

# THE ASIAN AGE

LONDON MONDAY 15 JULY 2024



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Overconfidence hurt BJP's hopes in Lok Sabha polls: Adityanath at party meet



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More Bollywood celebrities are scoring invitations for global sporting events



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### WINDOWS



Charlize Theron during an event in North Hollywood, California, on Saturday. — AFP

### Massive Delhi BJP stir against power tariff hike today

New Delhi: Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva on Sunday announced demonstrations across all 14 districts here to protest against the imposition of the Power Purchase Agreement Charges (PPAC) and other surcharges resulting in excessive electricity bills. During a press conference, Mr Sachdeva accused the Delhi government and electricity distribution companies of failing to pre-purchase electricity for peak summer and winter demands, forcing residents to bear the burden of these additional costs. Calling for a judicial inquiry, Mr Sachdeva claimed that the PPAC was not part of the approved Business Regulatory Plan for power distribution companies until 2015. He alleged that its imposition is a result of corrupt practices between the Arvind Kejriwal government and power distribution companies.

Full report on Page 2

### Gaurav Gogoi Cong's deputy leader in LS

New Delhi: Congress' Gaurav Gogoi will be the party's deputy leader in the LS and a letter about the decision has been sent to Speaker Om Birla. Congress parliamentary party chairperson Sonia Gandhi has informed the Speaker about the appointment of the deputy leader.

Full report on Page 3

### Cops arrest 5 aides of Canada-based militant

Chandigarh: Five associates of Canada-based terrorist Lakhbir Singh alias Landa have been arrested, the Punjab police said on Sunday. Three pistols were seized from them, DGP Gaurav Yadav said. With this, the number of Landa gang members arrested has increased to 13, he added.

Full report on Page 4

### COUNTERPOINT



You got bail in one case and are booked in 50 new cases!

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## 20-yr-old shooter shot dead; 1 killed, 2 supporters critical

**Bethel (Pennsylvania), July 14:** Donald Trump survived a weekend assassination attempt days before he is due to accept the formal Republican presidential nomination, in an attack that will further inflame the US political divide and has raised questions about the security lapses. On Saturday, Mr Trump, 78, had just begun a campaign speech in Butler, Pennsylvania, about 30 miles (50 km) north of Pittsburgh, when shots rang out, hitting the former President's right ear and streaking his face with blood. "Fight! Fight! Fight!" Mr Trump mouthed to supporters, pumping his fist, as Secret Service agents rushed him away. His campaign said he was doing well and appeared to have suffered no major injury besides a wound on his upper right ear.

The FBI identified 20-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks of Bethel, Pennsylvania, as the suspect in what it called an attempted assassination. He was a registered Republican, according to state voter records and had made a \$15 donation to a Democratic political action committee at the age of 17.

Law enforcement officials told reporters they had not yet identified a motive for the attack. Both Republicans and Democrats will be looking for evidence of Crooks' political affiliation as they seek to cast the rival party as representing extremism. The shooting occurred less than four months before the November 5 election, when Mr Trump faces an election rematch with Democratic President Joe Biden.

The shooting whip-

### Former US Prez walks out of hosp

Washington, July 13: Former US President Donald Trump was out of hospital late on Saturday following a shooting earlier in the day at his rally where he was shot in the right ear. Mr Trump flew to New Jersey after visiting a local Pennsylvania hospital, landing shortly after midnight at Newark Liberty International airport. A video posted by an aide showed the former President leaving his private jet flanked by the Secret Service and heavily armed members of the agency's counter-assault team, an unusually visible show of force by his protective detail.

— Agencies

sawed the discussion around the presidential campaign, which had recently focused on whether Biden, 81, should drop out following a disastrous June debate performance. The Biden campaign had been seeking to reset its message, depicting Mr Trump as a danger to democracy for his continued false claims about election fraud but said on Saturday it was suspending its political advertising for now.

Secret Service agents fatally shot the suspect, ■ Turn to Page 4

### PAGE 6

► Shooting in US shocks world, leaders condemn

► FBI says officials haven't identified suspect's motive

► Shooter identified

► SS is probing how gunman got so close

## I am defiant in the face of wickedness, says ex-US Prez



Former US President and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump being shielded by the Secret Service at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, on Saturday. — PTI

## 'Deeply concerned': PM slams attack

■ Says violence has no place in politics ■ Kharge, Rahul express shock

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, JULY 14

Denouncing the assassination bid on former US president and current Republican presidential contender Donald Trump, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday expressed concern over the incident and said "violence has no place in politics and democracies". Lok Sabha Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi also condemned the assassination attempt.

In a post on X, Mr Modi said, "Deeply concerned by the attack on my friend,

former President Donald Trump. Strongly condemn the incident. Violence has no place in politics and democracies. Wish him speedy recovery. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family of the deceased, those injured and the American people."

In his reaction, Mr Gandhi said, "I am deeply concerned by the assassination attempt on Mr Trump. Such acts must be condemned in the strongest possible terms."

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge too condemned the attack and was quoted as saying, "Deeply appalled by the



Narendra Modi

attack on Mr Trump. I strongly condemn this heinous act. Such violence has no place in any democracy or civilised society. As India stands with the American people, we offer our deepest condolences to the family of the deceased."

Presidential elections in the US are scheduled to be

held this November. According to reports, Mr Trump is leading Mr Biden in national poll surveys conducted.

It may be noted that Mr Modi shared a strong bonhomie with Mr Trump when he was the US President. While support for India-US ties has been bipartisan in the US and backed by both Republicans and Democrats, the last few months have seen many irritants in ties between the Joe Biden administration and the Modi government on many issues, including the Pannun

■ Turn to Page 4

6 I was sickened by the shooting and my thoughts are with Trump, those at the event and all Americans. Political violence is never acceptable.

—Justin Trudeau Canada PM

6 I am appalled by the shocking scenes. Best wishes to Trump and his family.

—Keir Starmer United Kingdom PM

6 The attack was 'despicable' and such violent acts threaten democracy. My compassionate thoughts are also with the other people who were hurt in the attack.

—Olaf Scholz German Chancellor

6 I watched 'in horror'. The attack is also an 'assassination attempt on American democracy.'

—Benjamin Netanyahu Israeli Prime Minister

6 There is no place in America for this type of violence. It is very sick.,"

—Joe Biden United States President

## 3 personnel hurt in suspected Kuki firing ■ CM condemns attack CRPF jawan killed in Manipur ambush

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, JULY 14

A soldier of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) was killed and three others, including two personnel of the state police commando, sustained bullet injuries in an ambush by suspected armed militants in Jiribam district of strife-torn Manipur on Sunday.

Informing that the incident took place at about

9.30 am during a search operation, the police said that the militants laid ambush after a fierce encounter between armed miscreants and combined state and Central security forces.

During the incident, one CRPF driver, identified as Ajay Kumar Jha, 43, a resident of Bihar, was hit on the forehead. He was evacuated to Jiribam district hospital. However, the hospital authorities

declared him "brought dead". In the incident, another CRPF jawan sustained a bullet injury to his leg and two Manipur commandos also received bul-

let injuries. The injured have been shifted to Jiribam district hospital. The gunfight stopped at around 11.30 am. Chief minister N. Biren Singh condemned the attack and extended condolences to the family of the deceased soldier.

"I strongly condemn the killing of a CRPF personnel in an attack carried out by an armed group, suspected to be Kuki

let injuries. The injured have been shifted to Jiribam district hospital. The gunfight stopped at around 11.30 am.

Chief minister N. Biren Singh condemned the attack and extended condolences to the family of the deceased soldier. "I strongly condemn the killing of a CRPF personnel in an attack carried out by an armed group, suspected to be Kuki

■ Turn to Page 4

## Veteran Oli returns as Nepal PM

Kathmandu, July 14: K. P. Sharma Oli, a wily politician who has wrecked many governments in Nepal in the past and endangered ties with India during his first tenure, has a tough task ahead as the new PM amidst frequent political turmoil. Almost on predictable lines, the Oli-led Communist Party of Nepal - Unified Marxist Leninist, which is the largest party in the ruling coalition, withdrew support from the government led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'. — PTI

## Alcaraz beats Djokovic to win Wimbledon



Catherine, Princess of Wales, applauds Spain's Carlos Alcaraz as he receives the trophy after beating Serbia's Novak Djokovic in the Wimbledon final at The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in London on Saturday. Alcaraz beats Djokovic 6-2, 6-2, 7-6 (4) to collect a 4th Grand Slam title at age 21. Catherine made her second public appearance since announcing she was diagnosed with cancer. — AFP

■ Report on Page 8

## 'MP lungs of India': Shah at mega plantation drive

Inaugurates PM College of Excellence in 55 districts

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, JULY 14

Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is committed to protecting the environment in the country in the interest of future generations. He also launched the PM colleges of excellence in each of the 55 districts in the state.

Launching the mega tree plantation drive in Indore, in which 11-lakh saplings were planted in 12 hours, billed as a world record feat, Mr Shah said that Mr Modi has undertaken several measures to deal with climate change issues and protect the environment.

Mr Shah said that Gujarat was the first state in the country to create a separate environment department when Mr Modi was the chief minister.

The Union minister launched the record-breaking sapling plantation drive in Indore by planting a tree in Indore city.

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav and state urban development minister Kailash Vijayvargiya, who were present on the occasion, also planted saplings



Union home minister Amit Shah offers prayer at the Pitreshwar Hanuman temple in Indore on Sunday. — PTI

along with Mr Shah. The local administration plans to plant 51-lakh saplings in urban and rural Indore under the "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" campaign launched by Mr Modi recently.

Mr Shah said, "Indore is becoming a green city along with a clean city."

Indore has been adjudged the cleanest city in India under the annual Swachh Bharat Survey for the sixth consecutive year this year.

Mr Shah said Madhya Pradesh is the lungs of India, having 31 per cent forest cover in the country against the national average of 12 per cent.

This is why Madhya Pradesh has set new standards in the field of tourism, he said.

The Madhya Pradesh government plans to plant 5.5-crore saplings across the state under the same programme.

Later, Mr Shah also launched the PM colleges of excellence in each of the 55 districts in the state. He hailed Mr Modi's farsightedness in bringing in the New Education Policy with the aim of making India a developed country by 2047.

Speaking at the main programme held at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government Arts and Commerce College in Indore, which has been developed as a PM College of Excellence, Mr Shah said students must download the NEP document, as it will teach them to "think out of the box".



## IN BRIEF

## PhD scholar held for duping man of ₹20L

New Delhi: A PhD scholar has been arrested from Hyderabad for allegedly cheating a Delhi-based man of around ₹20 lakh by luring him into earning more money by completing online tasks, officials on Sunday said. The accused, Lakku Akhileshwar Reddy, is a resident of Telangana who is pursuing a PhD in business management and runs a flex printing business, the police said. "A complaint was received at the national cyber crime reporting (NCRP) portal where Akshay Kumar Singh, a resident of Dwarka in Delhi, stated that on November 23 last year, he received a message on the online messaging app Telegram about a part-time job," DCP Ankit Singh said. According to the complaint, the accused asked Singh to create an account on a website for buying and selling cryptocurrency and some prepaid tasks were assigned to him. "Following instructions of the accused, the complainant invested ₹20.16 lakh but he was cheated. Upon receiving the complaint, an FIR was registered and an investigation taken up," the DCP said.

## 'Kejriwal's health condition worrying'

New Delhi: The Aam Aadmi Party on Sunday alleged that there was an "acute" danger to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's health in judicial custody. Addressing a press conference here, Delhi Cabinet minister Atishi said Mr Kejriwal, who is a severe diabetic, has had his sugar levels falling dangerously low. "The BJP has conspired to put Kejriwal in jail in a fake case. There is an acute danger to his health. His weight has declined by 8.5 kgs and his sugar levels have fallen below 50 five times in sleep. This is a worrying situation especially for a diabetic," she said. "If Kejriwal suffers a stroke, if there is brain damage and permanent damage, who will be responsible," she said, claiming the AAP chief is unable to get proper medical attention as he is in jail.

## 2 killed, 1 hurt as pickup van hits bike

Ghaziabad: Two persons were killed and one injured on Sunday when the motorcycle they were riding was hit by a pickup van in the Vasundhara area here, police said. Three persons — Irshad, Shaukat and Sehwan — suffered severe injuries in the accident, they said. Shaukat died on the way to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital in Delhi, while Irshad died during treatment, they added. The victims were going from the city towards the Kanawani police outpost when a pickup vehicle coming from the opposite side hit the bike. — PTI

## SIX OF 'DIGITAL ARREST' GANG HELD FROM RAJ

Noida: The cyber crime unit of the Noida police has arrested six members of a gang involved in "digital arrests" and other fraudulent activities, including drug trafficking, illegal passport creation, and money laundering, from Rajasthan, officials said on Sunday. The gang's activities were traced to 73 complaints registered across multiple states, including Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Maharashtra, Punjab, and others, they said. Digital house arrest is a tactic where cybercriminals confine victims to their homes in order to scam them. Offenders generate fear by making audio or video calls, frequently posing as law enforcement officers using AI-generated voices or videos. The cybercriminals were apprehended from the Losal area in Sikar district, Rajasthan, assistant commissioner of police (cyber) Vivek Ranjan Rai said. "The gang operated by 'digitally arresting' gullible people and scaring them into believing they were involved in international criminal activities," Mr Rai said. "Investigations are ongoing, and relevant authorities in other states are being notified," the police officer said. — PTI

Delhi unit workers to protest outside discom offices in all 14 districts  
Mega BJP stir over power tariff todayAGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 14

The Delhi BJP will on Monday hit the streets across all 14 districts in the capital to protest against the imposition of the power purchase agreement charges (PPAC) and other surcharges resulting in excessive electricity bills. Addressing a press conference, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva accused the Delhi government and electricity distribution companies of failing to pre purchase electricity for peak summer and winter demands, forcing residents to bear the burden of additional costs.

The ruling AAP, however, said that the city has been getting free electricity up to 200 units every month. It claimed that even above 200 units, Delhiites were getting the cheapest electricity in the country.

Calling for a judicial inquiry, Mr Sachdeva claimed that the PPAC was not part of the approved



Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva addresses a press conference in New Delhi on Sunday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

business regulatory plan for power distribution companies until 2015. He alleged that its imposition is a result of corrupt practices between the Arvind Kejriwal government and power distribution companies.

During the press conference, city BJP chief released a copy of a letter addressed to the chairman of the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC). He called for intervention on

the issue of excessive PPAC, pension surcharges, meter charges, and load surcharges, which have collectively inflated consumers' electricity bills.

