow bowling colleagues Keshav Maharaj (1/24) and skipper Aiden Markram (1/28), restricted West Indies to a manageable 135 for 8, South Africa achieved the revised target of 123 with five balls to spare.

The Proteas were 15/2 in two overs when rain disrupted proceedings. With this win, South Africa topped Group 1 followed by defending champions England as the second semifinalist from it.

Tristan Stubbs (29 off 27 balls), one of the most talked-about among young T20 batters, set up the chase in company of Heinrich Klaasen (22 off 10 balls) for the South Africans.

But it was Marco Jansen (21 not out off 14 balls), who hit a beautiful six down the ground off the first ball of the 17th over bowled by left-arm pacer Obed McCoy to seal the deal.

Equally praiseworthy was Kagiso Rabada's copybook cover drive off Roston Chase when South

SCOREBOARD

West Indies: K Mayers c Tristan Stubbs b Shamsi 35, Shai Hope c Tristan Stubbs b Marco Jansen 0, Nicholas Pooran c Marco Jansen b Markram 1, Roston Chase c Rabada b Shamsi 52, Rovman Powell st de Kock b Maharaj 1, Sherfane Rutherford c Markram b Shamsi 0, Andre Russell run out (Nortje) 15, Akeal Hosen c and b Rabada 6, Alzarri Joseph not out 11, Gudakesh Motie not out 4. Extras (b-1, lb-1, w-8) 10. Total (For 8 wickets in 20 Overs) 135.

Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-5, 3-86, 4-89, 5-94, 6-97, 7-117, 8-118.

Bowling: Marco Jansen 2-0-17-1, Aiden Markram 4-0-28-1, Keshav Maharaj 4-0-24-1, Anrich Nortje 4-0-26-0, Tabraiz Shamsi 4-0-27-3, Kagiso Rabada 2-0-11-1.

South Africa: Quinton de Kock c Sherfane Rutherford b Russell 12, Reeza Hendricks c Pooran b Russell 0, Aiden Markram c K Mayers b Alzarri Joseph 18, Tristan Stubbs c K Mayers b Roston Chase 29, Heinrich Klaasen c Pooran b Alzarri Joseph 22, David Miller b Roston Chase 4, Marco Jansen c K Mayers b Roston Chase 29, Keshav Maharaj Alzarri Joseph b Roston Chase 2, Kagiso Rabada not out 5. Extras (b-2, w-9) 11. Total (For 7 wickets in 16.1 Overs) 124.

Fall of wickets: 1-12, 2-15, 3-42, 4-77, 5-93, 6-100, 7-110.

Bowling: Akeal Hosen 3-0-31-0, Andre Russell 4-0-19-2, Alzarri Joseph 4-0-25-2, Gudakesh Motie 1-0-20-0, Obed McCoy 1-1-0-15-0, Roston Chase 3-0-12-3.

Africa required 9 off 7 balls.

"Lot of relief to get through to the semifinal. We would have liked to be a lot more convincing," said South African skipper Aiden Markram.

—PTI



South Africa's Tabraiz Shamsi (left) celebrates with teammate Aiden Markram after taking the wicket of West Indies batter Sherfane Rutherford during their Super 8 match in North Sound on Sunday. — AP

High-flying Afghans ready for Bangladesh

Kingstown, June 24: Afghanistan will watch the India-Australia clash with bated breath, hoping that the "Men in Blue" stand on the winning side — a result which will hand them a golden opportunity to qualify for the T20 World Cup semifinals when they take on Bangladesh in their Super Eights match.

Afghanistan augmented their chances of making their first-ever World Cup semifinal when they downed the mighty Australians on Saturday.

As things stand, India lead the group followed by Australia and Afghanistan — both on 2 points each — and Bangladesh are last.

Rohit Sharma and his men are favourites to qualify for the final-four with a net run rate of 2.425 while Australia (0.223) have superior NRR compared to Afghanistan (-0.650).

Rashid Khan and Co. will hope India do them a favour by beating Australia so that they enter the clash knowing exactly what they require to do for making the semi-

finals. But if Australia win, it will be an uphill task for Afghanistan to overtake the former champions on NRR. Having said that, Afghanistan will be super high on confidence having exacted revenge from Australia for their ODI World Cup loss last year in Mumbai.

Irrespective of the India-Australia result, the Afghans would fancy their chances against a down-and-out Bangladesh, who seemed happy just to progress to the Super

Eights. That Afghanistan have the skills and mindset to excel in the format is not up for debate. They have proved that they are no longer a side reliant on just their bowling unit to eke out victories.

Openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz, the leading run-getter, and Ibrahim Zadran have set the tournament ablaze with their sensational hitting.

Additionally, the Afghans are enjoying the conditions that the Caribbean pitches are

offering. Having a plethora of quality all-rounders has only helped their cause.

They will take on Bangladesh at the same venue where they defeated Australia and the spin friendly conditions will aid them.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, have already given up. Although they do have a minuscule chance of progressing to the semifinals, back-to-back defeats against Australia and India have deflated their confidence. —PTI

Germany survive scare, Hungary win

Frankfurt (Germany), June 24: Germany survived a scare to finish top of Group 'A' at Euro 2024 as Niclas Füllkrug's stoppage-time goal rescued a 1-1 draw against Switzerland on Sunday, while Hungary's Barnabas Varga suffered a sickening injury in a 1-0 win that eliminated Scotland.

