



OPINION 6
BYPOLL RESULTS INDICATE A SHIFTING VOTER PREFERENCE

WORLD 9
BANDAGED TRUMP'S RAPTUROUS GOP CONVENTION DEBUT

MONEY 10
SENSEX, NIFTY CLOSE AT RECORD HIGH LEVELS

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol.160 Issue 192
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

LUCKNOW, WEDNESDAY JULY 17, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

Established 1864

the pioneer

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HARDIK PANDYA TO LEAD INDIA IN T20s AGAINST SRI LANKA
12 SPORTS

Spiralling terror in Jammu claims four Army personnel

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A Captain of the Indian Army, along with three other soldiers, was martyred during a fierce gunfight with a group of suspected foreign terrorists in Jammu Dessa forest area...



Security forces personnel during an encounter with terrorists in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir, on Tuesday

contact with the terrorists hiding in the area, which is a thickly forested and mountainous area with restricted visibility due to low clouds and rain.

inducted to flush out the terrorists and the use of drones and other technical resources is being ensured.

Dwivedi, who apprised him of the ground situation and ongoing operation in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda on Tuesday.

families. The nation stands firmly with the families of our soldiers who have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty.

Implementation of digital attendance of govt teachers put on hold

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government on Tuesday decided to suspend its order for digital attendance of teachers till further orders and constituted a committee to submit its report on the issue.

CM YOGI GIVES RESIDENTS RELIEF FROM DEMOLITION ALONG KUKRAIL — P3



Security personnel and locals near the residence of Jitan Sahani, father of former Minister Mukesh Sahani, after he was found dead, at Ghanshyampur in Darbhanga district, on Tuesday

Spate of political murders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA/CHENNAI/NEW DELHI

In two separate ghastly murder incidents that have sent shock waves across Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and the political circles of the national Capital days ahead of Parliament Session...

home in Bihar's Darbhanga district, police said on Tuesday. His body, with several stab injuries and cut marks on his chest and stomach, was found inside his room at his house in Biralu area this morning.

Continued on Page 8

Government convenes all-party meet ahead of Monsoon session of Sadan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has convened an all-party meeting on July 21 ahead of the Monsoon session of Parliament which will start next Monday during which the full fledged annual Budget of the third term of the Narendra Modi-led NDA Government will be presented.

The traditional 'halwa' ceremony, marking the final stage of the Budget preparation process for Union Budget 2024, was held in North Block on Tuesday, in the presence of Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

The customary ceremony begins with the Finance Minister stirring the 'halwa' in the kadhai and then serving it to the colleagues in the Ministry. It is a tradition performed every year ahead of the Budget and it marks the final stage of preparing the plan for the upcoming financial year.



The Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Nirmala Sitharaman, commences final stage of Union Budget 2024 with halwa ceremony, in New Delhi, on Tuesday

Budget session. The meeting has been called by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijji, the Ministry said in a statement. This will be Leader of Opposition and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's first time at the customary session-eve meeting of the floor leaders from all parties if he attends it.

become the first Finance Minister in India's history to deliver seven consecutive Budgets. She will surpass the record previously held by Morarji Desai, who presented six consecutive Budgets between 1959 and 1963.

Continued on Page 8

EC releases SOPs for EVMs

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Acting on a Supreme Court judgment, the Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday released a technical Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for checking and verifying the burnt memory of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), with expanded choices for candidates.

The technical SOP includes the selection of EVMs from any polling station in an Assembly constituency, the mix and match of EVM units (BU-CU-VVPAT) from any polling station, connecting BU-CU-VVPAT in any sequence and the option of casting up to 1,400 votes in a mock poll in any sequence.



order in which the units are connected does not have an impact on how they work. According to the SOP, the checking would be done by authorised and trained engineers from BEL and ECIL.

The entire process would be carried out under CCTV cameras and in the presence of candidates or their representatives. On April 26, the Supreme Court had ordered the EC to facilitate checking and verification of the burnt memory or microcontrollers of up to 5 per cent of the Electronic Voting Machines (ballot units and control units) and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails of an Assembly constituency or Assembly segment of a Lok Sabha constituency on the written request of the candidates who come in

process. This will ensure the EVMs are picked up from across the constituency as per choice of the applicant without the involvement of a third party or officials in selecting or leaving out any particular machine. The choice to mix and match EVM units from any polling station in the assembly constituency has also been offered.

If any applicant candidate selects any specific unit — ballot unit, control unit or VVPAT — of a particular polling station, he/she is not bound to choose other units of the same set used at that polling station. At least one ballot unit, one control unit and one VVPAT or paper trail machine makes up for one EVM.

Instead, the applicant candidate can mix and match and give his choice of other units from remaining polled units used at other polling stations in the assembly constituency or assembly segment to make a set. Polled units are those which were used in the elections to cast votes.

Continued on Page 8



Two arrested in NEET leak case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Tuesday arrested two persons, including a key accused in the NEET-UG paper leak case, who allegedly stole the paper from a National Testing Agency's trunk in Hazaribagh in Jharkhand.

The CBI has arrested Pankaj Kumar alias Aditya, a 2017-batch civil engineer from the National Institute of Technology Jamshedpur, who allegedly stole the NEET-UG paper from the NTA trunk in Hazaribagh officials said.

According to officials, the CBI has also arrested one Raju Singh who allegedly helped Kumar in stealing the paper and passing them on to other gang members, adding that Singh was arrested from Hazaribagh. Earlier this month, the CBI arrested the main accused, Rakesh Ranjan alias Rocky, from Bihar's Nalanda. Rakesh Ranjan is believed to be one of the key players in the NEET paper leak. The CBI set a trap and conducted raids at four locations in Patna and Kolkata to arrest Ranjan. The CBI has been utilising advanced investigative techniques to track down and apprehend those involved.

Top babus tasked to push Modi's 100-day agenda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Top bureaucrats of all Central Government Ministries and departments have been directed to identify at least one impactful project to be commissioned in the first 100 days of the Government and implementation of action points, as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Rajiv Gauba

concerted steps should be taken for India to become the third largest economy in the shortest possible time. He said Modi has emphasised that all Ministries and departments should identify at least one impactful project to be commissioned, one project to be grounded and one scheme or initiative to be

launched during the first 100 days of the new Government. "Ministries/departments to take steps for implementation of action points in 100 days' agenda prepared by them, after obtaining necessary approvals," the letter said. The secretaries were told that each Ministry and department will formulate initiatives and ideas for implementation as part of 'Panch Pran' (five resolutions) announced by the Prime Minister during his Independence Day address on August 15, 2022.

"Each Ministry/ department to effect qualitative improvements in their grievance redressal systems to make them more sensitive, accessible and meaningful.

'Ease of Living' for citizens is a high priority for government. Ministries/departments to make sustained efforts for reducing compliance burden and decriminalising minor offences," the letter said. The Cabinet Secretary said a comprehensive exercise to be undertaken by all Ministries and departments to simplify rules and regulations and processes to ensure that these are consistent with the spirit of laws and policies. This may be ensured also while framing new rules and processes, he said. He said Ministries and departments should revamp their websites to ensure that they are user friendly, taking into account the global best practices.