To protest against these charges, BJP workers will hold demonstrations at power distribution company offices across all districts of Delhi on Monday, Mr Sachdeva said. He also highlighted that since 2015, the PPAC has increased every summer

and winter for the relevant quarter, but it has never been withdrawn after the quarter ends. Starting at 1.5 per cent, the PPAC has now surged to nearly 45 per cent.

Speaking about the impact on the consumers, Mr Sachdeva said that Delhi residents are facing dual hardships, enduring a humid monsoon following a long summer and being forced to pay steep electricity bills. He noted that there has been significant public outcry over the bill amounts since April-May. A study conducted by the BJP in collaboration with power charge experts and Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) revealed that the PPAC has become a major burden for lower and upper-middle-class consumers.

The Delhi BJP has urged the DERC chairman to investigate the imposition of these increased charges despite power distribution companies already being profitable at the current per-unit rates.

## BJP urges govt to give vegetables at subsidised rates

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 14

In view of the abnormal rise in the prices of vegetables, the Delhi BJP on Sunday urged the city government to provide potato, onion and other basic vegetables at subsidised rates.

BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor in a letter to the food & civil supplies minister of Delhi, Imran Hussain drew his attention towards the price rise.

In the letter the BJP spokesperson stated, "Basic vegetables like potatoes selling at ₹40 to 50 per kg, onions at ₹50 to 60 per kg and tomato at ₹90 to ₹100 per kg and have gone beyond the purchasing power of economically weaker sections and the lower middle class."

## 3 held for posing as BSES staff, extortion

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 14

A momo seller and a property dealer were among three people arrested here for allegedly trying to "extort" money from a family by posing as officials of power discom BSES, police officials said on Sunday. They had threatened the Maharani Bagh-based family saying the BSES would file a case against them for using a residential power connection for commercial purposes, the officials said.

The accused had asked the family to pay a "fine" of ₹12 lakh, they said and added that this was reported to police on July 10 and a probe was initiated.

Shammi Chadha (62), a property dealer, Dilesh Kumar Paras (59), a momo seller, and Shakil Ahmen (46) were arrested after call records and footage from CCTV cameras were analysed, the officials said.

Penal sections related to extortion were added to the case during the course of investigation, a senior officer said.

The officer said in the footage of a CCTV camera, the accused were seen moving around the house of the complainant in the Maharani Bagh area in southeast Delhi on a motorcycle.

The owner of the motorcycle, Paras, was tracked down and his call records were analysed, the officer said and added that he was later arrested.

The officer said after he was interrogated, Chadha and Ahmen were also apprehended.

In the past, they were employees of a private company that used to work for the BSES to recover pending electricity bills. The accused were aware of the discoms workings, the officer said.

The officials said posing as BSES officials, they used to target people, including owners of under-construction sites, by threatening of filing cases against them for using residential power connection for commercial purposes.

## 50-yr-old dies of electrocution while repairing pole in Dwarka

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 14

A 50-year-old man died of electrocution while repairing an electric pole in the Dwarka area, officials said on Sunday.

The deceased has been identified as Ram Naval, an employee of Bombay Suburban Electric Supply (BSES), the police said. The incident took place in Dwarka's Mohan Garden area. Naval died due to electrocution followed by head injury as he fell from a height of 15 feet, they said.

PUC centres to be shut from today  
Operation of centres unviable, say Delhi petrol pump ownersAGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 14

Petrol pump owners said PUC centres will be shut from Monday onwards, expressing their dissatisfaction over the recent proposed hike in rates of pollution certificates by the city government. The operation of the pollution under control (PUC) centres is unviable, they said in a statement issued on Sunday.

Delhi government on Thursday increased the PUC certificate charges for petrol, CNG and diesel vehicles after a gap of about 13 years. The

hike ranges between ₹20 and ₹40.

The new rates will be effective as soon as it is notified by the Delhi government, transport minister Kailash Gahlot had said.

In a statement issued, the Delhi petrol dealers' association (DPDA) said, "Since the operation of PUC centres is unviable, many PUC centres have surrendered their licenses in the last few months. The managing committee of the Delhi petrol dealers' association has thus resolved to close PUC centres at their retail outlets across Delhi from July 15

in light of arbitrary and grossly insufficient hike in PUC certification rates, which will not in any way mitigate the losses of the dealers in operating the PUC centres," the statement said.

The Delhi petrol dealers' association, after eight years of writing letters to the transport department and the transport minister had earlier called for a closure of the pollution under control centres from July 1 due to its unviability, it said.

The association said PUC rates were last revised in 2011 after a gap of six years and the per-

centage increase then was more than 70 per cent.

"The rate hike announced by the Delhi government now after 13 years is merely 35 per cent whereas all our expenses in the operation of a PUC centre have increased multiple times with just the wages having increased three times from 2011 to 2024," the statement said.

Oil marketing companies have also been charging heavy rents from the PUC centres — 10-15 per cent of the total revenue — which was not the case earlier, the statement said.



Participants during an 'Olympic awareness run' as part of Bharat In Paris event at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

No declaration of result by NTA, answer key not yet notified  
CUET-UG retest for over 1K on July 19

New Delhi, Jul 14: The National Testing Agency (NTA) has decided to conduct a retest for over 1000 candidates of CUET-UG on July 19. The NTA had on July 7 released the provisional answer key of Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG 2024 and announced that it will conduct a retest for CUET-UG candidates between July 15 and 19 if any grievance raised by students about the conduct of the exam is found to be correct.

While the agency notified the retest schedule on Sunday, it remained silent

on the declaration of the result which has already been delayed by over two weeks with the final answer key not yet notified.

The delay in CUET-UG results comes amid a raging row over alleged irregularities in competitive exams, including Neet and Net.

According to NTA sources, the distribution of question papers in languages not opted by the candidates is one of the reasons for the retest and the 1000-odd candidates are spread across six states.

"Some of the grievances include time loss due to distribution of

under scanner for the alleged leak of Neet-UG question paper.

According to the official notification issued on Sunday, the grievances received from candidates up to June 30, 2024, regarding the CUET (UG) 2024 exam as well as the complaints sent to rescue@nta.ac.in between July 7-9 (before 05:00 P.M.) have been reviewed.

"Based on these grievances, a re-examination will be conducted for those affected candidates on July 19, 2024, in the Computer-Based Test (CBT) mode," the notification said. — PTI

A total of 250 candidates of the 1,000 CUET-UG aspirants for whom the NTA is conducting the retest are from Oasis Public School in Hazaribagh, which is also under scanner for the alleged leak of Neet-UG question paper.

wrong question paper," a source said.

A total of 250 candidates of the 1,000 CUET-UG aspirants for whom the NTA is conducting the retest are from Oasis Public School in Hazaribagh, which is also

## Teen boy shoots patient dead in GTB hosp ward

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 14

A 32-year-old man was shot dead by a teenager inside a ward of GTB Hospital here on Sunday, police said.

The victim, Riyazuddin, according to police, had been admitted to the hospital on June 23 and was undergoing treatment for abdominal infection.

The incident took place in ward number 24 of the hospital, the police said, adding that it was one shooter.

Riyazuddin later succumbed to the gunshot wound, the police said. "The PCR call regarding the incident in ward number 24 was received at the GTB Enclave Police Station," DCP Surendra Choudhary said.

"On reaching the spot, the police found that a patient, namely Riyazuddin, received an injury. He was later declared dead by doctors," he said.

The officer said around 4 pm, an 18-year-old man came inside the ward and fired at Riyazuddin. "Case is being registered and teams have been formed to nab the culprit. Prima facie, the matter seems to be of personal enmity," the DCP said.

IN RESPONSE to the incident, the residents' doctors association (RDA) of the hospital has announced to go on an indefinite strike from tomorrow on Monday

In response to the incident, the residents' doctors association (RDA) of the hospital has announced to go on an indefinite strike from tomorrow on Monday.

Meanwhile, Delhi health minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said a security review of all hospitals would be carried out and no negligence would be tolerated.

An official from the hospital said a few people showed the doctor entering the ward, shot the patient and fled.

A nurse, who was on duty and requested anonymity, said the teenager entered the ward at 3.59 pm and asked everyone to remain calm and not raise an alarm. "He took out a pistol which he had concealed behind and shot the patient and ran away," she said.

The nurse said the sound of the gunshot drew a crowd outside the ward and one of them informed the police about the matter.



Police personnel investigate after a patient was shot dead at GTB hospital in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

## 'Testimonies unclear': Court acquits man of rape after 9 yrs

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 14

Over nine years after a man was charged with rape, a Tis Hazari court has acquitted him, saying the testimonies of the alleged victim were not clear, cogent, credible or trustworthy, nor were her allegations corroborated by other material evidence.

Additional sessions judge Priyanka Bhagat was hearing a case against Mahender, against whom the Subzi Mandi police station had lodged an FIR under penal provisions of rape and

criminal intimidation.

As per prosecutrix, in 2014, Mahender took her to Nainital where he spiked her food, raped her after she fell unconscious and filmed the act. After the woman returned to Delhi, the accused threatened to circulate the video clip and raped her again at an under-construction building after keeping her in confinement, she claimed.

In its order, the court said: "...The testimonies of prosecution witness 12 or victim are not clear, cogent, credible and trustworthy and the same are not corroborated by other

material evidence," the court said in its verdict dated July 9. For the reasons stated above, this court is of the considered opinion that the prosecution has failed to prove the case against the accused beyond reasonable doubt. Hence, accused Mahender is hereby acquitted.

Underscoring that the prosecution's entire case was based on the statement of the woman, the court said there were some major contradictions in her version regarding the incident of spiking her food, which affected the credibility of her statements.

## Dusu politics heat up: Parties claim vandalism in office

New Delhi, July 14: The

RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad on Sunday alleged that some members of the NSUI, including DUSU vice-president Abhi Dahiya, ransacked the students' union office on North Campus. The police said they have received a complaint and will register an FIR. "A complaint has been received at the Maurice Nagar police station. The police will investigate the matter and act accordingly," DCP (North) M.K. Meena said.

According to a statement by the ABVP, Dahiya, a member of the Congress's student wing National Students' Union of India, and others ransacked the offices of DUSU president Tushar Dedha, DUSU secretary Aparajita, DUSU joint secretary Sachin Baisla, and the visitor room early Sunday morning.

"The attackers first consumed alcohol in the DUSU vice-president Abhi Dahiya's office and then vandalised the property in the DUSU office," the group alleged. The ABVP shared a video of Mr Dahiya's office with some empty bottles in it.

ABVP SAID, Dahiya, a member of NSUI, and others ransacked the offices of DUSU president Tushar Dedha, DUSU secretary Aparajita, DUSU joint secretary Sachin Baisla

The group also shared some recordings of the offices bearing marks of vandalism. The students' body demanded the DU administration remove Mr Dahiya from his position as the vice-president.

The NSUI denied the allegations and accused the ABVP of vandalising the union vice-president's office.

"Last night, several ABVP members attacked my office at Delhi University. Their reaction comes after I exposed the fake degree of the ABVP office bearer and DUSU president," Mr Dahiya said in a statement.

"The ABVP is conspiring to defame me and NSUI. I will expose this conspiracy by taking legal action and bringing the truth to light in court," he said.

He also demanded that the CCTV footage of the incident be made public. — PTI



A saint performs ritual during the Lord Jagannath Rath Yatra in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

**BJM chief explores poll pact with JD-U**

**Patna:** Bharatiya Jantantra Morcha (BJM) chief Saryu Roy on Sunday said he was "exploring" the possibility of a tie-up with Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) in the upcoming Assembly elections in neighbouring Jharkhand. Mr Roy, a former Jharkhand minister who had quit the BJP five years ago to emerge as a giant slayer as he defeated the then chief minister Raghubar Das in the 2019 Assembly elections, called on Mr Kumar at his official residence here on Saturday evening. After meeting the Bihar CM, Mr Roy wrote in a post on X, "Met the CM at his residence in Patna. A brief but fruitful discussion was held about our possible role (alliance) in the Jharkhand Assembly polls. A consensus has emerged to contest the Jharkhand Assembly elections together. The JD(U) leadership will soon take a decision on the remaining formalities." — PTI

**Badoli takes charge as Haryana BJP chief**

**Chandigarh:** Newly-appointed Haryana BJP president Mohan Lal Badoli Sunday formally assumed charge at the party office in Rohtak in the presence of Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini and expressed confidence that the BJP government will be formed for the third time in the state. The Assembly elections in Haryana are due later this year. Mr Badoli also said party workers will meet the people and highlight the achievements of 10 years of the BJP government. The MLA from Rai seat in Sonapat district was on Tuesday appointed the party's state president. Mr Badoli said party workers will highlight the achievements of 10-year rule of the BJP in the state. "We have brought a number of policies and taken many decisions for welfare of the people," he said. — PTI

**NDA govt enjoys people's trust Nadda**

**Lucknow:** BJP president and Union minister J.P. Nadda on Sunday said people have supported the party-led NDA government at the Centre for the third consecutive term as they aspire for a "Viksit Bharat". Mr Nadda was addressing the Uttar Pradesh BJP working committee meeting here, which was held to review the party's poor performance in the recently held Lok Sabha polls in the state. "People of our country have supported us for the third consecutive term because they believe in and aspire for a Viksit Bharat by 2047," Mr Nadda said. "In 2016, our party president had said that 'BJP is the party of Bharat's present and Bharat's future'. We must understand that the responsibilities we have are not momentary, rather these are our perpetual responsibilities," he said. — PTI

**CONG, BJP GEAR UP FOR BYPOLL FACE-OFF IN MP**

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, JULY 14

The ruling BJP and the Opposition Congress have launched campaigns for the upcoming bypoll to Vijaypur Assembly constituency under Sheeppur district in Madhya Pradesh. The two traditional rivals have geared up for a fresh face-off in a poll battle, a day after the results of byelection to Amarwara Assembly seat in the state were declared. Vijaypur Assembly seat has fallen vacant following the resignation of sitting MLA Ramniwas Rawat from the House, a couple of days before his induction in the Mohan Yadav Cabinet. Mr Rawat, a six-time MLA, quit the Congress ahead of the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections and joined the BJP. Chief minister Mohan Yadav launched the campaign of the ruling BJP in Vijaypur Assembly seat on Saturday by visiting the Hanuman temple in Cham Chama under the constituency. State Congress president Jitu Patwari along with the senior leader of the party Sajjan Singh Verma on Sunday held a meeting of local party workers in Vijaypur, initiating the process for selection of the candidate for the upcoming byelection to the seat.