Dan Ndoye's first-half goal in Frankfurt had put Switzerland on course to climb above hosts Germany into top spot.

But Füllkrug's late header ensured Julian Nagelsmann's side advanced to the last 16 in pole position with seven points. "In the end it's a well-deserved point. We did well to come back. We deserved it," Nagelsmann said.

"Niclas is important for us. It's important to have players who can score decisive goals coming



Germany's Niclas Füllkrug (second from right) scores against Switzerland during their Group 'A' match at the Euro 2024 in Frankfurt, Germany, on Sunday. — AP

as substitutes." In Stuttgart, meanwhile, Varga was described as being in a "stable" condition after a second-half

collision halted play for eight minutes while the stricken striker was treated by medics. The 29-year-old was sur-

rounded by worried teammates as red sheets were used to shield him as he lay on the pitch. The scene immediately drew com-

parisons with Christian Eriksen's collapse after suffering cardiac arrest during Denmark's Euro 2020 match against Finland.

Varga was stretchered off and taken to hospital where he was conscious but diagnosed with what was believed to be a fractured cheekbone.

The Germans, who last won the Euros in 1996, will take on the Group 'C' runners-up — currently slated to be Denmark — in the last 16.

Denmark, two points behind leaders England, play Serbia in their last group game on Tuesday.

Germany are also on track for a potential quarter-final clash with Spain, who have been among the best teams at the tournament so far. Switzerland have now made the knock-out stage in six successive major tournaments. —PTI

Young India for Zim tour: Gill to lead; Rohit and Virat rested

New Delhi, June 24: Dashing Assam batter Riyan Parag on Monday became the first north-eastern cricketer to get an India call-up as a new-look T20 squad led by Shubman Gill was unveiled for next month's five-match series in Zimbabwe which will not feature any of the senior stars. The series starting July 6 will be held entirely in Harare.

The national selection committee didn't pick any of the first team players, who are currently playing the T20 World Cup in the West Indies.

All the seniors like Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Jasprit Bumrah, Suryakumar Yadav and Ravindra Jadeja have been rested after a gruelling three-half months, including the hectic IPL.

Even the likes of Shivam Dube, Arshdeep Singh, and

INDIA SQUAD

Shubman Gill (Captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Abhishek Sharma, Rinku Singh, Sanju Samson (WK), Dhruv Jurel (WK), Nitish Reddy, Rivan Parag, Washington Sundar, Ravi Bishnoi, Avesh Khan, Khaleel Ahmed, Mukesh Kumar, Tushar Deshpande.

Kuldeep Yadav have been given a break. It is believed that the selectors want to broaden the pool of players looking at the 2026 T20 World Cup in India.

The announced squad marks a landmark for 21-year-old Parag, who had a stellar IPL season for the Rajasthan Royals with 573 runs which put him in the reckoning.

He became the first player from his state and region to get a call-up in a senior

national team. Joining him from the RR camp were his franchise captain Sanju Samson and Dhruv Jurel as the two wicket-keepers in the side.

Punjab skipper Abhishek Sharma, who had a mind-blowing IPL opening with Travis Head for the Sunrisers Hyderabad and his franchise teammate Nitish Reddy from Andhra Pradesh are among the three rookies in the squad of 15 where only Mukesh Kumar is on the wrong side of 30s. The average age of the squad is roughly around 25.

Reddy, a seam-bowling all-rounder is someone who the national selectors have been keeping an eye on for some time. His solid IPL performances and need to have some back-up plan for Hardik Pandya has led to his selection. —PTI

matinee

Rajini to collaborate with Salman in Atlee's next?

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Hrithik and Jr NTR's face off

Ayan Mukherji directorial will feature a thrilling one-on-one combat scene between the two stars

AGE CORRESPONDENT

The much-awaited face-off between Jr. NTR and Hrithik Roshan in *War 2* has gotten even more exciting.

Director Ayan Mukherjee has roped an ace stunt director, Anl Arasu, to do the climax sequence of *War 2*.

The film's plot hinges on the one-on-one fight sequence between the two actors, which Arasu, known for his high-octane action sequences in hits



like *Jawaan*, will direct. In a conversation with the Tamil publication *Vikatan*, Anl disclosed his plans. He is also going to make his debut as a

ARASU WAS EXCITED TO DIRECT JR. NTR AND HRITHIK'S HIGH-OCTANE ACTION SCENE, A FILM HIGHLIGHT.

director in Tamil cinema with *Phoenix*, starring Vijay Sethupathi's son Surya in the lead role.

As the dynamics play out, Aditya Chopra's *Spy Universe* the sequel to his 2019 blockbuster film *War*, is one of the most anticipated films, and it also marks Jr NTR's debut in Hindi films and the spy cinematic verse.



Pawan Kalyan with producer C. Aswini Dutt

VIKRAM SHARMA

Warning: Social media can be harmful for your mental health. Imagine this warning popping up each time you take to social media to watch or follow the content you like. Will it make any difference to you? Or will you continue to indulge in it anyway?

Dr Vivek Murthy, the US surgeon general, provided an interesting piece of advice.