Continued on Page 8

Controversial IAS officer Puja Khedkar grounded

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Relieving her from its district training programme, the Maharashtra Government on Tuesday ordered controversial trainee Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Dr Puja Manorama Dilip Khedkar — who is under scanner for alleged misuse of power and privileges — to return to the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie. Acting on a letter received from the LBSNAA which recalled Puja 'for further action', the Maharashtra Government kept her district



training programme on hold and directed her to join the academy on or before July 23. "It is informed that the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie has decided to keep your district training programme on hold

and immediately recall you for further necessary action. Therefore, you are hereby relieved from the district training programme of the State Government of Maharashtra.... You are instructed to join the academy at the earliest but not later than July 23, 2024 under any circumstances," Maharashtra's additional chief secretary (P) Nitin Gadre stated in a letter issued to Puja. Puja's recall to LBSNAA came on the heels of her transfer to Washim from Pune, amid allegations of manipulation of disability and OBC certificates for getting into the civil services.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Cycle of terror

Terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir continue unabated, resulting in a heavy toll on lives

In yet another tragic incident four security personnel lost their lives in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), underscoring the persistent instability in the region. Four Indian Army soldiers, including a Major, were killed in action during an encounter with terrorists in Doda district. This incident highlights the ongoing challenges faced by security forces and raises concerns about the broader implications for peace and security in the area. Despite tall claims to restore order, the frequency and intensity of attacks remain alarming. The recent fatalities among security personnel are not isolated incidents but part of a broader pattern of violence that has plagued Jammu and Kashmir in recent times. The shift of terror incidents and targeted killings to Jammu, which had been peaceful for two decades, represents a significant and concerning development. Since 2021, following the abrogation of Article 370, Jammu has seen a troubling rise in terror attacks and targeted killings, leading to an alarming escalation in violence that has destabilized the region.



The counter-terrorism strategies that proved effective in Kashmir may not be suitable for Jammu's unique geopolitical and social landscape. Although past strategic lessons can provide some guidance, the new wave of terror in Jammu requires a new counter-terrorism approach. A notable change is the decline in stone-pelting and social unrest in Kashmir; however, the militancy and terrorist groups that remained active have now relocated to the Jammu region. These groups often receive support from across the border, complicating the security landscape. Despite significant military operations aimed at curbing militancy, the resilience of these groups remains a significant hurdle. The socio-political environment in Jammu and Kashmir also plays a crucial role in perpetuating violence. Historical grievances, political disenfranchisement, and socio-economic challenges contribute to a fertile ground for militancy. Many local youths, feeling marginalised, are drawn into the cycle of violence, further complicating the security situation. Addressing these underlying issues is vital for any long-term solution to the conflict. The loss of security personnel is not just a statistic; it represents the human cost of the ongoing conflict. Each casualty not only affects the families of the deceased but also has a profound impact on the morale of security forces operating in the region. The high casualty rate raises questions about the effectiveness of current strategies and the need for a re-evaluation of approaches to counter-terrorism and internal security. Following the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, there was a glimmer of hope, but that now appears to be diminishing. Jammu and Kashmir seems to be slipping back into its previous cycle of violence and persecution. To address the unabated violence in Jammu and Kashmir, a multi-faceted approach is essential. This includes not only robust security measures but also concerted efforts towards political dialogue and community engagement.

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PICTALK



A vendor sells Capsicum at Azadpur Mandi, in New Delhi

Cultivating civic sense: The path to a better society

A lack of civic sense results in numerous societal issues, but it can be instilled through awareness and the enforcement of stringent punitive measures

Citizens are one of the four essential elements that define a country, and a responsible citizenry is undoubtedly an asset to any nation. Today, our country boasts state-of-the-art facilities, with concerted efforts being made to upgrade infrastructure, services, logistics, and public transport. Additionally, inclusive and integrated policies are being formulated, and comprehensive citizen-centric actions are being implemented. While the government's efforts are commendable, there is also a need for citizens to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining public goods and ensuring resources are accessible to all, especially the marginalised. Civic sense is the act of considering others in society and having a sense of responsibility towards public goods. It can be described as "a set of perceptions and attitudes that guides an individual's independent actions or actions within a group for the benefit of many and harm towards none." Conversely, a lack of civic



sense signifies disregard for fellow beings, depriving others of a fair chance of accessing what is due to them. Civic sense involves inculcated socially and ethically good behavior, conduct, and approach. Patriotism is deeply rooted among Indians, and we have a strong affinity for our civilizational values and ethos. However many of us are not adept at it, and civic rules are often flouted in some way or another. Examples of this lack of civic sense include vandalism, mishandling public property, disobeying laws, infringing traffic rules, evading taxes, prejudice, intolerance, indiscipline, sectarianism, and insensitivity towards the beliefs and prac-

tices of other social and religious groups. These behaviors create law and order problems and are rooted in disregard for social norms and appropriate behavior. Despite significant improvements in literacy rates in our country over the past few decades, people often remain casual regarding their societal responsibilities. Examples of this include dumping household waste on streets; destroying public property and so on. Such uncivil behavior is rampant and alarming, detrimentally impacting the collective well-being of society. It not only translates into social conflicts but also triggers a vicious cycle, where such behavior, often being an easier way out, is quickly emulated by many, making the problem difficult to address. India witnessed 461,312 road accidents in 2022, resulting in the tragic loss of 168,491 lives. Many of these accidents could have been avoided had people not flouted traffic rules. Similarly, problems arising from adulteration, corruption, and exploitation can be mitigated through a mindful

approach that prioritizes common interest over self-interest. Civic sense is crucial for quality of life and plays an important role in building the reputation of the country. Inculcating civic virtues is not a choice but is essential for addressing both perennial and new problems. Education plays a significant role in civilising people, but the fact that even well-educated individuals living in metropolitan cities often behave in an unruly and uncivilised manner makes it imperative that the desire to perform constructive and positive roles should come "from within." Elders need to set good examples for the young to emulate. Spreading awareness, rewarding good practices, and enforcing stringent punitive actions against law violations can be effective strategies for inculcating civic sense among the people.

(The writer is Assistant Professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, Delhi; views are personal)



GURDEEP KAUR

(The writer is Assistant Professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, Delhi; views are personal)

Bypoll results indicate a shifting voter preference

This outcome raises questions about the stability of the Govt, as the BJP grapples with internal and external pressures to maintain its coalition



KALYANI SHANKAR

The recent results of by-elections for 13 seats in various states are essential for understanding what people think of the major political parties. One month after the 2024 elections, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi won a third term, the INDIA bloc's significant victory in securing ten of the 13 seats has shifted the country's politics. This positive result for the INDIA bloc could weaken the ruling coalition's power. The BJP won 240 seats but fell short of the 272-majority mark in the recent Lok Sabha elections. As a result, the party had to seek the support of NDA allies, which could influence its policy decisions and lead to compromises to maintain the coalition. This situation raises concerns about the government's stability. A boost to the Opposition could create unpredictability within the ruling coalition. Despite securing 240 seats in last month's Lok Sabha polls, the BJP fell short of the 272-majority mark. It had to seek the help of the NDA allies. This reliance could sway the BJP's policy decisions. The BJP may have to compromise on specific issues to maintain the coalition. There is also a shadow of uncertainty over the government's stability. A substantial boost to the Opposition can shift the balance of power and create a sense of unease and unpredictability in the ruling coalition. The Election Commission conducts the by-polls when a legislative seat becomes vacant. There could be many reasons for a vacant seat. It could be death, resignation, disqualification, or expulsion of a sitting member. Elections are held to fill empty seats when a member of Parliament resigns or dies. Only voters from the area can vote, and there is no party vote. On Wednesday, by-elections were held for 13 assembly seats in Punjab (1), Himachal Pradesh (3), Uttarakhand (2), West Bengal (4), Madhya Pradesh (1), Bihar (1), and Tamil Nadu (1). The Congress,



TMC, AAP, and DMK are some of the parties that put forward candidates in the by-elections to test their strength. The INDIA bloc's win significantly boosted the Opposition. They have been a crucial test for the INDIA bloc as it faced the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the first electoral battle after the Lok Sabha Elections 2024. The regional chieftains in the Opposition performed exceptionally well. Trinamool Congress, a key player in the INDIA bloc, secured all four seats in Bengal, a significant victory. At the same time, the surging Congress won two seats each in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, further strengthening its position in these states. The DMK won one seat, and AAP captured Jalandhar West. These diverse outcomes hint at potential shifts in power dynamics, adding a layer of uncertainty to the current political scenario. Also, the BJP securing only two seats and an independent candidate winning in Bihar add a layer of complexity. Typically, the party in power wins the bye-election seat. The TMC, DMK,

THERE IS ALSO A SHADOW OF UNCERTAINTY OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S STABILITY. A SUBSTANTIAL BOOST TO THE OPPOSITION CAN SHIFT THE BALANCE OF POWER AND CREATE A SENSE OF UNEASE AND UNPREDICTABILITY IN THE RULING COALITION.