Former Tripura Assembly deputy speaker Pabitra Kar and others pay last respect to CPM candidate for panchayat elections Badal Chandra Shil at party office in Agartala on Sunday. Shil was killed ahead of polls on Friday. — PTI

**Birla hails role of Indian diaspora in India's growth**

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 14

Appreciating the contributions of the Indian diaspora to nation-building in India, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Sunday opined that Indians living abroad are equal partners in the country's development and modernisation. Mr Birla, who was leading an Indian parliamentary delegation to the 10th Brics parliamentary forum at St. Petersburg, Russia, addressed members of the Indian diaspora in Moscow. Addressing the Indian diaspora, Mr Birla said that Indians living in Russia are the country's brand ambassadors and their actions, contribution, and achievements shape the image of India in Russia.



Om Birla

He further encouraged them to spread awareness about India's rich Sanatan culture, Yoga, ancient knowledge, and diversities among the Russians and to encourage them to visit India. The Lok Sabha Speaker recalled the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his interaction with the Indian community in Russia. He elaborated on how the present government has started a new era of change, development, and prosperity in the country.

Speaking on the relationship between India and Russia, he said that the bond between the two countries is based on the foundation of mutual trust and mutual respect. He further encouraged them to spread awareness about India's rich Sanatan culture, Yoga, ancient knowledge, and diversities among the Russians and to encourage them to visit India. The Lok Sabha Speaker recalled the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his interaction with the Indian community in Russia. He elaborated on how the present government has started a new era of change, development, and prosperity in the country.

**Traitor MLAs identified, to be punished: Wadettiwar**

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, JULY 14

Senior Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar on Sunday revealed that the party MLAs, who have allegedly crossed voted in the recent Vidhan Parishad polls, are from Mumbai and Nanded. A report has been sent to the party high command seeking action against them, he said. "It has come to our notice that some MLAs were not with us during the Vidhan Parishad elections. We have identified the traitor MLAs who were involved in the cross voting. We have found out their names. Among them, some are from Nanded and some from Mumbai. Their names cannot be disclosed at this time," Mr Wadettiwar said. The Congress was embarrassed for the second time in the Legislative Council elections where its five to seven MLAs suspected to have voted for the candidates fielded by the ruling Mahayuti alliance. "We have a list of people who voted for us, who didn't and who betrayed the party. Some MLAs did not follow the party order and we have been successful in tracing their names," Mr Wadettiwar, who is the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, said.

**EAM, Thai FM reaffirm pledge for strong trade & bilateral ties**

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 14

Ahead of the Bimstec summit to be hosted by Thailand later this year, external affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar held talks with his Thai counterpart Maris Sangiampongsa in the national capital last Friday, the ministry of external affairs said in a statement on Sunday, adding that the "two ministers reviewed progress across various areas of partnership — political exchanges, defence and security ties, trade and investment opportunities, connectivity, science & technology collaboration, health cooperation, culture and people-to-people interaction".

New Delhi further said, "The ministers reaffirmed the mutual desire for a stronger India-Thailand partnership." The talks took place on the sidelines of the second Bimstec foreign ministers' retreat hosted by India last Thursday and Friday. Bimstec's importance has grown sharply in the past several years, especially since the eight-nation grouping the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) has virtually been in a frozen state since 2016 due to tensions between India and Pakistan.

In a statement, New Delhi said, "On July 12, the EAM held a bilateral meeting with the Thai minister of foreign affairs and hosted a lunch in his honour.

**BSP leader's killer shot dead in Chennai, Opp. cries foul**

Accused Thiruvengadam killed in encounter during escape bid

**Chennai, July 14:** A key accused in the murder of BSP Tamil Nadu chief K. Armstrong was shot dead here on Sunday, police said, adding that he allegedly opened fire at them and attempted to flee from their custody. Several Opposition leaders raised questions about the police's version of events that led to the killing of the murder suspect K. Thiruvengadam, and reiterated their demand that the BSP leader's murder be investigated by the CBI.



Tamil Nadu Congress chief K. Selvaperuthagai with party leaders takes part in a religious harmony walk in Chennai on Sunday. — PTI

While the Opposition continued to ask if the arrested persons were the "real culprits", police released a video clip that purportedly shows the accused persons hacking Armstrong to death on July 5. The clip was taken from CCTV recordings in the vicinity of the crime scene, the police said.

According to the police, when Thiruvengadam was taken by them to Manali in north Chennai as part of the investigation, to unearth weapons allegedly concealed at a spot, he escaped from custody after pushing away the policemen on escort duty. The incident took place when the police vehicle had halted near a lake area to enable the accused to relieve himself, according to the police.

Though the police personnel tried to apprehend Thiruvengadam, he fled, the police said. Eventually, however, the sleuths spotted him at a nearby locality and busted his hideout at "Vegetarian Village", which falls in Puzhal police station limits.

When they tried to arrest him, the accused allegedly opened fire at police personnel using his unlicensed pistol. Immediately, for self-defence, a police inspector shot Thiruvengadam, the police said in a statement. It is, however, not clear whether police personnel were injured in the operation.

The accused was quickly taken to a nearby private hospital for treatment. Doctors there declared him brought dead. An FIR has been registered and a magisterial inquiry has been ordered. Thirty-three year old Thiruvengadam is one of the 11 accused who was arrested in the Armstrong murder case after he surrendered to the police. He has a number of criminal cases against him, including other murders. A couple of days ago, a court here had granted police five-day custody of the accused persons. Leader of the Opposition Edappadi K. Palaniswami demanded to know if the accused, who was killed in the encounter, was handcuffed when he was taken by police to recover weapons. In a post on social media platform X, the former chief minister wondered about the "necessity" to "shoot to death" a person in police custody. He was taken away hastily by police early in the morning. The encounter leads to a strong suspicion, he said. "In order to protect whom this encounter was done?" he asked. Family members of Armstrong as well as functionaries of the BSP have raised doubts that those who "surrendered" (the 11 arrested persons) are not the real culprits. The police action further strengthens that suspicion. AIADMK chief Palaniswami said authorities should submit to court — in a sealed cover — Thiruvengadam's statement to the police. Since confidence about a fair investigation is lost in this case, he said, and in deference to the plea of family members of Armstrong, the case should be handed over to the CBI. — PTI

**Cong appoints Gaurav Gogoi as party's deputy leader in LS**

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 14

Gaurav Gogoi will be the deputy leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha and a letter regarding the decision has been sent to Speaker Om Birla. Congress parliamentary party chairperson Sonia Gandhi has written to Mr Birla, informing him about the appointment of the deputy leader, chief whip and two whips for the Congress party in the Lower House of Parliament, AICC general secretary, organisation, K.C. Venugopal said on X. While Mr Gogoi will be the party's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, eight-time MP from Kerala Kodikunnil Suresh will be its chief whip, he said. Virudhunagar MP Manickam Tagore and Kishanganj MP



Gaurav Gogoi

Mohammad Jawed will be the party's whips in the Lower House, he added. Earlier, the party had named Rahul Gandhi as the Leader of the Opposition and subsequently, he was appointed to the post. "Guided by LoP Rahul Gandhi ji, the Congress and INDIA bloc parties will energetically champion the people's causes in the Lok Sabha," Mr Venugopal said. Mr Gogoi was the party's deputy leader in the last Lok Sabha as well. Mr

**EIGHT-TIME MP from Kerala Kodikunnil Suresh will be its chief whip. Virudhunagar MP Manickam Tagore and Kishanganj MP Mohammad Jawed will be the Congress' whips in the Lower House**

Gogoi expressed gratitude to Sonia Gandhi, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and Mr Venugopal for their trust and faith in his abilities. "I congratulate my colleagues. Our aim will be to raise the voice of the people of India inside Parliament and strengthen our democracy," he said in a post on X. Mr Gogoi is expected to share the burden of responsibilities during the day-to-day working of the House.

**Bhujbal slams Pawar over quota politics**

AGE CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, JULY 14

Maharashtra minister Chhagan Bhujbal, who was once considered a close confidante of Sharad Pawar, on Sunday made a veiled attack on NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar saying some people are working to set Maharashtra on fire under the guise of reservation. The Opposition parties did not attend a meeting called by chief minister Eknath Shinde to find an amicable solution for the Maratha quota issue because of a "phone call from Baramati," Mr Bhujbal said in Baramati, the hometown of the NCP founder. His remarks came after the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi boycotted an all-party meeting.

**UP BJP chief vows to win all 10 Assembly seats in UP bypolls Overconfidence hurt BJP's hopes: Yogi**

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW, JULY 14

In the first major meeting of the Uttar Pradesh BJP unit after the Lok Sabha poll debacle in the state, chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said "overconfidence" hurt the BJP's hopes in this year's elections. Addressing the BJP's UP working committee meeting here, Mr Adityanath said while the BJP managed to maintain its vote share of previous elections, there was a "shifting of votes", and now the "defeated" Opposition is "jumping around" again. "The percentage of votes that BJP had in its favour in 2014 and subsequent elections, BJP has been successful in getting the same number of votes in



Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath interacts with Union minister and BJP president J.P. Nadda during the party's state working committee meeting in Lucknow on Sunday. — PTI

2024 as well, but shifting of votes and overconfidence have hurt our hopes," he said. "The Opposition, which had earlier accepted defeat, is again jumping around today," the chief minister said at the concluding session of the day-long meeting at Ambedkar Auditorium of Ram

Manohar Lohia National Law University in Lucknow. Mr Adityanath's remark comes after a day after the BJP-led NDA's dismal performance in byelections in seven states. INDIA bloc members won the bypolls to 10 of the 13 Assembly constituencies, while the BJP managed to bag two

and an Independent pocketed one seat. In the recently concluded Lok Sabha polls, the BJP won 33 seats, down from 62 it clinched in 2019. The Congress won six seats, while its INDIA bloc ally Samajwadi Party bagged 37 seats from UP, which sends 80 members to the Lower House of Parliament. Meanwhile, UP BJP chief Bhupendra Singh Chaudhary said that the saffron party will win the upcoming bypolls on 10 Assembly seats in the state. "Termining the Congress 'Bhasmasur' (a mythological character with the power to burn up anyone and reduce to ashes), he said that SP chief Akhilesh Yadav should beware that the Congress' intentions are to "usurp Muslim votes".

**C'garh Sai Cabinet visits Ram Mandir**

AGE CORRESPONDENT RAIPUR, JULY 14

Chhattisgarh chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai along with his cabinet colleagues visited Ram temple in Ayodhya to pay obeisance to the presiding deity of the shrine. Mr Sai and his ministers flew to Ayodhya from here in the morning by a special flight. "Mr Sai, accompanied by his cabinet, visited Ayodhya Dham on Sunday and offered gifts to Bhancha Shri Ram. The chief minister presented sweet berries and holy water from Mata Shabri's land in Shivrinarayan in Chhattisgarh along with 'Vishnu Bhog rice', a special kind of aromatic rice produced in Chhattisgarh, 'Arisa' (a sweet cake), curry laddu (a special kind of laddu prepared in Chhattisgarh) and kosa (silk) clothes to the Lord," a spokesman of the Chhattisgarh government said. Talking to the media, Mr Sai said, "We have come to Ayodhya Dham to have darshan of Shri Ram. Chhattisgarh is the 'Naniha' (maternal home) of Lord Ram." Lord Ram's mother Kaushalya Devi was believed to hail from Chhattisgarh. A temple dedicated to Kaushalya Devi, the only kind of temple in the world, is built near Raipur.

**Puri Jagannath Ratna Bhandar reopens after 46 years**

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO PURI (ODISHA), JULY 14

The long wait of nearly five decades is over now. After a gap of 46 years, Lord Jagannath's Ratna Bhandar or treasure trove located inside Srimandir, reopened on Sunday, bringing smiles on the faces of crores of devotees across the world. A 15-member high-level committee headed by Justice Biswanath Rath entered Ratna Bhandar and unlocked it exactly at 1.28 pm. While the committee managed to open the Bahar Bhandar or outer

treasury with the key procured from district treasury, it had to break the lock of Bhitir Bandar as it did not open with its keys. According to Sri Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) chief administrator Dr Arabinda Padhee, precious jewels and jewellery stored in the wooden chests in Bahar Bhandar were shifted to a temporary strong-room. The valuables kept in the inner treasury of Bhitir Bhandar could not be shifted today because of the want of time. "As it was late today till

**A 15-MEMBER high-level committee headed by Justice Biswanath Rath entered Ratna Bhandar as per the schedule and unlocked it exactly at 1.28 pm**

the valuables of Bahar Bhandar were shifted to temporary strong-room, we decided move the jewels and jewellery of of Bhitir Bhandar on another suitable day after Lord Jagannath's Bahuda Yatra and other rituals are over," said Dr Padhee. The SJTA chief administrator dismissed any snake or other dreaded

creatures inside Ratna Bhandar. Justice Rath said all the committee members were mentally and physically unaffected during the entry into Ratna Bhandar and the subsequent work inside it. There are three chambers of Bhandars in Ratna Bhandar. The ornaments that are stored in the inner chamber, popularly known as Bhitir Bhandar, — are never used in the rituals of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra. Similarly, the ornaments of the outer chamber are used on the occasions of festivals.



Devotees during the reopening of "Ratna Bhandar" at the Jagannath temple in Puri on Sunday. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

5 dead, 7 injured in Bihar road accident

**Kishanganj, Bihar:** At least five people, including two children, died and seven others were injured on Sunday when a jeep they were travelling in collided with a truck near Petbhari village in Bihar's Kishanganj district, police said. The accident took place around 11 am. The identities of the deceased are yet to be ascertained. "Five persons, including two children, died on the spot. All seven injured persons have been admitted to the nearest government hospital," a police statement said. The driver of the jeep also died in the accident, it said. "It's a very tragic incident. I have visited the hospital where the injured have been admitted. We are trying to determine the identities of the deceased persons," SP (Kishanganj) Sagar Kumar told PTI. Further investigation is underway. — PTI

₹17.5cr drugs seized in Assam, 4 arrested

**Guwahati:** Heroin worth nearly ₹17.5 crore has been seized from different parts of Assam and four peddlers have been arrested, police said on Sunday. Assam police chief public relations officer Pranabijoti Goswami, in a statement, said 1.732 kg of heroin has been seized from two different places in Golaghat district. Acting on a tip-off, a Special Task Force (STF) team conducted a raid at a house in Rajapukhuri area under the jurisdiction of Uriamghat police station on Sunday, he said. A soap box containing 13 gm of heroin was seized and two persons were arrested from the house, Mr Goswami said. "During spot interrogation, the two apprehended persons revealed that more heroin was concealed in their sister's house nearby, following which, that house was also raided and 140 soap boxes containing 1.72 kg of heroin were seized," he said. — PTI

Mother jumps into well, 4 kids drown

**Mandsaur, MP:** Four children drowned after their mother jumped into a well with them in an attempt to commit suicide in Madhya Pradesh's Mandsaur district on Sunday, police said. The incident occurred in Pipalkhedda village in Garoth in the early hours of the day, an official said. Locals managed to rescue Sugna Bai (40) but could not save her children in time, he said. Bodies of Arvind (11), Anusha (9), Bittu (6) and Kartik (3) were fished out of the well later, additional superintendent of police Hemlata Kuril told reporters. A preliminary probe has revealed that Ms Sugna's husband, Rodu Singh, thrashed her on Saturday, after which she left home with kids and took refuge at a school, she said. — PTI

Number of members arrested from Landa gang increases to 13 5 aides of Canada-based terrorist held

**Chandigarh, July 14:** Five associates of Canada-based terrorist Lakhbir Singh alias Landa have been arrested, the Punjab police chief said on Sunday. Three pistols were seized from them, director-general of police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav said. "In a major breakthrough against organised crime, Jalandhar Commissionerate Police apprehends 5 more associates of #Canada-based terrorist Lakhbir @ Landa," he said in a post on X.