Social media was contributing to an "emergency" mental-health crisis among young people, with increasing anxiety and depression symptoms and adolescents feeling worse about their bodies.

The surgeon general's warning label would say that social media is "associated with significant mental health harms for adolescents."

DOES VIVEK MURTHY'S ADVICE MAKE SENSE?

"While warning labels on social media can raise awareness about mental health risks, it's crucial to balance these with the recognition of its educational and social benefits," says Dr Prerna Kohli, clinical psychologist and founder of MindTribe.in.

She says social media, like any tool, has its pros and cons. "A warning label can help highlight the potential dangers, but moderation and mindful use can unlock its positive aspects."

HOLISTIC APPROACH

While warning labels are a step towards addressing mental health concerns, they should be part of a broader, more holistic approach, says Dr Prerna. "This includes promoting digital literacy, encouraging offline activities, and fostering open conversations about mental health."



A warning label for social media?

Cigarette packs and alcohol come with a health warning, but people continue to indulge in them. Could a mental health warning about the negative effects be helpful?

She says empowering social media users with tools and knowledge to manage their online habits can lead to healthier usage. "Features like screen time tracking, content filters, and mental health resources integrated into social media platforms can be beneficial," points out Dr Prerna.

COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

Social media has the power to connect individuals across the globe, foster communities, and support networks. "Highlighting and nurturing these positive aspects can mitigate some of the negative impacts," she says.



“WHILE WARNING LABELS CAN HELP RAISE AWARENESS, IT'S ESSENTIAL TO ALSO FOCUS ON EDUCATION, EMPOWERMENT, AND ETHICAL PRACTICES

TO CREATE A BALANCED AND SUPPORTIVE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT. BY ADDRESSING BOTH THE RISKS AND BENEFITS, WE CAN GUIDE USERS TOWARDS HEALTHIER, MORE FULFILLING INTERACTIONS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA.”

— DR PRERNA KOHLI, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

TURN TO PAGE 10

Producer asks T'wood to stay apolitical

Says, "Governments come and go, but demeaning one party is unfair. We are creative people, and we do our work to earn a living"

B.V.S. PRAKASH

THE ASIAN AGE

A top producer claims that the Telugu film industry should remain neutral since governments change in both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana every five years. "Telugu producers hosting parties to celebrate CM N. Chandrababu Naidu's victory in AP is unwarranted," he says.

"Demonising the previous Y.S. Jagan Reddy government as anti-industry is quite unfortunate," he adds. He asserts that the industry's association with the TDP is unfavorable, given that creative individuals have no political affiliations. "If I like a particular party and it wins, I should host a party at my home, rather than turning the industry into TDP sympathisers," he says adding, "We are creative people, and we do our work to earn a living."

"Many governments have come and gone, while all parties like Congress, TDP, BRS, and YSCP have done their bit for the Telugu film industry over the decades, and just demeaning one party is unfair," he laments. Another director cites Jagan Mohan Reddy's regime's industry-friendly decisions and also hikes ticket prices for star-studded movies.

“ANDHRA PRADESH IS MUCH CHEAPER AND OFFERS PUBLIC LOCATIONS FREE OF CHARGE FOR FILM SHOOTINGS, UNLIKE IN TELANGANA STATE,” HE SAYS ADDING, “PRODUCERS CAN SAVE ₹15 TO ₹50 LAKH BY SHOOTING IN AP, WHILE THEY HAVE TO COUGH UP ₹15,000 TO ₹3 LAKHS PER LOCATION IN TELANGANA, WHICH IS UNAFFORDABLE FOR SMALL BUDGET MOVIES.”

TURN TO PAGE 16

WARNING SHOT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

Stressing the need for encouraging social media companies to adopt ethical design practices that prioritise user well-being can make a significant difference. Dr Prerna says it must include reducing addictive features and promoting positive content. "There also needs to be a collaboration between social media platforms and mental health professionals, which can lead to the development of better guidelines and features that support users' mental health," she says.

DOES NOT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Madhulika Maniyar, a social media influencer and employee at Apple,



feels having the warning will not make any major difference. The warning must come from within. She wonders, "If we ignore the warnings about sugar, tobacco, alcohol, and preservatives, will we also ignore the social media warning?"

Social media is a boon and a bane, depending on what content you watch and follow. "There is content that will give you peace and solace, as well as make you feel confident. It's a personal choice how you interpret information on the internet," says Madhulika.

She feels it also depends on one's maturity level. "I've personally witnessed children fall into the trap of using fake IDs; social media is not to blame for this. I've seen my grandparents use social media to align with our lifestyles too; isn't this cool?"

She asserts that social media shouldn't bear the brunt of the blame. "It's also important to consider a person's lifestyle and surroundings. My advice would



YOUNGSTERS CONSUME SOCIAL MEDIA MOST FREQUENTLY, EXPOSING THEM TO BOTH REAL AND MISLEADING INFORMATION. EVEN CIGARETTE PACKS COME WITH A WARNING. IT DEPENDS ON WHETHER OR NOT CONSUMERS WANT TO USE IT."