Congress, and Aam Admi Party controlled their states. For the TMC, the results were a shot in the arm just a month after it had bagged 29 parliamentary seats, up from 22 in 2019. In Uttarakhand and Bihar, things were different. The candidates from the ruling parties - BJP and JD(U) - lost. Congress won two out of the three by-elections in Himachal. After the results, the party has 40 members again in the 68-member house. This will bring stability to our government. Bye-elections are a crucial test for political parties and their popularity. Parties gauge public sentiment and assess their support base. They often use by-elections to test campaign strategies, influencing future elections. If the ruling party wins seats in the by-election, it could increase its overall number of seats and have more influence on the government's stability and decision-making. The BJP still needs to improve its performance despite investigating the reasons for its low number of seats in the Lok Sabha elections. This raises questions and potential strains within the party. There are speculations about

a possible strain between the RSS and the BJP, which could negatively affect the RSS's support for the party, adding to tension and uncertainty in the ruling coalition. The strong performance of the INDIA bloc shows that power dynamics may be shifting. Despite their differences, this success is because the opposition parties continued to work together. Some analysts think that both factors led to their success. The Opposition's strong showing could weaken the ruling coalition's power and strengthen the Opposition's position. The future is difficult to predict at this stage. Winning and losing are part of the game in a democracy. The impact of these events will be more precise in the upcoming assembly polls in Maharashtra and Haryana later this year. The INDIA bloc's strong showing in the by-elections could strengthen the Opposition's position in these forthcoming assembly polls. They will help determine whether the Opposition gains strength or weakens. (The writer is a popular columnist; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OPPOSITION GAINING GROUND

Madam — The recent state assembly bypolls held on July 10 may not have been critical for the survival of state governments in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. However, the results were highly anticipated as a potential indicator of shifting political winds, especially after the national elections where the BJP saw a reduced tally and the Congress-led INDIA bloc significantly increased its presence in the Lok Sabha. In these state assembly by-elections, the Congress and its allies achieved significant victories, winning 10 out of 13 seats. The ruling BJP secured only two seats, with an independent candidate winning in Bihar. While these results do not necessarily signal a nationwide trend, the BJP's below-par performance should be a concern for the central ruling party. The Congress and its partners in the INDIA bloc celebrated their success. Congress won two seats each in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, the TMC secured all four seats in West Bengal, AAP won in Jalandhar West, and DMK triumphed in Vikravandi, Tamil Nadu. Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi claimed these results reflect a changing political climate, suggesting the BJP's influence is waning. BJP leaders, however, dismissed these claims, pointing out that the ruling party did not previously hold the 13 contested seats. Bishal kumar Saha | Murshdidabad

MANDELA'S LEGACY

Madam — Kudos to Rajdeep Pathak for the article titled "Lessons in forgiveness from Mandela's life" (July 15). On 10th April 1993, the South African Communist leader Chris Hani was murdered by a far-right White. When the newly independent Blacks were seething in anger and were getting ready to massacre the Whites in retaliation, it took Mandela to utter just two firm

AP and Telangana resolve issues



It is heartening that the chief ministers of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have, putting aside their political affiliations, met each other recently to amicably resolve long standing issues that have arisen after the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh. AP Chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu is has taken the initiative. Both the sides have agreed upon setting up high-level chief secretarial and ministerial dispute resolution committees that will address grievances. Contentious issues like water shar-

ing and power distribution are not easy to sort out but it is heartening that Naidu and Reddy have made a start. Both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are claiming power payment "dues" from either side while Telangana appears keen to get more water allocation. Division of assets and liabilities running into a whopping 1.42 lakh crores, some that have been mentioned in the AP Reorganisation Act and a few that have not been stated, figured prominently in the chief ministers' meeting. Telangana's access to the long coastal corridor of AP may be an important issue. It's no wonder that allocation of some important landmark buildings of Hyderabad, that has exclusively become the capital of Telangana from June 2, have already occupied the attention of both chief ministers. Ganpathi Bhat | Akola

ALCARAZ TRIUMPHS AGAIN

Madam — Winning is a habit, and Alcaraz has mastered the art, clinching the Wimbledon men's singles title for the second time against all odds. Spectators at the Centre Court were treated to vintage tennis in a packed stadium. Alcaraz set the ball rolling, winning the first two sets rather comfortably. The final lasted for 147 minutes, with the defending champion establishing a 5-4 lead and serving for the championship point. However, he committed a couple of double faults, and the set went to a tie-break. The number three seed secured his second Wimbledon title and fourth Grand Slam win with a straight-set victory. Djokovic could not recover from the fierce serve-and-volley game of the Spaniard. Alcaraz played calculated tennis on his fourth match point, ultimately winning the tie-break, set, match, and Championship. C K Subramanian | Mumbai

words "NO REVENGE" to promptly bring back the situation under control. Even though Mandela was yet to become the President of the country, he led the nation in what a sane way guiding the society towards light by shedding all sorts of jingoism. Immediately after his release from prison Mandela said "I am not the only one who did not want revenge. Almost all my colleagues in prison did not want revenge, because there is no time to do anything else except to try and save your people". Yes, "Save your people" needs to be the only priority of a true leader, not "call of revenge". And Mandela indeed did walk the talk when Chris Hani got murdered rendering him to a statesman and torch-bearer of the society guiding all on the path of peace. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr had stated - "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that". "We must learn to live together as brothers or we will perish together as fools". Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

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FIRST COLUMN

THE TRUE MEANING OF SUCCESS

Strive for achieving success that is based on contentment, humility, peace and respect



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Most of us want to be successful, but not everyone knows what success looks like. The concept of "success" can be a real subject of contention because everyone has their definition of success. Success has different meanings to different people, however, to define it in simple words, it can be said that success is very largely a matter of adjusting one's self to the ever-varying and changing environments of life, in a spirit of harmony and poise. So, is it simply the completion of the next task, another job well done, a promise kept, an exam passed, a medal won or a mountain climbed? Whatever we believe success to be, there is no doubt that it will have a profound influence on our lives.

The great philosopher Lao Tzu said - "When you are content to be simply yourself and don't compare or compete, everyone will respect you." However, what we see today in the so-called modern society is something way too different. If we were to follow the trends of the current world, then success would be measured by acquisition i.e. the more you have the more successful you are. Nowadays even our education systems are geared to producing people whose character and skills are shaped and developed to make more. Similarly, economic growth is the yardstick for national success based on the production and selling of more. And amidst all this, we continue to avoid the connection between the philosophy of more and the unprecedented levels of unhappiness, abuse and breakdown of human relationships worldwide.

Some of us say that because we have more telephones there is more communication between more people in more countries every day than at any other time in history. But communication of what? Electronic symbols, packets of data, cold information? This is far from human communication. We seldom nourish each other at the level of mind and spirit over a telephone. Do we? Off lately we have developed more intimate relationships with our techno-toys than we do with each other. So what exactly does it mean to be successful? At what level, in what context and by whose standards? If we were to live in this question for long enough it would challenge us at the deepest level. It would invite us to



review and probably revise our core values. But we don't want that challenge because it means we might have to change how we think and what we do. So we live instead in avoidance and denial while going with the flow of traditional belief, and then we wonder why both contentment and fulfilment are so elusive. Just imagine for a moment that every school student in the world spent one year discussing and debating the question, "What is success?" inside out, and upside down. What would our children tell us? Would we have the patience and the faith to listen and to learn from them?