With this, the number of Landa gang members arrested has increased to 13, the DGP said. "The gang is involved in multiple heinous crimes such as murder, extortion and many other criminal activities in many districts of Punjab," Mr Yadav said. Later in a statement, Jalandhar police commissioner Swapan Sharma said the accused were allegedly involved in heinous crimes like murder and extortion. The accused have been identified as Simranjit Singh alias Simma, Paramjit Singh alias Pamma, Dilbagh Singh alias Baga, Dilpreet Singh and Sajandep Singh alias, all residents of Tarn Taran district. Mr Sharma said Dilpreet

**THE ACCUSED** were allegedly involved in heinous crimes like murder and extortion

**THREE PISTOLS** were seized from them, director-general of police Gaurav Yadav said

was in contact with Landa and had threatened traders and shopkeepers in Tarn Taran and Amritsar for money. The police commissioner said Baga and Sajan were also in touch with Landa and had demanded money from several traders, commission agents and shopkeepers in Tarn Taran and Amritsar districts. On June 10, the police had said they arrested three associates of Landa. Five more associates of the terrorist were held on June 30. — PTI

BJP to counter TMC's Martyrs' Day rally with protests in WB

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI** KOLKATA, JULY 14

West Bengal Leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari staged a four-hour sit-in demonstration with a group of around 300 BJP workers outside Raj Bhavan on Sunday against the post-poll violence, allegedly by the Trinamul Congress in the state. Though BJP leaders including Arjun Singh and Tathagata Roy were present at the brief stir that was allowed by the Calcutta high court, neither state party president Sukanta Majumdar nor his predecessor Dilip Ghosh were not seen at the venue.

Mr Adhikari, however, announced the plan of a new agitation by the BJP on July 21, the day when the TMC will hold its annual signature event, "Shaheed Divas" rally, to commemorate the killings of 13 Youth Congress workers — since party supremo Mamata Banerjee was in Congress then — in police firing during the CPI(M) rule.

Mr Adhikari also claimed, "50,000 Hindu voters from Raiganj, 70,000 Hindu voters from Ranaghat South and 10,000 Hindu voters from Bagda were not allowed to exercise their votes at the Assembly bypolls." Mr Singh wondered why governor C.V. Ananda Bose did not come out of his office to meet the victims of the post-poll violence. "When Jagdeep Dhanekar was governor here, he reached out to the affected people and paid heed to them," he added. "The nodal officer of the Central paramilitary forces for the Manikatala Assembly bypolls took money from Kolkata police commissioner Vineet Goyal at Lalbazar, the headquarters, he alleged.

PM's 'X' followers cross 100m, more than Taylor Swift, Kohli

**AGE CORRESPONDENT** NEW DELHI, JULY 14

Registering an impressive growth of nearly 30 million in the past three years, the number of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's followers on his X handle crossed the 100-million mark on Sunday.

The PM is already the most followed head of government on the social media platform globally.

In a post on X, Mr Modi said, "A hundred million on @X! Happy to be on this vibrant medium and cherish the discussion, debate, insights, people's blessings, constructive criticism and more. Looking forward to an equally engaging time in the future as well."

Officials pointed out that his followers are quite a few times more in number in comparison to the most followed Opposition leaders like AAP's Arvind Kejriwal and the Congress' Rahul Gandhi, who have 27.5 million and 26.4 million followers respectively. Among other heads of government with a large



Narendra Modi

following are US President Joe Biden (38.1 million) and Turkiye President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (21.5 million).

An official said that PM Modi has more followers even compared to active global athletes like Virat Kohli (64.1 million), Brazilian footballer Neymar Jr (63.6 million) and American basketball player LeBron James (52.9 million). "He is ahead of even celebrities like Taylor Swift (95.3 million), Lady Gaga (83.1 million), and Kim Kardashian (75.2 million)," the official said.

The official further stated that world leaders often

eagerly engage with Mr Modi on social media because connecting with him significantly boosts their own follower base, engagements, views and reposts. "This was seen recently in Italy as well as Austria," he said. PM Modi is also an influential presence on YouTube and Instagram, with nearly 25 million subscribers and more than 91 million followers respectively.

Since joining X, formerly known as Twitter, in 2009, Mr Modi has consistently used it for constructive engagement, officials noted, highlighting that he has never blocked anyone.

"He maintains an active and engaging persona, follows numerous common citizens, interacts with them, replies to their messages, and has never blocked anyone. PM Modi has always used this platform organically, without ever resorting to paid promotions or bots," an official said, adding that it reflects his ability to resonate with a diverse and dynamic audience.

IAS trainee Khedkar's luxury car confiscated

Pune RTO sends notice to firm which owns Audi

**Pune, July 14:** The Pune police on Sunday confiscated the luxury car used by probationary IAS officer Pooja Khedkar by allegedly installing a red beacon light on it illegally, an official said. The Pune regional transport office on Thursday issued a notice to a city-based private company that is the registered owner of the Audi car Ms Khedkar used during her posting here.



Luxury car confiscated by police in Pune on Sunday.

Shivane village in Haveli taluka was mentioned as the address of the registered user, said officials.

Ms Khedkar recently came under the spotlight after kicking up a controversy over her demands, such as a separate cabin and staff during her posting in Pune. She allegedly misused the disability and Other Backward Class (OBC) quota to secure a position in the Indian Administrative Service. Ms Khedkar allegedly used a red beacon light on

the Audi car and got "Maharashtra government" written also on it without permission.

Following the controversy, she was transferred from Pune to Washim district before the completion of her training.

"A notice was issued on Thursday against the unauthorised use of a beacon and name sign on the private sedan Khedkar had been using. The car now has been confiscated,

its documents will be checked and we are probing the matter further," a senior police official said on Sunday. A jammer was put on the car, and barricades were installed around it, he said.

As many as 21 challans with a total charge of ₹27,000 were issued in the past against the Audi car, which was registered at the Pune RTO on June 27, 2012, for alleged traffic violations. — PTI

3 militants killed along LoC in J&K's Kupwara

**AGE CORRESPONDENT** SRINAGAR, JULY 14

Army has foiled an infiltration bid by shooting dead three militants along the LoC in J&K's Kupwara district.

The defence sources in Srinagar said that a heavily armed group of militants breached the LoC in Kupwara's Keran sector shortly before dawn on Sunday. The alert Army troops challenged them on which they opened fire and tried to flee, but were

quickly encircled. "In the gun battle that continued for a few hours, three terrorists were killed. A search operation has been launched to ensure no more terrorists are around," sources said. Army's Srinagar-based Chinara Corps (15 Corps) wrote on microblogging site X, "Operation Dhanushi II, Keran Kupwara: 3 terrorists have been eliminated in the ongoing anti-infiltration operation on the #LoC in Keran Sector."

Gov: No bill is pending as claimed by WB govt

**Kolkata, July 14:** West Bengal governor C.V. Ananda Bose on Sunday rejected the allegation that eight bills passed by the state Assembly is pending with the Raj Bhavan.

Out of the eight bills, six were reserved for the consideration of President Draupadi Murmu, while another is subjudice, Mr Bose said.

For the eighth bill, no representative of the state government turned up at the Raj Bhavan despite being called, as some clarifications were needed, he said.

"My attention has been drawn to a news item of today that the Bengal government has moved the Supreme Court against the governor over eight pending bills. This is incorrect, as not a single bill is pending with the Raj Bhavan," Mr Bose said.

On Friday, the Mamata Banerjee government moved the Supreme Court against Mr Bose for allegedly sitting on the eight bills, without giving any reason of not signing them.

"The action taken or proposed to be taken by the government in the matter may be reported as is mandated in Article 167 of the Constitution of India," he added. — PTI

Trump survives assassination bid

**Continued from Page 1** The agency said, after he opened fire from the roof of a building about 150 yards (140 m) from the stage where Mr Trump was speaking. An AR-15-style semiautomatic rifle used in the shooting was recovered near his body, according to sources. The firearm was legally purchased by the suspect's father, ABC and the Wall Street Journal reported, citing sources. Bomb-making materials were found in the suspect's car, the Associated Press reported, citing sources.

One person who attended the rally was killed and two other spectators were critically wounded, the Secret Service said. "In this moment, it is more important than ever that we stand United, and show our True Character as Americans, remaining Strong and Determined, and not allowing Evil to Win," Mr Trump said on his Truth Social service on Sunday. Former US President said that he will remain "defiant" in the face of "wickedness". "We will fear not but instead remain resilient in our faith and defiant in the face of wickedness," Donald Trump wrote on Truth Social, a

social media platform he launched after he was banished from X.

The Secret Service in a statement denied accusations by some Trump supporters that it had rejected campaign requests for additional security.

"The assertion that a member of the former President's security team requested additional security resources that the US Secret Service or the department of homeland security rebuffed is absolute falsehood," said Secret Service spokesperson Anthony Guglielmi in a statement. "In fact, recently the US Secret Service added protective resources and capabilities to the former President's security detail."

While mass shootings at schools, nightclubs and other public places are a regular feature of American life, the attack was the first shooting of a US President or major party candidate since the 1981 attempted assassination of Republican President Ronald Reagan.

In 2011, Democratic then-Congresswoman Gabby Giffords was seriously wounded in an attack on a gathering of constituents in Arizona.

Republican US Representative Steve Scalise was also badly wounded in a politically motivated 2017 attack on a group of Republican representatives practising for a charity baseball game.

Ms Giffords later founded a leading gun control organisation, Scalise has remained a stalwart defender of gun rights.

Mr Trump is due to receive his party's formal nomination at the Republican National Convention, which kicks off in Milwaukee on Monday.

The shots appeared to come from outside the area secured by the Secret Service, the agency said.

Hours after the attack, the Oversight Committee in the Republican-led US House of Representatives summoned Secret Service director Kimberly Cheatle to testify at a hearing scheduled for July 22.

Leading Republicans and Democrats quickly condemned the violence, as did foreign leaders.

"There's no place for this kind of violence in America. We must unite as one nation to condemn it," Biden said in a

statement.

Some of Mr Trump's Republican allies said they believed the attack was politically motivated.

"For weeks Democrat leaders have been fuelling ludicrous hysteria that Donald Trump winning re-election would be the end of democracy in America," said Scalise, the No. 2 House Republican. "Clearly we've seen far-left lunatics act on violent rhetoric in the past. This incendiary rhetoric must stop."

Mr Trump began the year facing multiple legal worries, including four separate criminal prosecutions.

He was found guilty in late May of trying to cover up hush money payments to a porn star. But the other three prosecutions he faces — including two for his attempts to overturn his defeat — have been ground to a halt by various factors, including a Supreme Court decision early this month that found him to be partly immune to prosecution.

Mr Trump contends, without evidence, that all four prosecutions have been orchestrated by Biden to try to prevent him from returning to power. — Agencies

'Defeat to Mughals by Ahoms was so severe that Britishers didn't dare enter region' Northeast battles must get recognition, says historian

**MANOJ ANAND** GUWAHATI, JULY 14

Military historian Shiv Kunal Verma has stressed on mainstreaming the battle glories of the Northeast, saying that some of glorious wars were fought in the region, which stand out for tactics and strategies.

"The crushing defeat inflicted upon the Mughals on the army led by Mir Jumla by Ahoms had been so severe that even the British dreaded venturing into the region," Mr Verma told this newspaper, while discussing his book — Yodha: Illustrated Military History of India — The

Epics (BCE) to the Uprising (1857).

Mr Verma said that the British had been so terrified about the battle glories of the Ahoms that they invaded the Northeast through Burma.

The military historian stressed that it's important that documentation of the past of the Northeast be done with verification of the claims so that the rightful place of the region be restored at the national stage. "My father fought the 1962 and the 1971 wars, and one constant thing that we came across was about the Northeast region that very less was known about the



Shiv Kunal Verma

people and their history. One tribe is not about the other across the river," Mr Verma told this newspaper.

Mr Verma has spotlighted the heroics of Lachit Borphukan in his book "Lachit Borphukan was appointed commander soon after the Mughals,

under Mir Jumla, gained control over Guwahati and compelled the Ahoms to sign the humiliating Treaty of Ghilajharighat," writes Mr Verma in the book.

Thereafter, Borphukan had organised his army, mastering the guerilla tactics, and he recaptured Guwahati from the Mughals. That set the stage for the 1671 battle in the Manas River, which filled even the Britishers with trepidations.

In the Saraihat Battle, Mr Verma writes in the book, the Ahom naval army under the command of seriously ill Borphukan decimated the Mughal flotilla led by Ram Singh.

Mr Verma gave a place of eminence to the Ahom generals for their military tactics in the vast span of his book that covers the wars from the Epic till the 1857 uprisings. Mr Verma also chronicles the British expansion in the Northeastern region. Cacher Levy after his raising in the British Army was tasked with the job of guarding the eastern frontier of Assam, writes Mr Verma in the book.

The military historian also spotlights the British bid to bring the "Naga-Patkai Hills" under control that set the stage for the battles between the imperialist forces and the Nagas.

Bill to amend Insurance Act in Parl session likely

**New Delhi, July 14:** The government is likely to introduce a bill seeking amendments to the Insurance Act, 1938, during the upcoming Budget Session to achieve "Insurance for All by 2047".

Some of the provisions, which could be part of the amendment bill, include composite license, differential capital, reduction in solvency norms, issuing captive license, change in investment regula-

tions, one-time registration for intermediaries and allowing insurers to distribute other financial products, sources said.

The move will enable the entry of differentiated insurance companies like in the banking sector. The banking sector is currently categorised as universal bank, small finance bank, and payments bank.

The provision of composite licenses would allow life insurers to

underwrite health insurance or general insurance policies.

As per the provisions of the Insurance Act, 1938, life insurers can only offer life insurance covers, while general insurers can offer non-insurance products like health, motor, fire, marine, etc.

The Irdai does not allow composite licensing for insurance companies, which means that an insurance company cannot offer both

life and non-life products as one entity.