— **DIVYA BOPPANA**, a fashion content creator

U.S. SURGEON GENERAL DR VIVEK MURTHY WANTS WARNING LABELS ON SOCIAL MEDIA APPS. "THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IS AN EMERGENCY — AND SOCIAL MEDIA HAS EMERGED AS AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTOR," HE WROTE.



be to restrict screen time and don't burden or overload yourself with social media," says Madhulika.

IT'S JUST LIKE SMOKING

Divya Boppana, a fashion content creator, believes that youngsters consume social media most frequently, exposing them to both real and misleading information. "Even cigarette packs come with a warning. It depends on whether or not consumers want to use it," she says.

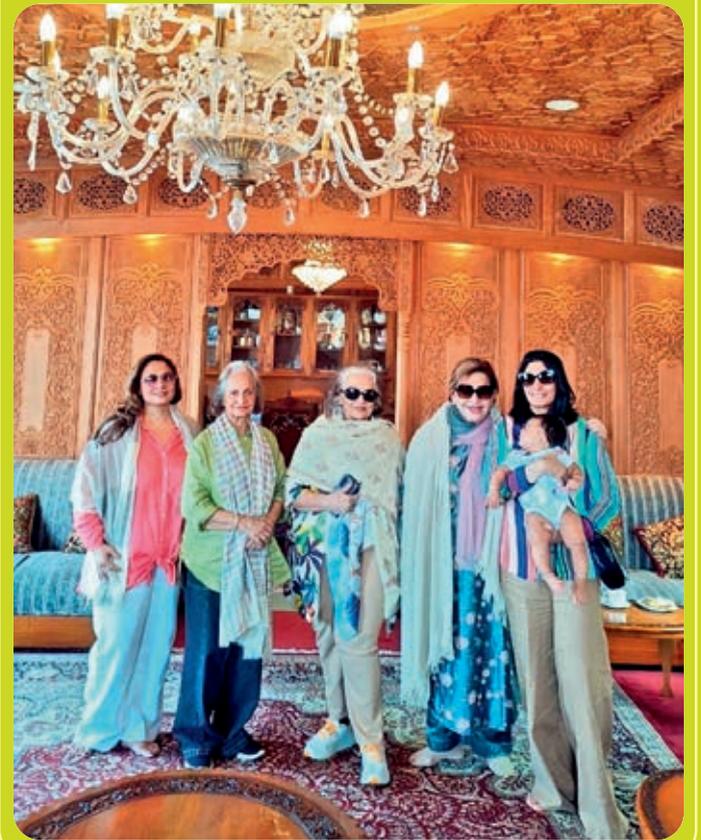
Divya asserts that although social media empowers numerous individuals, it also carries significant drawbacks. "People should follow mindful practices when it comes to social media use. They should know when to cut it off. The caution or warning sign should be there. But one needs to know where to stop," says Divya.

AI HELPLINE

IN 2016, FACEBOOK TEAMED UP WITH GROUPS LIKE THE NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE TO DEVELOP TOOLS TO HELP PREVENT SUICIDE. THIS COLLABORATION CULMINATED IN THE CREATION OF SPORTS WARNING SIGNS.

FACEBOOK USES AI TO DETECT POSTS THAT MIGHT INDICATE SOMEONE IS THINKING ABOUT SELF-HARM AND OFFERS THEM HELP, LIKE SUGGESTING THEY TALK TO A FRIEND OR CONTACT A HELPLINE.

OFF THE WEB



'Enjoying the houseboat in Srinagar'

The legendary actress Asha Parekh is having the time of her life in Srinagar with her her BFFs— Waheeda Rehman and Helen.

She posted a photograph to keep her fans updated on her vacation plans. The photograph shows the trio standing inside a lovely house. The chandelier and the exquisite work on the walls exude nobility from all angles. Needless to say, the actresses are lovely when posing for the camera. Helen wrote, "Enjoying the houseboat in Srinagar."

A few days ago, Asha Parekh also shared another photo from the same vacation. In that shot, the three friends were sitting in a garden, enjoying their meal.

SURPRISE DUET

Swift welcomes Gracie Abrams onstage; Travis Kelce unexpectedly appears on Taylor Swift's Tortured Poets Department set in London

Taylor Swift invited Gracie Abrams to join her onstage during her Eras Tour performance on Sunday night.

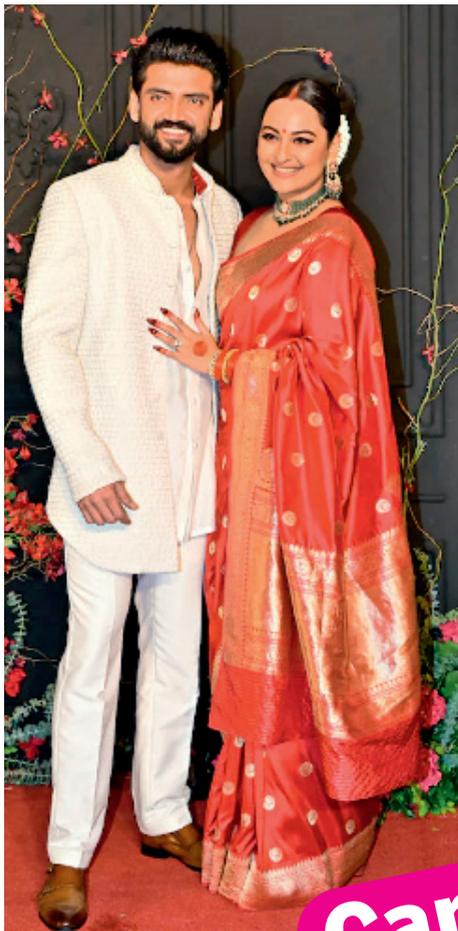
Abrams' second album, *The Secret of Us*, was released on Friday. She previously opened for Swift's Eras Tour last summer. The album includes the song *Us*, a collaboration with Swift.