Instead of imposing our inherited beliefs, definitions and conditions, would we have the humility to facilitate their discussion and allow them to tell us? Or do we intuitively know they would be wiser than us and therefore pull the carpet from under our comfortable feet? Would we be threatened if their wisdom defined success as a simpler, more considerate, caring, sharing, spiritual state of being and giving, and not a material state of acquisition, accumulation and possession? Would success be less and not more for them? If we were to give ourselves the time to explore this question, we would likely arrive at the fairly obvious insight that success is not a material thing, it is not something that can be possessed, it is a state of being. We might call it contentment, or happiness, or even peace because these are the deepest and most meaningful symptoms of success, but only when they are not dependent on anything outside ourselves. So, let us engage our energies in achieving success that is based on a strong foundation of values like contentment, humility, peace, and respect and inspire the next generation to do so.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist for publications; views are personal)

Imam Husain dared fighting terrorism



HASAN KHURSHID

The tragic events of Karbala, where Husain and his followers were mercilessly slain, serve as a poignant reminder of the values of justice and unwavering faith in the face of oppression



John Bradshaw once said, "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." Can man stand up to these conditions? "Man can but not necessarily with ease", Imam Husain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad announced from the battlefield of Karbala (Iraq), on the fateful day of 10th Muharram, 61 A.H. (October 10, 680 A.D.). The pre-Islamic period in Arabia is known as the "age of ignorance". Scudding away from the noble attributes of human principles, the Arabs were treading the path of retrogression and abhorrence. Suffering from the worst evils and vices, these Arabs known as Bedouins (uncivilised rustics) were highly tentative of wrecking vengeance, group quarrels, and tribal animosities leading to bloody warfare that lasted for generations. In the pre-Islamic period, these Arabian Bedouins used to bury their newly born daughters alive out of ego. They had no sense of equality, humanity, decency and brotherhood. In this crucial moment, the Prophet of Islam Hazrat Muhammad brought the message of peace, tolerance, humanity, forbearance, liberty, equality, and brotherhood, assisting to weak and securing justice for the persecuted. The Prophet gradually started transforming the heartless brutes to humane and turn towards peaceful life. The most notorious among them were the Bedouin tribals of "Bani-Omayya" (Omayyads). Omayyads did not tolerate the sojourn of humanity and peace. They violently opposed the Prophet's teachings. Omayya's grandson, Abu Sufiyan, son of Herb, unfurled the flag of revolt against Islamic teachings. They started a campaign of persecution on the Prophet, who was forced to migrate from his home in Mecca to Medina. As such, the year of the Prophet's flight from Mecca to Medina is marked as the beginning of the Hijri era of the Islamic calendar. Still, the Prophet Muhammad was not given any respite or relief. Muhammad was compelled to fight battles many a time. In Medina, the



AFTER THE DEATH OF MUAWIYA, HIS SON ACCURSED YAZID ASCENDED TO THE CALIPHATE SEAT OF SYRIA. HE WAS A HARDCORE TERRORIST AND HAD SURPASSED ALL HIS ANCESTORS IN PRACTISING CRUELTY, VIOLENCE AND CORRUPTION

Prophet established the system for administering the "rule of law" in the light of Islamic jurisprudence, under the command of his son-in-law Hazrat Ali Murtaza. Notwithstanding the bravery of Ali, Omayyads suffered a thorough collapse. The shrewd Abu Sufiyan played a trick to subscribe to Islam outwardly and the Prophet mercifully granted a quarter to Abu Sufiyan and his men. On the contrary, Mohammad realised his duties as Prophet were preparing his two beloved grandsons, 'Hasan' and 'Husain', sons of Ali Murtaza and Fatima Zehra, as perfect specimens of his attainment and imparted to their young minds all the characteristics of his high morality. After the demise of the Holy Prophet Mohammad, the school of Islamic thought, philosophy, culture and administration was shifted to the 'Caliphate' with temporal and ecclesiastical powers. The first three caliphs were: Abubakar, Umar and Usman. The last caliph Imam Ali Murtaza, was assassinated by the henchmen of the conspirator and hypocrite Muawiya son of Abu Sufiyan while Hazrat Ali Murtaza was prostrating before Allah in the mosque. After Ali's assassination, Muawiya with the might of a sword, usurped the seat of the Caliphate in Syria and declared himself as the self-appointed caliph. Muawiya, the first ruler of the House of Omayyads displaced the democratic Islamic rule by oligarchical and barbaric despotic rule. After the death of Muawiya, his son accursed Yazid ascended to the Caliphate seat of Syria. He was a hardcore terrorist and had surpassed all his ancestors in prac-

tising cruelty, violence and corruption. Yazid was a libertine and sinner to the extent that the barest mention of his objectionable character is taboo in this civilised society. Yazid was the mammon of unrighteousness, whose lust for power prompted him to beat society into the mould he favoured. Yazid's criminal behaviour indicated the extreme occurrence of vulgar, and inhuman innovations in the established Islamic values. On the contrary Imam Husain was recognised throughout the Arab world for his excellence of behaviour, wisdom, compassion and piety. When Yazid occupied the erstwhile seat of the Caliphate, deceitfully usurped by his father Muawiya, Yazid by terrorising the citizens sought their allegiance to accept him as leader of the faithfully. He then demanded allegiance from Hazrat Imam Husain. Yazid was equipped with all the paraphernalia of power but so long, he didn't get the allegiance of Imam Husain, the grandson of the Prophet, he had no religious sanction to claim the Caliphate. He therefore demanded allegiance from Imam Husain to subscribe to him as the leader of the faithful. When Yazid bargained hard for Imam Husain to choose between allegiance and death, Husain straightaway refused his allegiance, saying, "A person of my kind, can not accept the allegiance of a man of his (Yazid's) kind." Husain knew that recognition of Yazid's immorality would permanently disfigure the "true faith" and a "pseudo-religion" would emerge in the guise of Islam. Had he encountered no opposition, Islam was bound to acclimatise to

the paralysing atonality from Yazid's degenerated symphony. Imam Husain was mercilessly assassinated in the desert of Karbala along with 71 family members and companions on the 10th of Muharram, 61 Hijri (October 10, 680 A.D.), after being kept hungry and thirsty for three days. Their heads were severed from the bodies and were mounted on lancers. Among the slain martyrs was Husain's six-month-old infant son, Ali Asghar, the buoyancy of whose innocent blood refloated the sinking ship of Islam. Ali Asghar's moon-like innocent severed head was too mounted on a lancer. Asghar's little body among 71 others was too trampled through the hoofs of office horses of Yazid's cavalry. The tents of Husain's household were torched. Daughters and grandchildren of Prophet Mohammad's extended family and the only surviving, ailing son office Imam Husain, were taken captives and paraded from Karbala to Syria, on bare backs of camels, where they appeared before accursed Yazid, the wild beast in human form. 10th Muharram is universally observed by right-thinking and kind-hearted people irrespective of caste, religion or faith. "Never in the fight of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few", said Churchill. The event of Karbala, taking place on 10th Moharram, 61 Hijri, teaches us: Never to support injustice and oppression, no matter, how powerful the oppressor might be. No matter, what incentive, what threat you might be given. (The writer is a legal journalist and author. The views expressed are personal)

Indian tourism industry: The challenges, resilience, and future prospects

As the Union Budget 2024 approaches, the Indian tourism industry has high hopes for increased support and strategic initiatives

Tourism has always been a significant contributor to the economic growth and GDP of nations worldwide, and India is no exception. Indian tourism has consistently shown remarkable growth, even though it has not been a primary focus of government policies. There have been improvements in infrastructure and connectivity, but these efforts have been limited.