The draft bill is ready and it has to go to the Cabinet for its approval, sources said, adding that the finance ministry is hoping that it gets introduced in the upcoming session.

The proposed amendments primarily focus on enhancing the policyholders' interests, improving returns to the policyholders, facilitating the entry of more players leading to

economic growth and employment generation, enhancing efficiencies of the insurance industry — operational as well as financial — and enabling ease of doing business, sources said.

The finance ministry in December 2022 invited comments on the proposed amendments to the Insurance Act, 1938, and the Insurance Regulatory Development Act, 1999. — PTI

CRPF jawan killed in Manipur ambush

**Continued from Page 1**

militants, in Jiribam district today. His supreme sacrifice in the line of duty shall not go in vain. I further extend my sincere condolences to the bereaved family of the deceased soldier while praying for the speedy recovery of the ones injured during the attack," he said in a social media post.

It is significant that Manipur's second lifeline, National Highway 37, which connects Imphal with Assam's Cachar, passes through Jiribam. The other lifeline that connects Manipur with the rest of the country is National Highway 2, which remains blocked in Kuki-dominated Kangpokpi district. This highway goes to Assam via Nagaland. The Kuki tribes allege the Meitei community has blocked all essential items and cargo trucks from going to the hill areas where they live.

'Deeply concerned': PM

**Continued from Page 1** case, religious freedom and human rights, apart from close bilateral ties between India and Russia.

In fact, in what was seen as the most direct warning to New Delhi yet from the Biden administration following Mr Modi's successful visit to Russia, United States ambassador to India Eric Garcetti had recently made it clear that a "cynical calculation" cannot pass off as a "trusted relationship" between India and the US.

He also said that while ties with India are deeper than they have ever been, "it is not yet deep enough". After being continuously

lambasted by hostile American official reports and senior US administration figures on the human rights and religious freedom fronts, a furious India had last month hit back at the United States and pointed out how New Delhi had officially taken up with Washington the "numerous cases in the United States of hate crimes, racial attacks on Indian nationals and other minorities, vandalism and targeting of places of worship, violence and mistreatment by law enforcement authorities, as well as the according of political space to advocates of extremism and terrorism abroad.

Vikram Misri to take charge as FS today

**AGE CORRESPONDENT** NEW DELHI, JULY 14

Senior Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer of the 1989 batch, Vikram Misri, will take over on Monday as India's new foreign secretary, following the departure of incumbent Vinay Mohan Kwatra, who demitted office Sunday.

In the past decade, Mr Misri has served as ambassador to Spain, Myanmar, and China. He was India's ambassador to China during the Ladakh standoff in 2020.

THE ASIAN AGE

15 JULY 2024

Attack on Trump reflects the politics of hate in US

The attempted assassination of the Republicans' presumptive presidential nominee Donald Trump by a gunman at a Pennsylvania rally confirms that this is the modern US of A, the land of guns in which the atmosphere is vitiated by the incendiary nature of the political rhetoric in highly polarised times.

The United States may have had a dark and troubled history of presidential assassination attempts, from the hits on Abraham Lincoln and the Kennedy brothers John and Robert that succeeded to the shots fired at Ronald Reagan which the then serving President survived. As a former President vying for the job again as challenger, Mr Trump fits perfectly into this profile of political targets.

The Second Amendment that guarantees every American the right to own a gun for his personal protection is not the only culprit in this age though the AR semi-automatic rifle used in a five-bullet bid by a 20-year-old lends itself easily to the argument about how to regulate such firearms which can be bought and owned so easily.

**It is certain that a former President covered in blood and holding a defiant fist in the air will define the current election cycle even if the discourse from both the Far Right and the Hard Left has left too much to be desired**

In these politically fraught times, there have been attempts on major political figures, including the then Speaker Nancy Pelosi who was attacked in her home with a hammer, but this sensational sniper's bid at a public rally has stoked the worst kind of posturing and posting in the era of social media salience.

The wildest theories have been floated with one side blaming the other for setting up the bid to kill Mr Trump and the other suggesting it may have been a staged hit for invoking sympathy for a martyr. Let it be said that since the final word has not yet been heard on the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1964, around which conspiracy theories still abound, there will be plenty more to come on this scary 2024 event.

This bid by Thomas Matthew Crooks, who was shot in the head by Secret Service agents, will undoubtedly spawn many theories about an event that may have dramatically changed the odds in the November 2024 presidential election with the Republicans, scheduled to hold their convention this week to formally nominate Mr Trump for the presidency, bound to milk this deadly attempt to twist the poll scenario by getting rid of a candidate.

The language of politics is so smeared with the vocabulary fuelled by hysteria of the coarsest imagery by words like "monsters", "hell", "fight", "bullseye", "dictator" and so on used by the incumbent as well as the challenger that an attempt at a major figure was predictable, even predicted in a famous cartoon strip series. Such are the times the world lives in, and the US even more so.

It appears as if the leaders of the world's oldest democracy were prepared to, figuratively at least, live by the sword. Reasonable people know instinctively that such attempts at eliminating leaders are a live and present danger to democracy.

It is certain that a former President covered in blood and holding a defiant fist in the air will define the current election cycle. But the truth is, the political discourse from both the Far Right and the Hard Left had left too much to be desired.

It is at once sad and frightening that a leader can be shot at. India, which has suffered the assassination of two Prime Ministers, knows the threat to freedom and democracy from such acts too well. And the US, reminded of the dangers of extreme reactions as evidenced in the attack on the Capitol, may have to learn lessons about damping down political hysteria.

Voters still unhappy with NDA

The results of the byelections to 13 Assembly seats in seven states in which parties belonging to the INDIA bloc have made substantial gains appear to suggest that the voter disenchantment with the NDA which became manifest during the Lok Sabha elections continues while the Opposition has been able to sustain its momentum despite odds. The overwhelming message is that the deflection politics that the BJP often resorts to appears to have lost appeal.

The BJP's loss in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand becomes a tad bitter for the party as in the Lok Sabha elections it had a clean sweep of both states. It may be remembered the byelections became necessary when three Independent MLAs resigned. The three, who later joined the BJP, were fielded by the party in the very same constituencies, but two of them have lost. The message is a reassurance for the Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu government and a warning shot at the BJP.

The Uttarakhand results also contain good tidings for the Congress. In Badrinath, the Congress defeated the same candidate who had won the 2022 election on a Congress ticket and then defected to the BJP, leading to the holding of the byelection. In Manglaur, the party made up for the loss it suffered at the hands of the BSP in the last elections. The clean sweep of the four seats by the Trinamul Congress of the bypolls in West Bengal, too, comes as a shocker for the BJP as the party had won only three of them in the last Assembly elections. In Punjab, it's a big relief for the AAP as it was able to defeat the candidate who had won on the party's ticket and later defected to the BJP. In Tamil Nadu, the decision of the main Opposition AIADMK not to contest the bypoll would have helped the DMK, but only in increasing its margin several-fold. The BJP had its consolation win in Madhya Pradesh where it managed to get the Congress turncoat to win again on its ticket, though by a whisker. But the Independent's win in the Bihar byelection has more to do with local factors.

The spell crass communal politics had cast over the Indian voter seems to be wearing thin now.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Will 'Bandhua Majdoor' remain loyal to the BJP?



Sunil Gatade

The BJP, politically, is the best butcher. It is the most practical outfit which dumps friends and allies alike when they have either become useless or have lost relevance.

The latest talk is that the one who could soon be joining the "dumping" list could be Ajit Pawar of the NCP in Maharashtra. A friend or ally is only as good as his/her performance in the last election.

After his stark failure to demolish Sharad Pawar's Baramati bastion in the recently-held Lok Sabha polls, Ajit Pawar has virtually no utility value left for the saffron party. Ajit's party could win only one of the four seats it had contested in the Lok Sabha polls from the state, bringing its strike rate to a mere 25 per cent.

For the BJP to stabilise in Maharashtra, it is essential that it first demolish the Maratha strongman. There are no shortcuts. Despite his best efforts, Ajit's wife Sunetra failed to defeat incumbent Supriya Sule and lost by over one lakh votes. For the BJP, it was an unbearable shock and a grim setback to its "Demolition Sharad Pawar" strategy. Ajit deserves no pardon.

The talk in Maharashtra is that the BJP could be humiliating Ajit in the allocation of seats for the Assembly polls by agreeing to concede a far lesser number of seats than being demanded by him. Recently, there were reports that Ajit's party wanted to contest some 80 to 85 of the total 288 seats, an almost impossi-

**Despite best efforts, Ajit's wife Sunetra failed to defeat incumbent Supriya Sule and lost by over a lakh votes. For BJP, it was a grim setback to its 'Demolition Sharad Pawar' plan. Ajit deserves no pardon.**

**BJD chief Naveen Patnaik is bitter about the BJP after losing power in the Assembly polls, held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha polls. He has asked his 10-odd members in the RS to oppose the government.**

Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh, which is now in power the state.

Mr Naidu is the arch detractor of Jagan Mohan Reddy and is one of the key supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was able to become the PM for the third time only due to the crucial support of the TDP and the JD(U)'s Nitish Kumar.

Mr Modi knows that the YSRCP will have no other option but to continue support at the Centre because Jagan Mohan Reddy faces several probes by the investigating agencies, including the ED. A nod from Mr Modi could land Mr Reddy in the soup, goes the argument in political circles.

Mr Reddy faces a double whammy. Mr Naidu has not forgotten how only a few months back he was thrown into jail by him. Mr Reddy needs double blessings from the PM to save himself. The MPs of Mr Reddy's party — four in the Lok Sabha and 11 in the Upper House — will virtually be guided by the BJP's whip.

The BRS/TRS led by former Telangana CM K. Chandrasekhar Rao, which once wanted to play a prominent role at the national level, got the dubious distinction of scoring a duck in the Lok Sabha polls.

His party has four Rajya Sabha members, and they would be more prone to support the BJP. Congress CM Revanth Reddy is a known detractor of Mr

Rao. The former CM will have to keep the Centre in good humour as his daughter K. Kavitha is yet to get bail in the excise case. During the Assembly poll campaign, Rahul Gandhi's pitch that Mr Rao, then CM, takes orders from Mr Modi, had hit the BRS hard. It is now planning to revert to its old name Telangana Rashtra Samiti.

BJD chief Naveen Patnaik is bitter about the BJP after losing power in the Assembly polls, held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha polls. He has asked his 10-odd members in the Rajya Sabha to vigorously oppose the government. It is a departure from past practice. In the nearly 25 years he has been in power, the BJD used to invariably support the Central government, whichever party may be in power. "Don't disturb me in Odisha" was his unwritten message for the quid pro quo.

Talk about the BJP initiating attempts to weaken the BJD has begun in earnest. The era of toppling non-BJP governments, engineering splits and weaning away of Opposition MPs and MLAs has been seen in the past decade. The BJD's decision to not play the "Bandhua Majdoor", or bonded labour, of the BJP at the Centre will attract stiff punishment.

In Punjab, the Shiromani Akali Dal, one of the BJP's oldest allies, is also not playing ball. Party chief Sukhbir Singh Badal's wife Harsimrat Kaur Badal recently targeted the BJP over the rebellion within the Akali Dal. The newly-elected MP from Bathinda said the BJP was now trying to destabilise and break the Akali Dal using its "stooges". Will 'Bandhua Majdoor' remain loyal to the BJP?

The writer is a journalist based in New Delhi

LETTERS

REAL VIKAS WINS

The recent by-election results in India highlight the importance of democracy. The success of the INDIA coalition shows that people trust parties focussed on development. Wins in states like Telangana, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh indicate support for parties addressing public welfare. Elected representatives now need to prioritise solving public issues and working together for everyone's benefit. This mandate should encourage parties to focus on serving people rather than their own interests, strengthening democracy and restoring public trust.

Masood Ahmad Barabanki

NO MORE LOSS

INDIA'S LONGEST and largest urban tunnel project, the Thane-Borivali line costing ₹16,600.40 crore and spanning 11.8 km, is set to commence soon. Prime Minister Modi laid the foundation for it on Saturday. This project will be highly beneficial for both people and the environment, reducing carbon emissions by 1,50,000 tonnes every year. Such a significant project must remain free from corruption, substandard equipment and irresponsible authorities. India cannot afford to witness grievous incidents of waste of life and potential anymore.

Jakir Hussain Kanpur

TAX BILLIONAIRES

WHY SHOULD a poor nation like India lag behind when the Western world is moving towards a two per cent billionaire tax? The extravagant wedding celebrations of the Ambanis makes it abundantly clear why such a tax is needed. Instead of taxing those who can pay them without any difficulty, governments are prone to burdening the salaried middle class. Had it been anybody else hosting such celebrations, the ED and IT would have been after them like hounds.

Anthony Henriques Mumbai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to R. Sivakumar (July 11). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.



Kamal Davar

Many challenges lie ahead as new chief takes charge of Indian Army

Assuming command of the second largest and unquestionably the finest Army in the world would be the rarest of rare honour for any professional soldier. In a world at war with itself, and India too facing diverse security challenges to its progress and peace, this hallowed command brings with itself traditional and many unknown emerging problems, which may arise, to encounter and overcome. Thus India's 30th Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), Gen. Upendra Dwivedi, who took charge on June 30, will have, in all likelihood, an eventful and exacting tenure. That he carries with it the best wishes of his countrymen and the support of the government and the other services is a foregone conclusion. His first week in command has already witnessed recurring terrorist acts in Jammu and Kashmir by Pakistani-origin terrorists.

Though each COAS formalises his professional agenda according to his strategic perception and priorities, similar challenges persisting for years and decades are common problems for successive commanders. Among the many enduring confrontations, dealing with a continually assertive and overly ambitious China will remain India's most critical challenge.

The COAS, having been the Northern Army commander earlier, would thus have full and intimate knowledge of China's provocative proclivities towards us. His directions to all formation commanders confronting the Chinese in the western, central and eastern sectors along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and Indian troops displaying their usual grit wherever the Chinese

indulge in mischief, will go a long way in effectively sending the nation's and Gen. Dwivedi's message across to the Chinese. The COAS may consider the planning and execution, if necessary, of mirroring actions by us to counter the Chinese mischief.

The Army Chief, by virtue of having been the vice-chief in his last appointment, would be more than conversant with the nuances of the Integrated Theatre Commands, whose establishment has been dodging the armed forces despite the government having given the green signal. In concert with the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and the other two chiefs, Gen. Dwivedi must push the creation of these commands even if it is done with deliberation and without haste. It's time our top hierarchy in the armed forces employ their collective wisdom to get on with this much-needed transformation.

Another area of collective study and analyses are the lessons emerging from the Russia-Ukraine War and the Israel-Hamas conflict. The COAS, and especially his Army Training Command along with the two other services, must delve deep into the nuances of such wars albeit in the sub-continental context.