Swift stated onstage at London's Wembley Stadium that she created the song one night while hanging out with Abrams, sipping wine, and talking about his life. Swift continued, "And talking about your life became this song."

Swift played guitar, and Abrams played the keyboard.

THE FOOTBALL STAR TRAVIS KELCE ARRIVED ON STAGE WITH SWIFT IN HIS ARMS WEARING A TOP HAT AND BLACK TAILCOAT TO LOUD YELLS AND ACCLAIM.





● Sonakshi Sinha and Zaheer Iqbal



● Shatrughan Sinha and Poonam



● Sanjay Leela Bhansali and Anna Singh



● (L) Aditi Rao Hydari and Siddharth



● (R) Daisy Shah

Captivating Moments

SONAKSHI AND ZAEHER WED IN A CIVIL MARRIAGE AT THE SEA-FACING BANDRA WEST APARTMENT WITH THE "BLESSINGS OF FAMILIES AND GODS"

The newlyweds — Sonakshi Sinha and Zaheer Iqbal — shared the news of their wedding in a joint Instagram post. "On this very day, seven years back (23.06.2017) in each other's eyes, we saw love in its purest form and dedicated to hold on to it. Today that love has guided us through all the challenges and triumphs... leading up to this moment... where with the blessings of both of our families and both of our gods... we are now man and wife. Here's to love, hope and all things beautiful with each other, from now until forever;" The bride and groom twinned in ivory: Sonakshi wore her mother Poonam Sinha's wedding saree and completed her look with a sleek bun and gajra, whereas Zaheer was dressed in an embroidered kurta-pyjama.

The newlyweds later hosted a reception for friends and industry colleagues at a fine-dining restaurant in Dadar. The reception was attended by film personalities including Salman Khan, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Bela Segal, Gulshan Devaiah, Reema Kagti, Padmini Kolhapure, Qureshi, Saqib Saleem, Siddharth Kak, Mudassar Aziz, Anil Kapoor, Chunky Pandey, Aanand L Rai, Kajol, Saira Banu, Sanjeeda Shaikh, Richa Chadha, Ali Fazal, Yo Yo Honey Singh, Ali Abbas Zafar, Raveena Tandon, Anees Bazmee, Vidya Balan, Siddharth Roy Kapur, and Tabu. Sweet boxes with a gratitude note from the couple were distributed to the media stationed outside the reception venue.

"Thank you for showering us with so much love, happiness and kindness on the most important day of our lives! Your support and wishes mean the world to us," read a message from Sonakshi and Zaheer.



● Salman Khan



● Vidya Balan and Siddharth Roy Kapur



● Anil Kapoor and Chunky Pandey



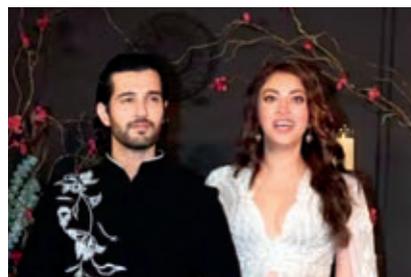
● Rekha



● Honey Singh



● Huma Qureshi



● Anushka Ranjan and Aditya Seal



● Tabu



● (L) Kajol (R) Raveena Tandon



WEDDING VOWS THAT ARE WOW!

TRADITIONAL NUPTIALS GET A PROGRESSIVE TWEAK, WITH GROOMS DONNING SINDOOR AND MANGALSUTRAS, BRIDES WALKING DOWN THE AISLE WITH MOMS, AND FEMALE PRIESTS SOLEMNISING THE UNION, HERE'S YOUR RSVP INVITE TO MODERN-DAY WEDDING VOWS

AGE CORRESPONDENT

Marriage is a celebration of love and companionship. And to keep up with today's progressive times, hubbies are now sporting mangalsutras and sindoor, while wives lead the wedding baraat to the heart-pounding beats of dhols and DJs. As dads gracefully step aside, moms steal the spotlight, guiding their daughters down the aisle. In a delightful fusion of cultures, interfaith marriages seamlessly blend various religious traditions into one joyous affair. In a world championing gender equality, social media allure, and personal expression, more and more lovestruck couples are opting for a delightful mix of tradition and modernity.

SINDOOR SEMANTICS

The significance of sindoor in Hindu marriage dates back to the Vedic era. The sindoor is believed to bestow luck and prosperity upon married couples, serving as a protective talisman against adversity. In contemporary marriages, sindoor retains its profound significance, albeit with a modern twist. Husbands are embracing a new tradition by asking their wives to apply sindoor on their forehead, symbolising mutual love, gender equality, and commitment. Actor Rajkumar Rao's decision to ask his wife Patralekhaa to apply sindoor on his forehead sparked a trend. It is hailed as a bold departure from conventional rituals. Many grooms followed suit.