The Indian Tourism and Hospitality industry, faced unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sharp decline in both domestic and international travel led to a significant downturn. Despite these challenges, the industry began to show signs of recovery in 2023. According



DIVYA BHATIA

to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), 2023 saw 152 million domestic flyers, an increase of almost 24% from 123 million in 2022, and nearly 6% more than the 144 million in 2019. International travel also showed signs of revival, with 63.9 million international travellers to and from India in 2023, close to the 64.2 million seen in 2019, and 35% more than the 47 million in 2022. Consulting firm McKinsey & Company pro-

jects that India will become the fourth-largest domestic travel market in terms of spending by 2030. Additionally, aviation analytics firm OAG indicates that India is now the third-largest domestic aviation market, after the U.S. and China. The WTTC reported that this sector contributed INR 19.13 trillion (\$230 billion) to the Indian GDP in 2023, marking a nearly 10% increase over 2019 levels. Employment in the industry also saw an 8% rise, reaching 43 million jobs. This highlights the sector's resilience and its vital role in the national economy. They projects that the Indian tourism industry will continue to grow, with contributions to the GDP expected to reach INR 21.15 trillion (\$253 billion) in 2024. Jobs in the

industry are also projected to increase by 2.45 million, accounting for one in every 11 jobs in India. Despite positive indicators, the tourism industry has been largely overlooked in recent government budgets. This lack of support is concerning given the sector's significant contributions to the economy and employment. Substantial investments and strategic initiatives are essential to fully capitalize on the industry's potential and ensure sustained growth. As the Union Budget 2024 approaches, the tourism industry remains hopeful for greater support and investment from the government. **Industry Perspectives** Jyoti Mayal, President, The Travel Agents Association of

India (TAAI) feels that the allocation for overseas promotion and publicity has been drastically reduced to just Rs. 3 crore, down from Rs. 100 crore in the previous year. She says, "The industry eagerly anticipates increased budget allocations to enhance infrastructure, marketing, and skill development. Investments in connectivity, heritage sites, and eco-tourism can propel growth. A focus on sustainable practices, waste management, and conservation efforts aligns with responsible tourism. Simplifying visa requirements and encouraging visa-free entry for tourists visiting India can significantly enhance foreign tourist arrivals". Pradeep Shetty, President, Hotel and Restaurant Association Western India

(HRAWI) says that the tourism and hospitality, accounting for around 10 percent of India's GDP and should be declared a priority sector. "Granting infrastructure status to hotels and convention centers of project cost of Rs 10 crore and above is essential for attracting investments and accelerating growth in the hospitality sector. Abolition of the 18 percent GST category for hotels with room rates above Rs.7500/-, merging it with the 12 percent GST category, would boost both domestic and inbound tourism," he says. Riaz Munshi, President, Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) says the outbound tourism sector is hoping for positive policy changes. "One key

expectation is the reduction of GST rates on outbound tour packages, making international travel more affordable. Additionally, better Tax Collected at Source (TCS) policies are hoped for as compared to current TCS rates, which are causing financial and administrative problems," says he. Mr Rajiv Mehra, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) feels that the adequate funding is needed for promote tourism on global map. He says, "Ministry of Tourism should be given separate substantial funds for marketing and promotion for participation in overseas travel marts along with industry stakeholders, organizing road shows and for MDA Assistance to tour operators".

Mr. Ajay Prakash, President, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) feels that for all the lip service to the economic and social benefits of tourism, the industry remains sadly neglected. Mere infrastructure development is not enough - the sector needs specific incentives if it is to realize its potential. The travel and tourism industry puts forth its Wishlist every year before the Budget and, come the day, is invariably disappointed. "The highest GST slab should not exceed 10% and travel agents/tour operators should be eligible to claim a setoff. Aviation fuel must be brought under GST to make airfares more affordable," says he. (The writer is a travel influencer and writes on travel & tourism; views are personal)

Political slugfest erupts after terror attack

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A political slugfest has broken out in the aftermath of a series of attacks on the security forces by suspected foreign terrorists across the Jammu region. On a day when the security forces paid rich tributes to four bravehearts of the Indian army who laid down their lives in the line of duty while flushing out terrorists in the Dessa forest area of Doda, former Chief Minister and Peoples Democratic Party Chief Mehbooba Mufti fired loose canons targeting Director General of Police RR Swain over the law-and-order situation in the union territory. Mehbooba also demanded the sacking of the director general of police, accusing him of treating Kashmiris as "Pakistanis". The PDP chief's reaction came in the light of a statement made by RR Swain, chief of Jammu and Kashmir Police who blamed regional parties for Pakistan's 'successful' infiltration into the Kashmiri civil society. Swain on Monday had even alleged that "so-called mainstream political parties" cultivated leaders of terror networks and sometimes directly to further their electoral prospects.



Referring to the incidents of infiltration from across the border Mehbooba asked what is the DGP doing. There is no accountability. By now the heads should have rolled. The DGP should have been sacked. Almost 50 soldiers have lost their lives in the last 32 months. Mehbooba thundered, Is it my job or Omar Abdullah's job to stop the infiltration? Who is at the borders? Who has to deal with the situation? The current DGP is busy fixing things politically. His job is to break the PDP, harass people and journalists, and threaten people... Verification has been weaponized. They

are finding ways to impose UAPA on maximum people... We don't need a fixer here, we need a DGP. We have had DGPs from other states before and they have worked very well. No one has worked on communal lines like things are being done now. "All Kashmiris, especially the majority community have been alienated by him (DGP). He is treating them as Pakistanis... He is talking through the barrel of a gun, through weaponizing of passports, verifications and security agencies," said Mehbooba Mufti. Provincial President of the National Conference in the

valley Nasir Sogami also reacted sharply to the statement of the DGP. Sogami said only those who plan to engage in politics should give political statements. The National Conference doesn't need anyone's certificate. Nearly 3,000 of our colleagues have died standing for this flag. J&K Peoples Conference (PC) President Sajad Lone also criticised the J&K Director General of Police (DGP) for his 'Pakistan' remarks, saying that statements by serving officers are an indication of the disdain and contempt of anything related to democracy.

"Such statements by serving officers are an indication of the disdain and contempt for anything remotely about democracy. Such a sad state of affairs and even sadder is the fact that the scriptwriters of this sad state of affairs take pride in having brought J&K to this level," PC President wrote on X. Meanwhile, the Congress party leaders in Jammu staged a protest highlighting the failure of the government to prevent attacks on the security forces. Democratic Progressive Azad Party Chairman Ghulam Nabi Azad expressed deep sorrow over the death of four Indian Army soldiers, including a Captain, in Doda. He emphasized that the rise in militancy in the Jammu region is alarming and called for serious government measures to combat it. "Every human life is precious, and the enemies of peace must be dealt with firmly," Azad stated. Chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party Syed Altaf Bukhari said the Doda Terror attack is condemnable. I think our security forces are either failing in intelligence gathering or something else. They should identify where they are going wrong to prevent further martyrdom of our forces.