These two ongoing conflicts have given a new and an unexpected orientation to the pursuit of conflicts in today's age, which appears radically different than the wars fought before these conflicts began. Similarly, the unorthodox but intensive employment of the once-humble drones, now emerging as major force multipliers, must be studied in the India-China and India-Pakistan

scenarios.

The already promulgated "Agnipath" concept, giving birth to "Agniveers" has already, once again, become the subject of heated discussions, albeit more on political grounds. Along with the other services, the COAS must revisit the "Agniveer" concept and advise the government to tweak this scheme vastly or scrap it. But the services must not let the bureaucracy overrule the services' requirement of ensuring combat effectiveness being the first principle for Agniveers or any other form of military recruitment. If the government is looking for pruning the burgeoning pension bill of the three services, there are other more effective ways of doing so. In the defence ministry, for example, there are some offices which can be removed as their contribution to the overall security effectiveness of the nation is long over. The COAS will have to look into the rightful issue of finding more money (capital expenditure) within the Army to muster enough resources for modernisation. Meanwhile, as the Army's operational commitments along the India-China and India-Pakistan borders continues to grow, it must be emphasised to the Centre that instead of raising additional units in the paramilitary forces, the same can be done in the Army for when the balloon goes up, the first responders to battle the enemy and the last bastion of the nation is the Indian Army.

Though it was felt that in the last two years terrorism had been largely reduced in J&K, since Narendra Modi government 3.0 was sworn in, Pakistan has upped the ante by resorting to ter-

rorism acts in the region south of the Pir Panjal and in the last week in the hitherto untouched Kathua region. The Army Chief will have to now revisit our entire counter-terrorism strategy, reinforce our counter-terrorism grid and at the local levels, unit and formation commanders will have to become far more intelligence-savvy and tactically more alert and aggressive. It is certain that at this juncture, the COAS and the top security hierarchy of the nation will be contemplating even some strategic counter-measures to effectively thwart Pakistan from further mischief. Pakistan has to be firmly told that India has not yet exploited the many fault lines existing within Pakistan and they had better curb their terrorist tendencies before they are made to face India's wrath.

Modernisation of equipment and platforms, acquisition of tomorrow's technology, adaptation to newer forms of warfare and enhancing the Army's combat capabilities will also be of major concern for the new COAS.

Importantly, ensuring synergy and better interoperability among the three services will equally be his KRA. His leadership of the most disciplined and professional fighting force in the world will be critical for the peace and stability of the region and the government must provide it the necessary wherewithal for it to excel in all domains of warfare.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, was the first head of India's Defence Intelligence Agency, and is a strategic analyst

WORLD REACTS

He'll never stop fighting to Save America. I love you Dad, today and always. - IVANKA TRUMP, Donald Trump's daughter

We are praying for him, his family, and all those who have been injured and impacted by this senseless shooting. - KAMALA HARRIS, US Vice-President

I am sickened by the shooting at former President Trump. It cannot be overstated - political violence is never acceptable. My thoughts are with former President Trump, those at the event, and all Americans. - JUSTIN TRUDEAU, Canadian Prime Minister

We must stand firm against any form of violence that challenges democracy. I pray for former President Trump's speedy recovery. - FUMIO KISHIDA, Japanese Prime Minister

The attack ... is despicable. I wish him a speedy recovery. My thoughts are also with the people who were affected by the attack. Such acts of violence threaten democracy. - OLAF SCHOLZ, German Chancellor

In political debate ... there are limits that should never be crossed. It is a warning to everyone, regardless of political affiliation, to restore dignity and honour to politics, against all forms of hatred and violence, and for the good of our democracies. Solidarity with Donald Trump, his supporters and the injured, and my heartfelt condolences for the victim and his family. - GIORGIA MELONI, Italian Prime Minister

This wasn't just an attack on Donald Trump. This was an attack on a candidate for the presidency of the United States. This was an attack on America. It was an attack on democracy, it was an attack on all the democracies. On behalf of myself, my family, the Government and people of Israel, we wish President Trump a speedy recovery, continued good health and continued strength. - BENJAMIN NETANYAHU, Israeli Prime Minister

I believe that the investigation into the attack will be carried out in the most effective manner and the perpetrators and their instigators will be brought to justice as soon as possible in order not to overshadow the US elections and global stability. - TAYYIP ERDOGAN, Turkish President

Trump is truly blessed. We believe the fact that President Trump is safe right now is nothing short of an act of God. Today, the future survival of the United States of America came down to less than a hair's width in the path of a bullet. - VIVEK RAMASWAMY, American businessperson and Republican

U.S. SHOOTING SHOCKS WORLD

Former US Prez out of medical danger • FBI investigators yet to identify motive behind attack

Washington, July 14: World leaders and governments reacted with shock to the wounding of former US president Donald Trump in an assassination attempt at an election rally.

Leaders globally spoke out against political violence and expressed their support for those affected by Saturday's shooting, which killed one bystander and left two other spectators critically wounded.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said she was "deeply shocked" by the attack. "Political violence has no place in a democracy," she said.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called the shooting "despicable" and said "such acts of violence threaten democracy." In neighboring France, President Emmanuel Macron called the assassination attempt a "tragedy for our democracies."

Russia strongly condemned any violence in the context of politics, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Sunday. "After numerous attempts to eliminate candidate Trump from the political arena using, first, all legal tools... it is obvious to all outside observers that his life is in danger," Peskov said.

He added, however, that "we do not at all believe that the attempt was organized by the current power." Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said he was "appalled to learn about the shooting" and wished Trump a "speedy recovery."

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed confidence "that the investigation into the attack will be carried out in the most effective way and that the perpetrators and their instigators will be brought to justice as soon as possible in order not to cast a shadow on the US elections and global stability."

The Vatican, meanwhile, voiced "its concern following yesterday's violent episode which injures people and democracy, provoking suffering and death."

Chilean President Gabriel Boric also expressed his condemnation, calling violence "a threat to democracies" which "we must all reject." Colombia expressed its "solidarity with the United States at this difficult time."



1. Former president Donald Trump catches his ears at the first instant of the bullet pierces his ear a campaign event at Butler Farm, Pennsylvania, US, on Saturday. 2. Trump crouches down in self-defence and series of shots are fired. 3. After a few moments, secret service agents are seen restraining a defiant Trump who is seen mouthing the words "Fight, Fight, Fight!"

FBI identifies 20-year-old as suspect, motive unclear

Bethel Park (US), July 14: The FBI identified 20-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks of Bethel Park, Pennsylvania as the suspect in the attempted assassination of former US President Donald Trump at a campaign rally.

The suspect was shot and killed by the Secret Service seconds after he allegedly fired shots toward a stage where Trump was speaking on Saturday in Butler, Pennsylvania.

The FBI said it was working to determine a motive for the attack. One rally attendee died and two other spectators were critically injured. Trump was shot in the ear.

State voter records show that Crooks was a registered Republican. The upcoming November 5 election in which Trump is challenging President Joe Biden would have been the first time Crooks had been old enough to vote in a presidential race.

When Crooks was 17, he made a \$15 donation to ActBlue, a political action committee that raises money for left-leaning and Democratic politicians, according to a 2021 Federal Election Commission filing.

The donation was earmarked for the Progressive Turnout Project, a national group that rallies Democrats to vote. The groups did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.



Former US president Donald Trump disembarks from the plane upon his arrival in Newark, US on Saturday night. - AFP

Trump leaves hosp, flies to New Jersey

Washington, July 14: Former U.S. President Donald Trump was out of hospital late on Saturday following a shooting earlier in the day at his rally where he was shot in the right ear.

Trump was seen walking off his plane unaided hours after surviving an assassination bid, in a video posted by his deputy communications director on social media early Sunday.

Trump, in a navy suit and white shirt without a tie, can be seen descending a staircase from his plane as an armed agent stands guard, in the video posted by Margo Martin on X.

His right ear, which was injured in the attempt, cannot be seen in the footage which was shot in New Jersey. - Agencies

Priselac, 67. "You kind of have to wonder what didn't he get in life? What led to this extreme?" Thomas Crooks graduated in 2022 from Bethel Park High School, according to a statement from the Bethel Park School District.

"Our school district will cooperate fully with the active law enforcement investigation surrounding this case, and as such, we are limited in what we can publicly disclose," the statement read.

The school district did not immediately respond to an inquiry from Reuters. - Reuters

HOW IT UNFOLDED?

- DRESSED in a white shirt, dark blazer and bright red MAGA cap, Trump was railing against illegal immigration when shots rang out at 6:08 pm (3.38 IST).
THE GUNMAN and a bystander were killed at the rally, while two spectators were critically wounded.

"I KNEW IMMEDIATELY that something was wrong in that I heard a whizzing sound, shots, and immediately felt the bullet ripping through the skin," - DONALD TRUMP, Ex-US president

RESPONSE FROM TRUMP CAMPAIGN: Trump's campaign is raising the armed security presence at its sites and asking staff in Washington and West Palm Beach to stay away from the office on Sunday after the former president was shot and lightly wounded at a rally.

WILL THIS AFFECT TRUMP'S CAMPAIGN? Trump, who will be formally nominated as the GOP's presidential nominee on Thursday, still plans to attend the convention, and officials stress the four-day event will go on as normal.

ELON MUSK 'FULLY' ENDORSES TRUMP: Tech billionaire Elon Musk said on Saturday he "fully" endorses Donald Trump after the Republican presidential candidate was rushed bleeding from the stage of a rally. - AFP

Assassination bid case opened

Butler, (US), July 14: Former President Donald Trump was the target of an apparent assassination attempt on Saturday at a Pennsylvania rally, days before he was to accept the Republican nomination for a third time. A barrage of gunfire set off panic, and a bloodied Trump, who said he was shot in the ear, was surrounded by Secret Service and hurried to his SUV as he pumped his fist in a show of defiance.

after the shooting, which he said pierced the upper part of his right ear. "I knew immediately that something was wrong in that I heard a whizzing sound, shots, and immediately felt the bullet ripping through the skin. Much bleeding took place," he wrote on his social media site. Law enforcement officials said the assailant who opened fire at the rally was a 20-year-old man from Pennsylvania. They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details that hadn't yet

been publicly released. At least one attendee was dead and two spectators were critically injured, authorities said. The Secret Service said it killed the suspected shooter who it said attacked from an elevated position outside the rally venue, a farm show in Butler, Pennsylvania and that Trump was safe. The attack was the most serious attempt to assassinate a president or presidential candidate since Ronald Reagan was shot in 1981. - AP

LONG HISTORY OF SHOOTINGS IN US PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS

RONALD REAGAN (1981) President Reagan was shot and seriously wounded as he left an event at the Hilton hotel in Washington.

GERALD FORD (1975) President Ford was left unscathed in two separate assassination attempts by women in September 1975, both in California and within a span of just 17 days.

GEORGE WALLACE (1972) While campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination, Wallace was shot four times and paralysed for life at a shopping mall in Laurel, Maryland.

ROBERT F. KENNEDY (1968) President John F. Kennedy's brother Robert, who was running for the Democratic presidential nomination, was shot and killed at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, California.

JOHN F. KENNEDY (1963) Riding in his motorcade with his wife Jackie, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas by Lee Harvey Oswald.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT (1933) As president-elect, FDR was the target of an assassination attempt in Miami, Florida. He was unharmed, but Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak was killed in the attack.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT (1912) WILLIAM MCKINLEY (1901) President McKinley was shot and killed by anarchist Leon Czolgosz in Buffalo, New York.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN (1865) Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth, a well-known actor and Confederate sympathizer, while watching a play called "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theater in Washington.

PROBE UNDERWAY Shooter was 150 metres from Trump, a comfortable distance for trained men

Secret Service probing how gunman got so close

Butler (United States), July 14: The US Secret Service is investigating how a gunman armed with an AR-style rifle was able to get close enough to shoot and injure former President Donald Trump at a rally Saturday in Pennsylvania, a monumental failure of one of the agency's core duties.

The gunman, who was killed by Secret Service personnel, fired multiple shots at the stage from an elevated position outside of the rally venue, the agency said. An Associated Press analysis of more than a dozen videos and photos

taken at the Trump rally, as well as satellite imagery of the site, shows the shooter, was able to get astonishingly close to the stage where the former president was speaking. A video posted to social media and geolocated by the AP shows the body of a man wearing gray camouflage lying motionless on the roof of a manufacturing plant just north of the Butler Farm Show grounds, where Trump's rally was held. The roof was less than 150 metres (yards) from where Trump was speaking, a distance from which a decent marksman could

reasonably hit a human-sized target. For reference, 150 metres is a distance at which US Army recruits must hit a scaled humanized silhouette to qualify with the M16 assault rifle in basic training. The AR-15, like the shooter at the Trump rally had, is the semi-automatic civilian version of the military M16. The FBI early on Sunday identified the shooter as Thomas Matthew Crooks, 20, of Bethel Park, Pennsylvania. The Secret Service didn't have anybody at a late-night news conference where FBI and

Pennsylvania State Police officials briefed reporters on the shooting investigation. FBI Special Agent in Charge Kevin Rojek said it was surprising that the gunman was able to fire at the stage before he was killed. Members of the Secret Service's counter sniper team and counter assault team were at the rally, according to two law enforcement officials. US secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said his department are working with law enforcement to investigate the shooting. - AP



Police snipers return fire after shots were fired while former President Donald Trump was speaking at a campaign event in Butler, US on Saturday. - AP

WITNESS SAW MAN CRAWLING UP ROOF WITH RIFLE IN HAND

Chicago, July 14: An eyewitness told BBC that he saw a "man on top of a roof" near President Trump's Pennsylvania rally. "We noticed the guy crawling up the roof of the building beside us, 50 feet away from us," the witness, Greg, said, who seemed visibly shaken. "He had a rifle, we could clearly see him with a rifle. Next thing you know, I'm thinking to myself why is Trump still speaking? Why have they not pulled him off the stage? I'm standing there pointing at him... the next thing you know, five shots ring out," he said. President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have been briefed about the incident, which is receiving widespread condemnation from a shocked nation. - PTI

quick  
BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	80,519.34 0.78
Nifty 50	24,502.15 0.77
S&P 500*	5,615.31 0.55
Dollar (₹)	83.53 0.01
Pound Sterling (₹)	108.17 0.52
Euro (₹)	90.93 0.32
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	73,285.16 0.02
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	85.27 -0.40
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.986 0.004
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.187 -0.006

\* As of 8:30 PM IST



## IndianOil starts producing fuel for motor racing

IndianOil has started producing fuel used in motor racing and dispatched its maiden consignment. The firm's refinery at Paradip in Odisha has started producing Storm-X - a high-octane petrol formulated for racing cars. The launch of premium racing fuel for motor racing events across the country and in international circuit is part of the firm's pursuit of innovation and excellence, IndianOil said.