Kush Rathor, a fitness coach married his wife Kasak Gupta in a traditional Hindu ceremony. What made their nuptials unique was when Kasak applied sindoor on Kush's forehead. Kush says he was inspired by Rajkumar Rao.

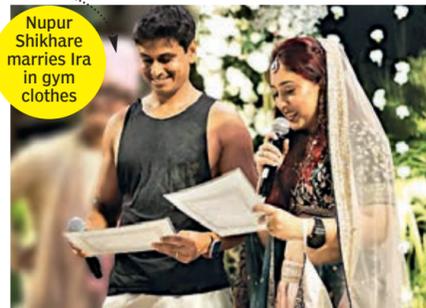
"When I asked my wife to apply sindoor on my forehead, it was not for fame but to make her feel loved and appreciated. Barring some negative comments, what mattered most was my wife's reaction. She was genuinely touched." Kush adds, "It was a spontaneous decision coming from a place of a sweet gesture. If it brings joy to your partner, that's what truly matters."

WOMEN LEAD THE WAY

Traditionally, fathers have been the stars of the wedding show, leading their daughters down the aisle in both Hindu and Christian weddings. But now moms are stealing the spotlight, adding a fusion of tradition and gender equality to the mix!



Patralekhaa applies sindoor to Rajkumar Rao's forehead



Nupur Shikhare marries Ira in gym clothes



Priyanka's mother walks her down the aisle



A female priest performs Dia Mirza's wedding

Take Katrina Kaif's big day, where her squad of six sisters strutted down the aisle with her.

Actor Raveena Tandon, beamed with pride as she escorted her daughter, Chaya, on her special day. Chaya's interfaith wedding was a talking point, where sindoor and mangalsutra made a cameo in a church! Priyanka Chopra shrugged off the 'desi' persona as she chose her mom, Dr Madhu Chopra, as her aisle buddy in her fairy-tale wedding to Nick Jonas. Ira Khan, daughter of Aamir Khan stirred up quite a storm by asking both her parents to walk

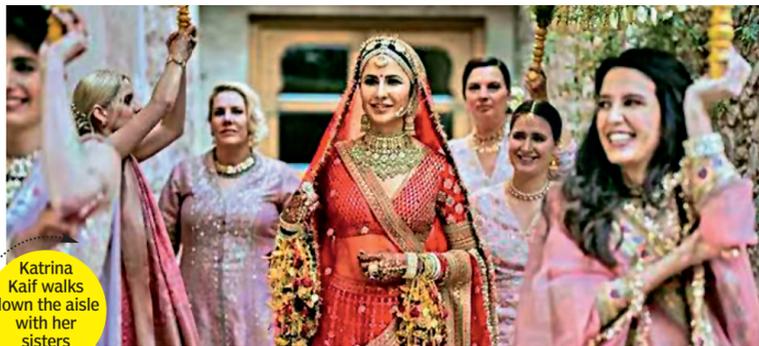
EMBRACING EQUALITY

In a land where Indian brides are often expected to be demure, quiet, and ever so submissive, some bold souls are rewriting the script with a bang - quite literally! Some Indian brides are making a bold statement by playing the dhol and leading the wedding baraat. Shilpa Sreekumar learned to play the Chenda (a percussion instrument) in Kerala which is predominantly played by men. "I was doubtful of how a female playing chenda at her wedding would be perceived. As I walked down

her down the aisle and opted for a Christian ceremony! Her 'fitness freak' hubby Nupur Shikhare paid homage to his profession as a fitness trainer. He ran 8-km to the wedding altar and married Ira in a pair of tank tops and gym shorts!

the aisle, my fear mingled with joy and I spontaneously picked up and played the chenda. It caused an element of surprise and shock among guests." Men are originally hired to play the chenda in temples and weddings. "Playing the chenda is a part of my identity. It fills me with joy when young girls consider playing it (chenda) in future," adds Shilpa.

Shalini Sen, an advertising professional, videographer, and creative director credits her staunch belief in gender equality to influencer modernity in her wedding ceremony. She says, "My husband and I share the same values and beliefs on equal responsibility and gender equality. We applied the sindoor on each other's foreheads. I was accompanied by both my brothers and sisters during the Saat Palak ceremony." Shalini says that she wanted



Katrina Kaif walks down the aisle with her sisters



Shalmali Kholgade's wedding garlands were made from the couple's photos



Shalini Sen and her husband flaunt their sindoors



Raveena Tandon walks her daughter Chaya down the aisle

the contribution of both genders to be recognised in the Saat Palak ceremony which is a Bengali ritual only carried out by the brothers of the bride on her wedding day. Traditional marriages with a modern twist are becoming the new norm, embracing personal expression and gender equality. From innovative rituals to unconventional roles, these weddings celebrate diversity and individuality, creating unforgettable moments that reflect the changing values of society.

ACTOR RAVEENA TANDON, BEAMED WITH PRIDE AS SHE ESCORTED HER DAUGHTER, CHAYA, ON HER SPECIAL DAY. CHAYA'S INTERFAITH WEDDING WAS A TALKING POINT, WHERE SINDOOR AND MANGALSUTRA MADE A CAMEO IN A CHURCH! PRIYANKA CHOPRA SHRUGGED OFF THE 'DESI' PERSONA AS SHE CHOSE HER MOM, DR MADHU CHOPRA, AS HER AISLE BUDDY IN HER FAIRY-TALE WEDDING TO NICK JONAS.