'Sangathan', not ED, CBI can win polls, says Bengal BJP

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA



The truth that central agencies alone cannot win elections for the BJP in Bengal seems to have finally dawned on the saffron outfit which has asked the party rank and file to spruce up its organisational prowess to counter the Trinamool Congress in 2026 Assembly elections. State party president Sukanta Majumdar, is known to have told the party men in an organizational meeting that instead of depending too much on the central agencies they should look forward to brace up the organizational strength of the party. "Sometimes workers would ask for CBI action to arrest someone. They think that such actions will only ensure a victory... but that is not to be... if you think that ED or CBI actions can win elections for you... it is not going to happen... the Agencies are there to catch the culprits and not win elections for parties... we will have to spruce up the organization instead of relying too much on the agencies if we have to win elections," Majumdar who is also a Union Minister said. Incidentally Majumdar who had won the Balurghat par-

liamentary constituency in 2019 general elections by a margin of more than 80 thousand votes could barely manage to retain the seat this time round. He won by about 28,000 votes. Not only the BJP's vote share dipped but also it conceded 6 seats to the TMC winning only 12 parliamentary seats in comparison to the TMC's 29. In 2019 the party had won 18 seats. Though Majumdar would not take names while making his statements inside sources said his remarks were directed at State Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari who has often gone on record saying "most of the TMC leaders are on the ED and CBI radar and soon half of Mamata Banerjee's cabinet will go to jail." Referring to the ED and CBI Majumdar said that some people had thought that both

the seats from the Birbhum district would come to the BJP once the party strongman Anubrata Mandal went to jail. "Anubrata is in jail... he has been arrested by the CBI... but could we win Birbhum and Bolpur seats... not... this is because of organizational deficiency," he said, "until we are able to strengthen the organization victory will not come." Much like Majumdar another former State BJP president Dilip Ghosh too had warned that "if the party has to win then the workers will have to resist the TMC and for that organization is required... in many areas we are not allowed to enter... that hegemony has to be broken and only a strong and dedicated organisation can do that... the cadres and not the agencies or central forces take you to the people." Ghosh who has been highly critical of the present State leadership including Majumdar and Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari, a Trinamool Congress import has however been sidelined in the party and there are rumors that he may also quit politics. The TMC was quick to react to Majumdar's statements saying he and his party had been able to realize the truth but one bit too late.

Kerala Govt blames Centre for mounting garbage which claimed life

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The death of 48-year-old Joy, a sanitary worker at Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala shocked the entire State. The body of Joy was retrieved after 46 hours from the other end of a canal which meanders through the city carrying with it the entire garbage and solid waste. While the poor family of Joy, the lone bread earning member of the family, is in an uncontrollable grief, the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, Government of Kerala and the ruling CPI(M) have blamed the Indian Railways for the mishap that claimed the life of the sanitary worker. The garbage was piled up over a period of time because of the callousness of the Corporation authorities, according to V D Satheshan, leader of the Opposition in Kerala assembly. The Corporation boasts of the youngest mayor in the country who is the most ineffective and inefficient people's representative, said RS Sasikumar, a one-man army waging battles with the authorities on behalf of the common man. A start up company in Thiruvananthapuram has been providing robot "Bandicoot" to



clean manholes as well as mountain of solid waste and garbage to other States but authorities in Kerala pay scant respect to such innovations. The canal meandering across the city passes through a tunnel under the railway tracks in Thiruvananthapuram Central Station and this has come handy for the education minister V Sivankutty and CPI(M) state secretary M V Govindan to defend Arya Rajendran, the controversial mayor. The mayor appeared from nowhere on Monday as rescue teams pulled out Joy's body from the canal and hogged limelight by sobbing and weeping in public. With the news channel crews withdrawing from the scene, the youngest mayor, who has made it known that her aim is to become an IPS officer, too made a quick

retreat. She was seen hugging and crying in the arms of the local MLA while the onlookers were taken aback by her behavior. "Mounting garbage and solid waste is a major problem haunting the residents of the capital city. The callousness of the local self-government authorities is the only reason behind the death of this poor sanitary worker," said P Sujathan, veteran author and journalist. "How can you blame the Railways for the present state of affairs? As far as I know, the Railways are executing their work with efficiency. But the waste is not generated by them. It is the sole responsibility of the Corporation and the department of public health," said Sasikumar. Interestingly, there are many start up units in the capital city itself which can address the issue of garbage cleaning at cheap rates. "But the State government is not serious about utilizing their expertise for reasons best known to the ministers and the party leaders. The mayor is said to carry a small bottle of glycerin in her hand bag for photo-ops wherever she goes," said a senior government official.

BMW case: Key accused sent to judicial custody till July 30

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A Mumbai court on Tuesday remanded key accused in the sensational BMW hit-and-run case Mihir R. Shah in judicial custody till July 30. At the end of her police remand, 24-year-old Mihir was produced before Chief Metropolitan Magistrate at Sewri S P Bhosale who sent him to judicial custody for 14 days. On their part, the police sought the extension of Mihir's custody. However, Mihir's Advocates Ayush Pasbola and Shudhir Bhardwaj opposed the extension of the police custody, saying the police had gathered whatever evidence that was required from the accused and that they had recorded the statements of 27 witnesses. After hearing both sides, the court remanded the accused in judicial custody till July 30. It may be recalled that on July 7, a high-end BMW car allegedly driven by the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena's deputy leader Rajesh Shah's inebriated son Mihir Shah knocked down a two-wheeler, killing a fisher woman and injuring her husband at Worli in south-central Mumbai in the early hours of July 7.

MoD marches on self-reliance in manufacturing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sustaining the momentum in achieving self-reliance in defence manufacturing and minimising import by defence public sector undertakings (DPSU), the Ministry of Defence has notified the fifth Positive Indigenisation List (PIL) consisting of 346 items. It means Indian industry will manufacture these items. Giving details of the list, officials said here on Tuesday the items include strategically-important Line Replacement Units/Systems/ S u b - systems/Assemblies/Sub-assemblies/Spares and Components and raw materials, with import substitution value worth ₹1,048 crore. The items will only be procured from the Indian industry after the timelines of indigenisation as indicated in the list available on the Srijan portal. The Ministry of Defence had launched the Srijan portal in 2020. On this portal, DPSUs and Service Headquarters (SHQs) offer defence items to the industries, including MSMEs and start-ups, for indigenisation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's major push for 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' has yielded remarkable results in the indigenisation of defence productions, with the Defence Minister Rajnath Singh driving the efforts to realise the vision of self-reliance in defence production. The DPSUs will undertake indigenisation of the items mentioned in the fifth PIL through various routes including 'Make' procedure or in-house development involving the industry, including MSMEs. This will provide impetus to the growth of economy, enhance investment in defence and lead to reduced import dependence. In addition, this will augment the design capabilities of domestic defence industry due to the involvement of academia and research institutions. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), BEML Limited, India Optel Limited (IOL), Mazgaon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL), Garden Reach Shipbuilders

& Engineers Ltd (GRSE) and Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL) are the DPSUs involved in production of the defence items of the fifth PIL. These have initiated process for issuing Expressions of Interest/Requests for Proposal on their respective websites with a link on the 'Srijan portal dashboard. Earlier, four PILs comprising 4,666 items were notified by the DDP for DPSUs, of which 2,972, having import substitution value worth Rs 3,400 crore, have already been indigenised. These five lists for DPSUs are in addition to the five positive indigenisation lists of 509 items notified by the Department of Military Affairs (DMA). These lists include highly-complex systems, sensors, weapons and ammunition. Till June 2024, over 36,000 defence items were offered to the industry for indigenisation by the DPSUs and SHQs. Of them, more than 12,300 items have been indigenised in the last three years. As a result, the DPSUs have placed orders with domestic vendors worth Rs 7,572 crore.

Top babus...

From Page 1 An exercise should be undertaken to study the impact of 'Jal Jeevan Mission' on the lives of citizens. Suitable incentives to be devised to encourage officers to take full advantage of capacity building courses and modules available on iGOT, the secretaries were told. Gauba said ministries and departments should take steps to make their IT systems adequately resilient and to sensitise their officers to ensure scrupulous adherence to cyber security guidelines and protocols. This should be a continuing endeavour. "My Bharat, National Service Scheme (NSS), National Cadet Corps (NCC), Bharat Scouts and Guides and other similar initiatives to be synergised with the objective of providing adequate opportunities to youth in nation building. A comprehensive action plan to be finalised to implement the concept of women-led development," he said. The cabinet secretary said ministries and departments should commence planning for post-Budget webinars immediately. All stakeholders to be involved in this exercise and implementation of budget announcements to be ensured in a time bound manner.