## Q1 exports in positive territory, says Goyal

Roll-out of 4G and 5G is helping service exports: Minister

New Delhi, July 14: India's exports have recorded healthy growth in May and remained in the positive zone in June and the first quarter of the current fiscal despite global challenges, commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal has said.

He also said that growth in the services sector is helping the country's out-bound shipments to register positive growth rates.

India's merchandise exports rose 9.1 per cent to \$38.13 billion in May. During April-May this fiscal, the out-bound shipments grew by 5.1 per cent to \$73.12 billion.

The commerce ministry will officially release the export data for June on July 15. "Despite the ongoing two wars (Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas), the Red Sea crisis, and container shortage issues, our exports are in a positive zone. One



● A HEALTHY infusion of funds by foreign portfolio investments in India reflects greater confidence of investors in India despite high interest rates in developed economies.

more advantage that we have is the fast pace growth in services exports," the minister said.

He added that the services sector has received a boost from the government's Digital India mission. "The roll-out of 4G and 5G in the country too is helping the service exports of India," he noted.

Last month, the minister stated that India's goods and services exports are expected to cross \$800 bn this fiscal despite global challenges. In 2023-24, the shipments stood at \$778.2

billion (goods \$437.1 billion and services \$341 bn).

On foreign direct investments (FDI) into the country, he said the inflows would increase once the international recessionary conditions start improving and interest rates in US and Europe start coming down.

Irrespective of this situation, India is continuously receiving FDI, he added. The US and other developed countries have high interest rates, and because of that, those markets are profitable to invest in.

The commerce minister added that a healthy infusion of funds by foreign portfolio investments (FPIs) in India reflects greater confidence of investors in India despite high interest rates in developed economies.

FPIs in June infused ₹26,565 crore in Indian equities, driven by political stability and a sharp rebound in markets.

FDI equity inflows in India declined 3.49 per cent to \$44.42 billion in 2023-24. Inflows during January-March FY24, however, rose by 33.4 per cent to \$12.38 billion against \$9.28 billion in the year-ago period.

The total FDI - which includes equity inflows, reinvested earnings and other capital - declined marginally by one per cent to \$70.95 billion during 2023-24 from \$71.35 billion in 2022-23, data from the DPIIT showed. — PTI

## NET DIRECT TAX MOP-UP THIS FISCAL UP 19.5% TO ₹5.74L-CR

New Delhi, July 14: Net direct tax collection grew 19.54 per cent to over ₹5.74 lakh crore so far this fiscal on higher advance tax payment by corporates.

The first instalment of advance tax, which was due on June 15, rose 27.34 per cent to ₹1.48 lakh crore. This includes corporation income tax (CIT) at ₹1.14 lakh crore and personal income tax (PIT) at ₹34,470 crore.

The net direct tax collection of ₹5,74,357 crore (as of July 11, 2024) includes CIT at ₹2,10,274 crore and PIT at ₹3,64,036 crore, as per data released by Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT).

Securities transaction tax (STT) accounted ₹16,634 crore to direct tax collection, it said.

During the same period last year, net direct tax collection was ₹4,80,458 crore.

Refunds amounting to ₹70,902 crore have also been issued in FY25 till July 11, which is 64.4 per cent higher than refunds issued during the same period in the previous year.

For April-July 11, gross collection of direct taxes (before adjusting for refunds) stood at ₹6.45 lakh crore compared to ₹5.23 lakh crore in the year-ago period, showing a growth of 23.24 per cent.

For the full fiscal year, the interim budget has pegged direct tax collection at ₹21.99 lakh crore. — PTI

## Markets to sway on Budget hopes, June qtr. results

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, JULY 14

Market momentum and expectation from the Union Budget may keep Nifty-50 in the 24,500 range as the Budget will be tabled on July 23.

The week ahead also has a crowded earnings calendar with Infosys (July 18), Reliance Industries and Ultratech Cement (July 19), Bajaj Auto (July 16), HDFC Bank (July 20) among others scheduled to announce first quarter financial performance.

While macro economic data released last week were mixed, the higher inflation may dampen market sentiments while higher index of industrial production data and reduction in monsoon deficit in July will cheer broader markets.

Last week stock market indices Sensex and Nifty-50 rose for the sixth consecutive week with the Sensex closing at new all time high of 80,519.34 and Nifty-50 at 24,502.

"Inflation increased to 5.08 per cent year on year from 4.75 per cent in May with the seasonal increase in vegetable prices higher than expected. Core inflation inched up from all time lows but slowed sequentially. A plus 5 per cent print, albeit seasonal, will likely make the RBI's monetary policy committee more hawkish. Our base case remains for a cut in Dec., with a risk of no cuts this year," said Shreya Sodhani, regional economist, Barclays.

Besides Infosys, Wipro, LTIMindtree, Mastek,

● INFLOWS INTO DIIs like mutual funds are now on an upward trajectory and this will keep the markets resilient. FPI flows will continue to be erratic influenced by global factors.

Persistent Systems's first quarter results, will set direction for IT companies. Besides HDFC Bank, other banks and financial services companies Q1 results in the week.

Market has good support from domestic institutional investors (DIIs) while foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have been erratic.

Foreign investors have net invested ₹18,553.01 crore in equities this year so far while they invested ₹77,108.36 crore in debt.

"Inflows into DIIs like mutual funds are now on an upward trajectory and this will keep the markets resilient. FPI flows will continue to be erratic influenced by global factors. Better-than-expected results from IT majors who have come out with results so far indicate potential for FPIs buying in these stocks," said V K Vijayakumar, chief investment strategist, Geojit Financial Services.

## Retail digital payments to double to \$7 tn

New Delhi, July 14: With digital adoption fast gaining currency, India is likely to see retail digital payments double to \$7 trillion by 2030 from current levels, a study by Kearney and Amazon Pay said.

In the report 'How Urban India Pays', Kearney-Amazon Pay said strong adoption of digital payments in online purchases has potentially led to a permanent shift in consumer behaviours, fueling offline adoption as well.

While 90 per cent of the respondents of the survey preferred digital payments when making online purchases, affluent consumers lead the way with the highest degree of digital payment usage, tending to use various modes of digital payment for 80 per cent of their transactions.

"Millennials and Gen X are leading in the adoption of all types of digital payment instruments," it said. "Men and women both use digital payments in about 72 per cent of their transactions."

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India has seen a surge in e-commerce, with the market valued at \$75 billion to \$80 billion in 2022 and expected to grow at a 21 per cent CAGR until 2030.

"In line with India's digital journey, retail digital payments have grown dramatically over the past five years - from \$300 billion in FY18 to \$3.6 trillion in fiscal year 2023-24," the report said. — PTI

## WORLD

## SHORT TAKES

## MAN KILLS TWO WOMEN, HIMSELF IN GERMANY

Berlin, July 14: A man killed himself and two others in an attack on Sunday in a home in Lautlingen, a village in the German state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, according to local police.

Two women were severely injured in the attack, which was first reported by newspaper Bild.

The wider public was not at risk, the police said.

## THREE PRISON ESCAPEES KILLED IN NIGER

Niamey, July 14: Niger has recaptured "a large number" of detainees who escaped from a high-security prison near the capital Niamey, the army said Saturday, adding that three of the "dozens" of escapees had been killed.

The jailbreak occurred on Thursday at the Koutoukale prison that houses many jihadist insurgents that have targeted the West African nation for years.

In a statement, the army said a mutiny broke out at the prison, with "several dozens of inmates taking advantage of the situation to escape".

"Thanks to a rapid and efficient response... A large number of the fugitives were caught," it said, without providing details.

It added that three "armed terrorists" were killed and that searches were underway "to find the remaining escapees" in a populated area around the Niger river.

Authorities had ordered a curfew after the escape, without specifying the number of fugitives at large.

Koutoukale prison is in the Tillaberi region, a vast and unstable border area of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso that is prone to attacks by rebels linked to the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda groups.

Niger is ruled by a military junta that seized power in a July 2023 coup.

The army also said Saturday that six soldiers were killed in a jihadist attack Wednesday in the neighbouring Tahoua region.

## Hamas pulling out of truce talks after strike

Govt in Gaza Strip says 92 killed, 300 hurt in Al-Mawasi attack

Gaza Strip, July 14: A Hamas official said Sunday the Palestinian group was withdrawing from Gaza truce talks, following a deadly Israeli strike that targeted militant commander Mohammed Deif more than nine months into the war.

The Islamist group's military chief Deif was "well and directly overseeing" operations, another Hamas official said despite the bombing raid on a southern Gaza displacement camp on Saturday, which Israel said was an attempt to kill him.

The first senior official from the Iran-backed group, whose October 7 attack on southern Israel sparked the war, said Hamas was pulling out of negotiations towards a ceasefire partly because of



An Israeli army infantry fighting vehicle moves at a position along the border with the Gaza Strip on Sunday. — AFP

Israeli "massacres". The health ministry in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip said at least 92 people had been killed and 300 wounded in a strike on Al-Mawasi, an Israeli-designated "safe zone" on the Mediterranean coast.

Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas' Qatar-based political chief, told international mediators of "decision to halt negotiations". — AFP

## HAMAS BRIGADE COMMANDER KILLED IN GAZA

Jerusalem, July 14: The Israeli military said that Rafa Salama, Hamas' Khan Younis brigade commander, was killed in an air strike on Saturday that also targeted the head of the group's armed wing, Mohammed Deif.

The military said Salama was one of Deif's closest associates and was involved in planning Hamas' October 7 attack. His death, "significantly impedes Hamas' military capabilities," the military said. Hamas has not confirmed Salama's fate. — Reuters

## 4 DEAD IN B'DAY PARTY SHOOTING IN FRANCE

Espinasse-Vozelle, France, July 14: Four people, including the shooter, died late Saturday when a man opened fire on a birthday party in a village in France, authorities said.

The man approached a neighbouring house where a 20-year-old was celebrating his birthday with his family in Espinasse-Vozelle, a central French village of around 1,000 inhabitants about 60 kilometres (37 miles) north of Clermont-Ferrand. He fired shots at the party guests, killing three of them, and then himself, the local prefecture said.

The young man celebrating his birthday and his father were both killed. Police were still piecing together the "how and the why" of the attack, authorities said. The man appears to have shot at passing motorists before the deadly assault. — AFP

## Oli named Nepal's new PM; to take oath today

Kathmandu, July 14: K.P. Sharma Oli, the leader of Nepal's largest communist party, was appointed Nepal's Prime Minister for a fourth term on Sunday to lead a new coalition government that faces the daunting challenge of providing political stability in the Himalayan nation.

Oli, 72, succeeds Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' who lost the vote of confidence in the House of Representatives, leading to the formation of the new government process as per Article 76 (2) of the Constitution.

President Ram Chandra Paudel appointed Oli, Chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), as the new Prime Minister under Article 76-2 of the Constitution of Nepal, according to a notice issued by the President's Office.

Oli became the Prime Minister with the support of the Nepali Congress, the largest party in Parliament.

Oli's swearing-in ceremony is scheduled to take place at 11 am on Monday at Shital Niwas, the main building of Rashtrapati Bhawan.

Oli now needs to secure a vote of confidence from Parliament within 30 days of appointment according to the constitutional mandate. Oli will need a minimum of 138 votes in the 275-seat House of Representatives (HoR).

On Friday night, Oli staked his claim to become the next Prime Minister with the backing of NC president Sher Bahadur Deuba and submitted the signatures of 165 House of Representatives (HoR) members — 77 from his Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) party

and 88 from the Nepali Congress (NC).

CPN-Maoist Centre Chairman Prachanda lost the vote of confidence in HoR during a floor test on Friday.

Earlier last week, Nepali Congress president Deuba and CPN-UML chairman Oli inked a seven-point deal to form a new coalition government replacing Prachanda. The two leaders agreed that the remaining term of the Parliament would be shared between them turn by turn.

According to the July 1 deal between Congress chief Deuba and UML chair Oli, the two parties will lead the government on a rotational basis until next general elections scheduled for 2027.

Prime Minister Oli will form a small cabinet on Monday, according to sources close to him. — PTI

## CPC to unveil reforms to halt economic slowdown

CHINA, RUSSIA START NAVAL DRILLS AFTER NATO CRITICISES BEIJING

Beijing, July 14: China's ruling Communist Party headed by President Xi Jinping will begin its four-day key economic review meeting on Monday to finalise a new set of economic reforms to revitalise the country's economy hamstrung by the persistent slowdown that has sparked concerns at home and abroad.

The meeting called the third Plenum to be attended by 376 full and alternate members of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee will meet from Monday to Thursday to primarily examine issues related to comprehensive deepening reforms and advancing Chinese modernisation, according to an official announcement earlier.

The meeting to be presided over by President Xi who also heads the party aroused global attention as the world's second-largest economy worth USD 18 trillion was unable to shake off its slowdown mode, especially after the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The party's powerful Politburo presided over by Xi finalised the draft for the discussion at the Plenum, CPC's top economic policy body on

the exercise, which began in Guangdong province on Sunday and is expected to last until mid-July, aimed to demonstrate the capabilities of the navies in addressing security threats and preserving peace and stability globally and regionally, state broadcaster CCTV reported Saturday, adding it would include anti-missile exercises, sea strikes and air defence.

Xinhua News Agency reported the Chinese and Russian naval forces carried out on-map military simulation and tactical coordination exercises. — AFP

The Chinese defence ministry said in a brief statement forces from both sides recently patrolled the western and northern Pacific Ocean and that the operation had nothing to do with international and regional situations and didn't target any third party.

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The party's powerful Politburo presided over by Xi finalised the draft for the discussion at the Plenum, CPC's top economic policy body on

the grim economic outlook in the country due to insufficient demand and uncertain external environment.

The meeting spoke of the difficult situation at home and abroad for Chinese enterprises.

China in the last few years focussed its resources to build a massive overcapacity in EVs. — Reuters

## PIOs held for enslavement in Italy

Rome, July 14: Two Indian nationals have been arrested for allegedly enslaving 33 farm labourers, all from India, in Italy's Verona province, according to a media report, weeks after the country was shocked by the tragic death of a Sikh farm worker who bled to death.

Finance police also seized assets worth 475,000 euros from the suspects, who own two agricultural sector companies with no employees on the books and are allegedly total tax evaders, ANSA news agency reported on Saturday.

The two alleged gangmasters were arrested on Saturday and are under investigation for crimes,

including enslavement and labour exploitation, the Italian news agency said.