THE VOW FACTOR

- **KATRINA KAIF'S** six sisters walked her down the aisle during her wedding to Vicky Kaushal
- **PRIYANKA CHOPRA'S** mother Dr Madhu Chopra walked her down the aisle and gave her daughter's hand to Nick Jonas
- **RAJKUMMAR RAO** asked his wife Patralekhaa to apply sindoor on his forehead during their wedding
- **IRA KHAN** asked both her parents to walk her down the aisle, while her husband wore gym attire during the nuptials
- **RAVEENA TANDON'S** daughter Chaya's interfaith wedding had sindoor and mangalsutra included in the church
- **Singer Shalmali Kholgade's** intimate ceremony to Farhan Shaikh had garlands made of their old photos
- **DIA MIRZA'S** wedding to Vaibhav Rekhi was conducted by a female priest

“WHEN I ASKED MY WIFE TO APPLY SINDOOR ON MY FOREHEAD, IT WAS NOT FOR FAME BUT TO MAKE HER FEEL LOVED AND APPRECIATED.”

— KUSH RATHOR, fitness coach

“I SPONTANEOUSLY PICKED UP AND PLAYED THE CHENDA. IT CAUSED AN ELEMENT OF SURPRISE AND SHOCK AMONG GUESTS.”

— SHILPA SREEKUMAR, dancer, Chenda artist

“WE APPLIED THE SINDOOR ON EACH OTHER'S FOREHEADS. I WAS ACCOMPANIED BY BOTH MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS DURING THE SAAT PALAK CEREMONY.”

— SHALINI SEN, Creative Director

Problem of widowers



Widowers may experience sexual inactivity as well as feelings of shock, grief, blame... It's known as 'Widower's Syndrome'

✓ Girish is a shattered man, as he has experienced two devastating events in a span of three years. First, he lost his first wife three years ago to uterine cancer. Now he is unable to perform with his second wife.



DR D. NARAYANA REDDY

Girish was married to Neeru 17 years ago. His life with her was a joyous one. Good things never last. Neeru discovered she had uterine cancer about five years ago, but it was too late to detect it. Girish fought valiantly to come to terms with reality. Unable to handle the situation, he remarried. His second wife, Smitha, is fairly good-looking. Girish entered the bedroom with high anticipation and excitement. He failed to rise to the occasion. Smitha felt that Girish had cheated her by not revealing his sexual inadequacy to her before the wedding and walked away from home.

What Girish was experiencing is known as "Widower's Syndrome." In this condition, a widower finds himself wanting a new sexual relationship, which he is trying to establish after the loss of his spouse. This is the case even though there were no issues with the deceased spouse.

All widowers go through the following stages of an emotional roller-coaster: shock, grief, fixing blame, resignation, rebuilding, and finally resolution.

The widower might find he is out of practice sexually. Sex is a natural physiological response, but making love is a skill. Just as one cannot play tennis or piano very well after sever-

al months or years away from it, when a widower begins sexual activity with a new partner, he might feel awkward and need time to regain comfort and confidence.

Anxiety, guilt, and other feelings intrude, causing sexual problems. These challenges are not uncommon, and the man need not lose hope. Through practice, he can regain sexual comfort and confidence.

As he forms a new emotional and sexual attachment, the widower should avoid making comparisons between his new partner and his former wife. Your sexual and emotional experiences may differ from those with your ex-spouse. Idealising the deceased wife puts pressure on the new partner. It causes her to feel discouraged and unloved.

The widower's major sexual issue is the feeling that he is unfaithful to his ex-wife. He needs to realise that the fact he has sex does not mean he does not love his ex-wife; it means he is a healthy male who chooses to continue his life despite his loss.

By being positive and with determination and perseverance, a widower can bring back meaning to his life.

The writer is a sexologist. Mail him at dr.narayana@deccanmail.com

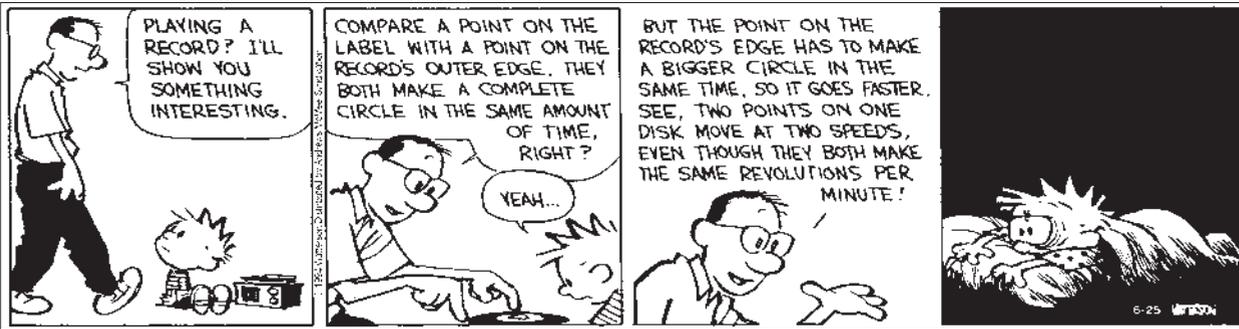
RELATIONSHIP ADVICE

Oprah Winfrey and Stedman Graham have been committed to one another since 1986—aka for more than 30 years. "He's kind and supportive...Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo. But you want someone who'll help you catch the bus."