Spate of political...

From Page 1 A political blame game has followed the tragedy befalling the VIP supremo, who has, in a political career spanning barely half-a-decade, aligned with parties on both sides of the ideological divide. The Nishad community leader, who goes by the evocative sobriquet 'son of Malah', was won over into the INDIA bloc by Tejashwi Yadav, who gave his party seats from the RJD's own quota in the recent Lok Sabha polls, besides ensuring that Sahni accompanied him at over 250 rallies across the state. Yadav, who is the leader of the opposition in state assembly, came out with a statement lambasting NDA government for failure to check crime in Bihar where "people are forced to live in terror". Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, who had shared the stage with Yadav and Sahni at some of the rallies, offered condolences and said "it is expected that the government in Bihar will ensure strongest possible punishment to the culprits at the earliest and ensure justice to the bereaved Sahni family". Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and party's general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said the murder is highly condemnable.

Leaders of the BJP, which had helped Sahni become a minister in 2020 by getting him elected to the legislative council, only to force his expulsion less than two years later, asserted that the guilty would be brought to book. "Spoke to Sahni and assured him that the government in Bihar has taken the incident very seriously and culprits will be brought to justice at the earliest", said Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai, a former state BJP president. Union ministers Chirag Paswan and Jitan Ram Manjhi also came out with condolence messages. Manjhi, a former chief minister who heads Hindustani Awam Morcha, hit back at the RJD-led opposition. According to Jitendra Singh Gangwar, Bihar Police ADG (Headquarters), two persons have been taken into custody for questioning, on the basis of CCTV footage obtained from cameras installed in the vicinity of the site of the crime. "They were found moving in a suspicious manner. However, the case is being investigated from all possible angles", said Gangwar, who did not divulge the identity of the detainees. The ADG said the body, which had deep wounds caused by a sharp-edged object on the chest and abdomen, has been sent for post mortem.

EC releases SOPs for...

From Page 1 The EVM units selected by the candidates after mix and match first shall undergo self-diagnosis followed by mutual authentication of each other. Successful mutual authentication takes place only between genuine EVM units and the result of the self-diagnosis of connected units is displayed on control unit. The mutual authentication process ensures that spurious or unauthorised units do not get connected with ECI-EVMs at any stage. The counting of VVPAT slips will be done as per the procedure on counting of VVPAT slips prescribed by the Commission.

A total of eight applications for Lok Sabha and three for assembly polls were received for checking and verification of burnt memory/microcontroller of EVMs post the announcement of results on June 4.

Spiralling Terror in Jammu...

From Page 1 General Upendra Dwivedi, COAS and all ranks of the Indian Army also conveyed their deepest condolences to the bravehearts who laid down their lives in the line

of duty, while undertaking a counter-terrorist operation in Doda. This is the seventh major incident of terrorist violence in the Jammu region since the beginning of this year. According to a recent assessment of the various security agencies, around seven to eight groups of 3-4 foreign terrorists are active in the region and have taken shelter in the thickly forested belt inside natural cave-like structures to dodge the security forces. So far 48 soldiers including

elite para commandos and other ranks have been martyred in around one dozen operations since October 2021 in the Jammu region. Since January 1, 2024, 12 soldiers including a village defence group member have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty. 10 civilians and five terrorists were also killed in these operations. The security forces were maintaining a tight vigil in the area in the aftermath of the killing of a village defence guard in the

Basantgarh area of Udhampur on April 28. The anti-terror operations in Doda were intensified after a fierce exchange of fire in Chattargalla pass left five Army personnel and a special police officer injured on June 12. A policeman was injured in another encounter in Gandoh the next day. After the Kathua ambush, terrorists managed to escape after an encounter with security forces in the nearby Ghadi Bhagwah forest bordering Kishtwar district

on July 9. Three foreign terrorists were killed in a day-long operation in the Gandoh area of the district on June 26. The Jammu region witnessed a sudden spike in terror attacks soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the oath of office of Prime Minister on June 9. His oath-taking ceremony coincided with one of the brutal attacks on a pilgrim bus in the Reasi district in which nine persons were killed and 41 others were left injured.

Controversial IAS officer Puja Khedkar grounded

From Page 1 The authenticity of various certificates submitted by her to the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) is being probed. After having completed MBBS, Puja appeared for the civil services examination in 2021 and cleared the preliminary and main exams,

and interview, securing the 821st rank. Later the UPSC asked her to undergo a medical check-up at the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS) in Delhi to confirm her disability claim of suffering from "blindness and mental illness", an illness that gave her the benefits under the Persons with Benchmark Disabilities (PwBD) category. However, she skipped call for a medical check-up on six occasions between April and August 2022. Puja had earlier submitted two certificates,

provided by the Ahmednagar District Civil Hospital in 2018 and 2021, to the UPSC under PwBD category. It has now emerged that she had applied for a disability certificate from the Aundh Government Hospital in Pune in August 2022, but after medical tests, her application was rejected. Puja, who was initially posted as an assistant collector, hit headlines for wrong reasons following her alleged demand for a separate office and official car and unauthorised use of a beacon in her private car.

Bandaged Trump's rapturous GOP convention debut

PTI ■ MILWAUKEE

Donald Trump, wearing a white bandage partially covering his injured right ear, stole the show when he made his first public appearance on the opening night of the Republican National Convention here, days after surviving an assassination attempt.



Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump and Republican vice presidential candidate Sen. JD Vance, R-Ohio, attend the first day of the Republican National Convention, Monday.

Trump on Monday entered the convention hall to roaring applause from thousands of delegates and holding his fist aloft towards the end of the first day of the four-day convention being held at the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, a city in the US state of Wisconsin.

The former president entered the convention arena here with a fist raised and to the strains of a live performance of "God Bless the USA".

He then slowly walked through cheering delegates who pumped their fists and called out "Fight! Fight! Fight!"

He then greeted key political allies and members of his fam-

ily, including three of his children, but not his wife Melania. The former US president escaped an assassination bid when a bullet grazed his ear at

a campaign rally in Pennsylvania on Saturday.

Supporters on the convention floor and standing in the stadium sang along to a live rendition

of "God Bless the USA" with singer Lee Greenwood. Trump was accompanied by his newly-announced running mate Senator JD Vance.

Trump, 78, wore a subdued look as the room around him erupted and chants of "USA" rang out. On Monday, delegates from across the country nominated him as the Republican presidential nominee for the November 5 general election against incumbent Democratic President Joe Biden. It was the third consecutive time that Trump has received the Republican Party's nomination. Trump will deliver his acceptance speech on Thursday.

The delegation from Florida put him over the top, with Eric Trump, the second son of Trump, awarding the state's delegates to his father. Several lawmakers and other officials spoke, including Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, Senator Tim Scott, and Representative Byron Donalds. The Democratic party would

formally nominate Biden as its candidate at its convention in Chicago in August.

Earlier in the day, Trump announced that Senator Vance, 39, would be his running mate. He was welcomed by the crowd with a thunderous applause. The choice reflects Trump's belief that Vance is an effective communicator who can sell Trump's populist agenda — particularly to working-class voters in states like Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, where presidential elections can be decided by thousands of votes.

"He is consistent with Trump's appeal to working men and women," Ohio Governor Mike DeWine said of Vance. "Also, someone who shares his desire to expand the base of the Republican Party," DeWine was quoted as saying by CNN. Trump survived an attempt on his life on Saturday when a young shooter fired multiple shots at him at a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, injuring his right ear.