The issue of modern forms of slavery in Italy recently came to the fore of media attention following the case of 31-year-old Sikh farm labourer Satnam Singh, who bled to death after being abandoned by his employer after a strawberry wrapping machine severed his arm in Lazio, near Rome, last month. Singh, who was an Indian national, died due to "copious bleeding".

On June 26, India asked Italy to take prompt action against those responsible for Singh's death.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said last

month that Singh, one of thousands of Indian immigrants who work the fields in the country, was the victim of "inhuman acts".

"These are inhumane acts that do not belong to the Italian people. I hope that this barbarity will be punished harshly," she said following a Cabinet meeting.

Gangmastering and the often violent exploitation of migrant farm labourers is a chronic problem in Italy, especially in the south of the country.

Latina hosts thousands of immigrant labourers, many of them Sikhs, working picking fruit and vegetables for the local 'agro-mafia', according to Italian media reports. — PTI

## SHORT TAKES

### BCCI to release ₹1cr for Gaekwad

**Mumbai:** In a noble gesture, the BCCI on Sunday decided to release Rs one crore for the treatment of former India coach Anshuman Gaikwad, who is battling blood cancer at a medical facility in London. BCCI's decision has come following emotional appeals for support from former captain Kapil Dev and Sandip Patil, who had enjoined the cricket board to help Gaikwad. "Mr. Jay Shah has instructed the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to release ₹1 crore with immediate effect to provide financial assistance to India's veteran cricketer Mr Anshuman Gaikwad, who is battling cancer," BCCI apex council said. Gaekwad, son of former India captain D. K. Gaekwad, is undergoing treatment for blood cancer at the King's College Hospital in London. "Shah has also spoken to Mr Gaekwad's family to take stock of the situation and extend support," the statement continued. — PTI

### Lahiri takes 4-shot lead in Spain golf

**Sotogrande, Spain:** Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri inched closer to a maiden win on the LIV golf series as he carded a 5-under 66 in the second round to take a four-shot lead at the LIV Golf Andalucia here. Lahiri, who plays on the Crushers team, put himself in position for his first win after the second round that included six birdies and no bogeys in his last 13 holes. The 37-year-old, who opened with a 2-under 69, is 7-under with 18 holes to go. New Zealand's Danny Lee is closest pursuer at 3-under. Lahiri is seeking to end his nine-year victory drought. His last win came in his home country in the Hero Indian Open on the DP World Tour. "It (the lead) doesn't really matter on this golf course. Every day you have to battle it out — (but) it is a difficult golf course to catch up," Lahiri said. Thanks to Lahiri, captain Bryson DeChambeau's 67 and Paul Casey's 69, the league-leading Crushers shot a counting score of 11-under to move atop the team leaderboard at 7-under. — PTI

### Anahat, Shaurya in fourth round

**New Delhi:** India's Anahat Singh and Shaurya Bawa entered the fourth round of the World Junior Squash Championships in Houston in the girls' and boys' sections respectively. Reigning women's national champion Anahat defeated Samantha Jaffe of the US 11-7, 12-10, 11-6 in the third round. She will meet Japan's Akari Midorikawa for a place in the quarterfinals. Meanwhile, Bawa rallied to beat USA's Rustin Wiser 4-11, 11-7, 12-10, 11-6 in the third round and will lock horns with Segundo Portabales of Argentina in the pre-quarterfinals. — PTI

**Other Indian results:** Yuvraj Wadhvani lost to Javier Emilio Romo Lopez (Ecuador) 11-8, 6-11, 11-7, 8-11, 6-11.

**Girls third round:** Tiana Parasampuria lost to Lauren Baltayan (France) 5-11, 3-11, 3-11.

### Saneeth & Tasnim clinch singles titles

**Pune:** Karnataka's Saneeth DS and Gujarat's Tasnim Mir notched up comfortable wins over their respective opponents to secure the men's and women's singles titles in the Yonex-Sunrise VV Natu Memorial All India Senior Ranking badminton tournament here on Sunday. Third seed Saneeth ended the dream run of qualifier Tushar Suveer 21-15, 21-12 in a 44-minute clash between two Karnataka players in the men's final, while Tasnim got the better of Devika, who won the last ranking meet in Bengaluru, 21-16, 21-13. While the youngsters ruled the singles categories, the experienced Aarthi Sara Sunil showed that she is still a force to reckon with, clinching the women's doubles crown in the company of VS Varshini. The top seeds came from a game down to beat Karnataka's former national champions Shikha Gautam and Ashwini Bhat K 17-21, 22-20, 21-18 in 53 minutes. Shikha, however, stood atop the mixed doubles podium as she and Nitin Kumar, seeded second, defeated Dhruv Rawat and Radhika Sharma 15-21, 21-14, 21-17 in the final. — PTI



**FINAL SCORE**  
6-2, 6-2, 7-6 (7/4)

Carlos Alcaraz of Spain celebrates after defeating Novak Djokovic of Serbia in the men's singles final of the Wimbledon tennis championships in London on Sunday. — AP

## Carlos overpowers Djokovic to retain Wimbledon crown

**London, July 14:** Carlos Alcaraz overpowered seven-time champion Novak Djokovic in straight sets to retain his Wimbledon title on Sunday in a brutal statement that the new era of men's tennis has arrived. The Spanish third seed produced a performance combining awesome power with delicate touch to win 6-2, 6-2, 7-6 (7/4), collecting the fourth Grand Slam of his young career. Alcaraz equals the Open Era record for most Grand Slams won at the age 21 or under, joining Boris Becker, Bjorn Borg and Mats Wilander. And he is just the sixth man to win the French Open and Wimbledon back to back. Djokovic, 37, who had knee surgery just weeks ago, was aiming to win a 25th Grand Slam — which would

have been a record in the men's and women's game. But he had no answers in the Centre Court sunshine as the electric Alcaraz pounded him from the back of the court and treated the crowd to an array of his trademark drop shots. "Honestly, it is a dream for me winning this trophy," said the Spaniard. "I did an interview when I was 11 and I said my dream is to win Wimbledon. "For me this is the most beautiful tournament, the most beautiful court and the most beautiful trophy." Alcaraz paid tribute to his beaten opponent, who only found his range in the third set. "Djokovic is an unbelievable fighter, I knew he was going to have his chances," said Alcaraz who had needed five sets to defeat the Serb in the 2023 final. "It was difficult but I

tried to stay calm going into the tie-break and tried to play my best tennis. I was glad that at the end I could find the solutions." **BREAKTHROUGH** Alcaraz seized the initiative in a first game of breathtaking quality lasting 14 minutes, taking advantage of his fifth break point. The Spaniard settled quickly into his routine on serve and went up a double break when Djokovic double-faulted in the fifth game. The shell-shocked Serbian, playing in his 10th Wimbledon final, held serve to love to close the gap to 5-2 but dumped the ball into the net to hand the Spaniard the first set. Alcaraz was immediately on the front foot in the second set, forcing a break in the first game and fending off pressure on his own serve to take a 2-0 lead. — AFP

## Unseeded Henry-Harry save 3 match points for first Slam



**Harri Heliövaara (left) of Finland and Henry Patten of Britain hold their trophies aloft after winning the men's doubles final.** — AP

**London, July 14:** Wimbledon for their first Grand Slam title on Saturday. Heliövaara saved three match points in the second set before beating Australian duo Max Purcell and Jordan Thompson 6-7 (7), 7-6 (8), 7-6 (11-9) in the men's doubles final at

third British man in the professional era to win the men's doubles at the All England Club, joining Jonathan Marray in 2012 and Neal Skupski last year. Playing on Centre Court, the duo never had a break point in the match and missed a set point in the first set after coming from 6-1 down in the tiebreaker to lead 7-6. In the second set, they saved a match point at 6-5 and two more in the tiebreaker, where they trailed 5-2 before beginning their turnaround. In the third-set tiebreaker, the 15th-seeded Thompson and Purcell also led 7-6 but couldn't close it out. "Obviously couldn't have been a closer match," Patten said. "I can't really remember what happened to be honest." — AP

## Uruguay down Canada to finish third

**Charlotte (United States), July 14:** Luis Suarez rescued Uruguay with an injury-time equaliser before the South Americans defeated Canada 4-3 in a penalty shoot-out to win the Copa America's third place playoff match on Saturday. Uruguay looked to be heading to a shock defeat after the Canadians took a 2-1 lead in the 80th minute through a Jonathan David goal at Charlotte's Bank of America Stadium. But former Barcelona and Liverpool star Suarez, who came on as a second-half substitute, swept in a crisp finish from Jose Gimenez in the second minute of injury time to make it 2-2 and send the game to penalties. In the shoot-out, Canada midfielder Ismael Kone saw his spot-kick saved by Uruguay goalkeeper Sergio Rochet before Alphonso Davies saw an



attempted panenka hit the crossbar and bounce out before Suarez's late leveler. Uruguay had got off to a dream start with Tottenham midfielder Rodrigo Bentancur firing them into the lead after just eight minutes. Sebastian Caceres out-jumped his marker to knock down for Bentancur, who turned and swiveled before rifling a shot into the roof of the net. The Uruguayans almost

doubled their lead soon afterwards when a sweeping counter-attack left Canada's defence scrambling to cover, only for Maximiliano Araujo's shot to be blocked by Canada goalkeeper Dayne St. Clair. That miss proved costly as moments later Kone equalised for Canada with a superb improvised finish on 22 minutes. Jacob Shaffelburg's corner was met with a header by Moise Bombito, and Kone lobbed the advancing Rochet with a deft flick to make it 1-1. Uruguay thought they had equalised almost immediately when Facundo Pellistri got the ball in the net in the 23rd minute. An offside in the build-up however saw the goal chalked off. — AFP

## INDIA VS ZIMBABWE | 5TH T20

# Sanju, Mukesh fire India to win

**Harare, July 14:** Sanju Samson's well-crafted fifty and Mukesh Kumar's disciplined spell helped India wind up their Zimbabwe tour with a comprehensive 42-run victory in the fifth and final T20I here on Sunday. With this win, India clinched the series 4-1. Samson's (58, 45b) was central to India's healthy 167 for six along with Shivam Dube's flashy 26 (12b). Then the India bowlers led by Mukesh (4/22), Shivam Dube (2/25) and Washington Sundar (1/7) did their job, bundling out Zimbabwe for 125 in 18.3 overs.

After the early dismissal of Wessly Madhevere, who dragged the third ball of the first over by pacer Mukesh onto his stumps, and Brian Bennett, the pair of Tadiwanashe Marumani (27) and Dion Myers (34) added 44 runs for the third wicket to keep the hosts in the hunt. Marumani's switch-hit four off leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi, who went for a few runs in this match, was quite stunning in its execution. But such shots were few and far between from the Zimbabwe batters. Marumani went for a sweep shot against Washington but missed the line altogether as the ball crashed on to his upper torso to get adjudged as leg-before. The final nail on their hope was the run out of skipper Sikandar Raza (8), which came in a cartwheel of four wickets for nine runs. Mukesh, who bagged his career-best T20 figure, fittingly ended Zimbabwe innings going through the gate of Richard Ngarava. Earlier, Samson (1x4, 4x6) and Riyan Parag (22, 24b) added 65 runs for the fourth wicket as India

SCOREBOARD	
<b>India:</b> Yashasvi Jaiswal b Sikandar Raza 12, Shubman Gill (c) c Sikandar Raza b Richard Ngarava 13, Abhishek Sharma c Clive Madande b Blessing Muzarabani 14, Sanju Samson c Tadiwanashe Marumani b Blessing Muzarabani 58, Riyan Parag c Richard Ngarava b Brandon Mavuta 22, Shivam Dube run out 26, Rinku Singh not out 11, Washington Sundar not out 1. Extras (lb-4, nb-1, w-5) 10. <b>Total (For 6 wickets in 20 overs) 167.</b>	
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-13, 2-38, 3-40, 4-105, 5-135, 6-153.	
<b>Bowling:</b> Sikandar Raza 4-0-29-1, Faraz Akram 4-0-39-0, Blessing Muzarabani 4-0-19-2, Brandon Mavuta 4-0-39-1.	
<b>Zimbabwe:</b> Wessly Madhevere b Mukesh Kumar 0, Tadiwanashe Marumani lbw b Washington Sundar 27, Brian Bennett c Shivam Dube b Mukesh Kumar 10, Dion Myers c Abhishek Sharma b Shivam Dube 34, Sikandar Raza run out 8, Johnathan Campbell c Tushar Deshpande b Shivam Dube 4, Clive Madande c Sanju Samson b Abhishek Sharma 1, Faraz Akram c Sanju Samson b Mukesh Kumar 27, Brandon Mavuta c & b Deshpande 4, Blessing Muzarabani not out 1, Richard Ngarava b Mukesh Kumar 0. Extras (b-1, lb-2, nb-2, w-4) 9. <b>Total (all out in 18.3 overs) 125.</b>	
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-1, 2-15, 3-59, 4-85, 5-87, 6-90, 7-94, 8-120, 9-123, 10-125.	
<b>Bowling:</b> Mukesh Kumar 3.3-0-22-4, Tushar Deshpande 3-0-25-1, Ravi Bishnoi 3-0-23-0, Washington Sundar 2-0-7-1, Abhishek Sharma 3-0-20-1, Shivam Dube 4-0-25-2.	

recovered from a mid-dling Power Play in which they scored 44 for three. Yashasvi Jaiswal (12), who made an unbeaten 93 in the fourth T20I, started the proceedings with two sixes in the first two balls of the innings bowled by Raza. — PTI



Sanju Samson in action against Zimbabwe during their fifth T20 match at the Harare Sports club in Harare on Sunday. India won by 42 runs. — AP

## ADAPTING TO CONDITIONS QUICKLY WAS KEY FOR GILL

**Harare, July 14:** The hunger to bounce back and adaptive skills helped Indian team pull itself up following the shocking loss in the series opener to win the remaining four matches against Zimbabwe, said skipper Shubman Gill here on Sunday. India suffered an unexpected 13-run loss in the first game of the five-match series as the team fell short of chasing a modest 115-run total on July 6. But the visitors quickly put the disappointment on the backburner to win the series 4-1. "I think, the hunger that we showed after losing the first match was fantastic to watch. When we came here, not everyone had a lot of hits in the nets. We weren't really used to the conditions. The way we adapted (was

great)," said Gill. "Player of the Series' Washington Sundar said the pace and bounce of the pitch here took the Indian batters by surprise initially, which cost them the first match, adding that the series win had given the side a lot of confidence going into the upcoming white-ball series against Sri Lanka. India will play a six-match away series against the Islanders from July 27, which includes three T20Is and an equal number of ODIs. "Good to finish with a win. I felt after the first game that the condition were very similar to South Africa, with extra speed and extra bounce. Lots of takeaways, lots of learnings, a lot of confidence going into the Sri Lanka series," said Sundar. — PTI