— Oprah



CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



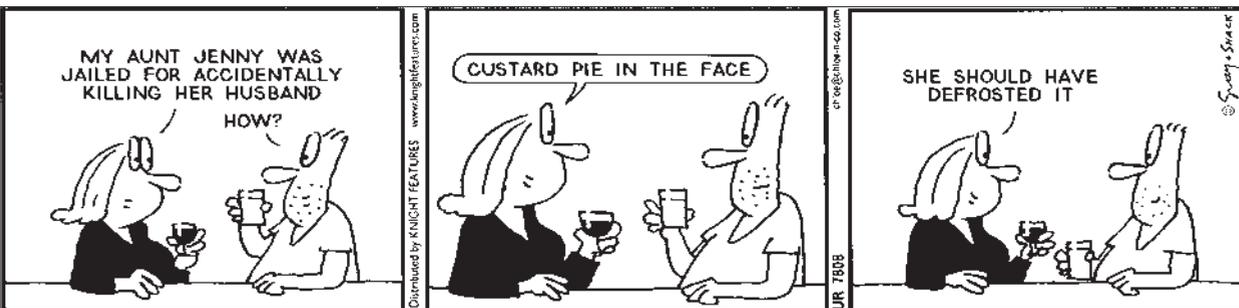
DOONESBURY | Garry Trudeau



B.C. | Johnny Hart



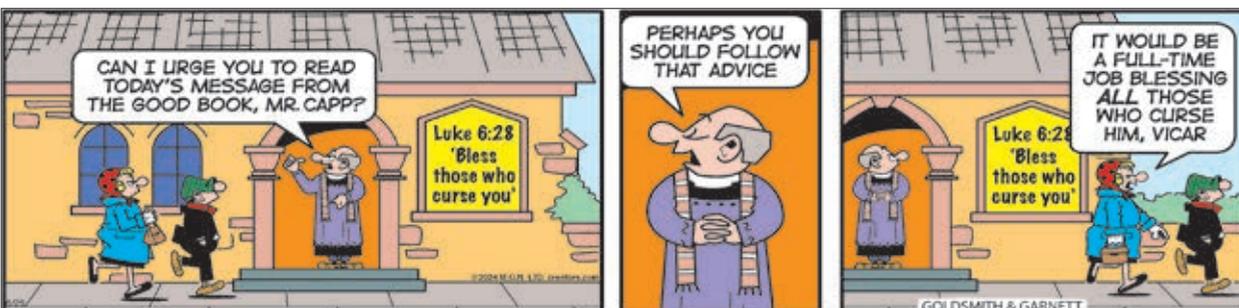
UP AND RUNNING | Gray and Shack



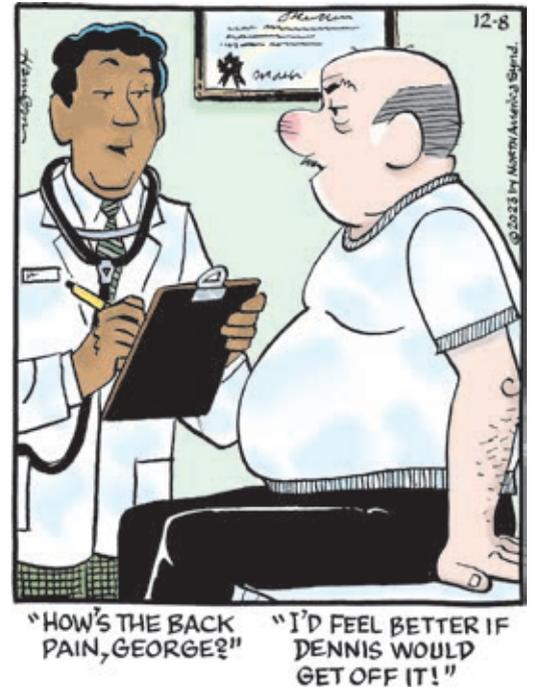
BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



Dennis the Menace



hocus focus



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Hand is not showing; 2. Man's shoulders are wider; 3. Tray is longer; 4. Handkerchief is different; 5. Knob on stove is moved; 6. Ear is smaller.

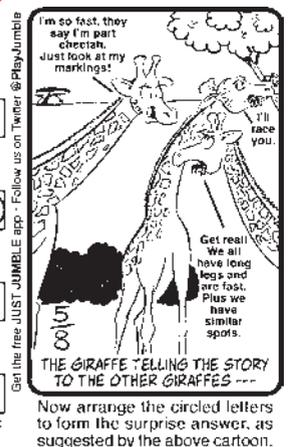
jumble

TFYAT

LUVTA

LANTEY

RLODAL



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

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(Answers tomorrow)
 Yesterday's Jumbles: EXUDE GRAFT MINION COUPLE
 Answer: The customers waiting to pay using their Visas, Master Cards, etc., formed a — LINE OF CREDIT