Sikh Republican Party leader recites 'ardas' at RNC

Milwaukee (PTI): Indian-American Sikh Republican Party leader Harmeet Kaur Dhillon on Monday recited 'ardas' at the Republican National Convention here in the presence of the party's presidential nominee Donald Trump. Amidst tight security, the four-day Republican National Convention began on Monday with delegates and officials coming to the US state of Wisconsin to greet Trump like a hero for the first time since a gunman on Sunday opened fire at the former president during a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, grazing his ear.

Dhillon, a Republican Party leader and Civil Rights Attorney discussing the attack on Trump said: "These last 48 hours have been some of the most intense, yet more prayerful of our lives, the heinous attack on President Trump and his supporters made all of us pause and seek answers in comfort." A video posted on social media platform X by the California Republican Party, showed Dhillon, 55, as saying at the Fiserv Forum: "I come from a family of Sikh immigrants and I'm honoured to share with you, my fellow Republicans and guests tonight, a prayer from my faith and tradition prac-

tised by over 25 million worldwide." "We recite the Ardaas (Sikh prayer) before any new endeavour, giving thanks to God and asking for his protection and help to uphold the values of humility, truth, courage, service, and justice for all," she added.

"Dear Waheguru, our one true God, we thank you for creating America as a unique heaven on this Earth, where all people are free to worship according to their faith. We seek your blessings and guidance for our beloved country. Please bless our people with wisdom as they vote for the upcoming election and please bless with humility, honesty, skill and integrity all those who conduct the election," she said after offering the 'ardas'. Dhillon, who has also served as the vice chairwoman of the California Republican Party and also co-chairs the Women for Trump organisation, thanked God for protecting Trump's life, and also mentioned the leader's "tireless and uplifting spirit". Dhillon was born in a Sikh family in Chandigarh and immigrated to the US. She has experience working on matters involving intellectual property, unfair competition, civil rights, employment discrimination and others, and also has her law firm.

Israeli strikes across Gaza kill more than 30

PTI ■ DEIR-AL-BALAH

Israeli strikes in the central Gaza Strip overnight into Tuesday killed 24 people, including women and children, according to hospital records, in deadly violence that continues to rage as Israel and Hamas weigh the latest cease-fire proposal. The deaths in Nuseirat and Zawiada, which included 10 women and four children, came days after Hamas said cease-fire talks meant to wind down the nine-month-long war would continue even after Israel targeted the militant group's top military commander, Mohammed Deif, whose fate remained unclear. Israel says another senior Hamas militant was killed in that strike which, according to local officials, killed 90 Palestinians, including children.

International mediators are working to push Israel and Hamas toward agreeing to a deal that would bring a halt to the devastating fighting and set free roughly 120 hostages held by the militant group in Gaza. The strikes late Monday and early Tuesday hit four residential homes, according to emergency workers. An Associated Press journalist saw the bodies of the dead, some wrapped in blue blankets and a floral sheet, as they were ferried to Al Aqsa hospital in Deir al-Balah. Clouds of smoke from Israeli strikes could be seen rising above the city. The military said it "conducted targeted raids on terror targets" in central Gaza, without elaborating. It did not immediately provide additional details on the targets.

In southern Gaza, nine people were killed in two separate strikes overnight Monday, according to medical officials and Associated Press journalists.

Four people were killed in a blast that struck a house in eastern Khan Younis while five other people were killed in a strike on a street in southernmost Rafah, accord-

ing to ambulance workers who transported the bodies to Nasser Hospital.

An AP journalist counted the bodies at the hospital before a funeral was held at its gates.

The military said that air force planes struck some 40 targets in Gaza over the past day, among them observation posts, Hamas military structures and explosives-rigged buildings. The war in Gaza, which was sparked by Hamas' October 7 attack, has killed more than 38,600 people, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count.

The war has sparked a humanitarian catastrophe in the coastal Palestinian territory, displaced most of its 2.3 million population and triggered widespread hunger.

Hamas' surprise attack killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and militants took roughly 250 people hostage. About 120 remain in captivity, with about a third of them believed to be dead, according to Israeli authorities. Violence has also surged in the West Bank during the war and on Tuesday a Palestinian stabbed an Israeli policeman, wounding him lightly, before another officer opened fire, killing the assailant, who was identified as a 19-year-old from Gaza.

Meanwhile, hospital officials say an Israeli airstrike killed 17 Palestinians on Tuesday in a military-declared "safe zone" outside the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis. Officials at Nasser Hospital said the strike hit near a gas station in Muwasi, an area packed with tent camps housing thousands of Palestinians who have fled Israeli offensives in other parts of Gaza. The site lies in a humanitarian "safe zone" where the Israeli military has told evacuating Palestinians to take refuge. The strike raises to at least 59 the number of people killed in southern and central Gaza by strikes overnight into Tuesday.

Oman mosque shooting kills 5, dozens injured

Dubai (AP): A rare shooting by multiple attackers at a Shiite mosque in Oman killed five people and wounded many more including a police officer, authorities said on Tuesday. Pakistan's government said four of its nationals were dead and 30 hurt. The Royal Oman Police said in a statement mentioned no motive or suspect and said the shooting occurred on Monday night in the Wadi Kabir neighbourhood of the capital, Muscat. The state-run Oman News Agency said three attackers were killed. It reported 28 wounded of "different nationalities".

The shooting occurred on the eve of Ashoura, a remembrance of the 7th century martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein, that gave birth to their faith. The day falls in the Islamic month of Muharram, one of the holiest months for Shiite Muslims.

Biden acknowledges 'mistake' in Bull's-eye comment on Trump

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden told NBC News in an interview Monday that it was a "mistake" to say he wanted to put a "bull's-eye" on Republican nominee Donald Trump, but argued that the rhetoric from his opponent was more incendiary while warning that Trump remained a threat to democratic institutions. The remark in question came during a private call with donors last week as Biden had been scrambling to shore up his imperiled candidacy with key party constituencies. During that conversation, Biden declared he was "done" talking about his poor debate performance and said it was "time to put Trump in the bull's-eye," saying Trump has gotten far too little scrutiny on his stances, rhetoric and lack of campaigning. The NBC interview — during which, at times, Biden grew defensive under questions about his fitness for office — came as the president and his reelection team pre-

pared to resume full-throttle campaigning after a brief pause following the weekend assassination attempt on Trump. The president and his campaign let loose a flurry of criticism after the GOP nominee announced freshman Sen JD Vance of Ohio as his running mate. "He's a clone of Trump on the issues," Biden told reporters as he headed to Nevada for a series of speeches and campaign events. "I don't see any difference."

He expanded on that during the NBC interview, telling Lester Holt that Vance has the same policies as Trump when it comes to abortion, taxes and climate change, adding, "He signed onto the Trump agenda, which he should, if he's running with Trump."

Once Vance was tapped as Trump's vice-presidential pick, the Biden campaign hit send on a fundraising solicitation signed by the president, and his team issued a blistering statement saying he picked the freshman senator because he would "bend over backwards

to enable Trump and his extreme MAGA agenda." For her part, Vice President Kamala Harris phoned Vance to congratulate him and left him a voicemail message, according to a person familiar with the matter.

And to NBC's Holt, Biden made it clear that he would keep up his focus on Trump. While he acknowledged his "mistake," Biden nonetheless said he is "not the guy who said I wanted to be a dictator on day one" and he wanted the focus to be on what Trump was saying. It's Trump, not Biden, who engages in that kind of rhetoric, Biden said, referring to Trump's past comments about a "bloodbath" if the Republican loses in November. "Look, how do you talk about the threat to democracy, which is real, when a president says things like he says?" Biden said. "Do you just not say anything because it may incite somebody?"

The NBC interview, scheduled before the attempt on Trump's life at a rally in Pennsylvania,

had been part of Biden's broader strategy to prove his fitness for office after angst grew among Democrats because of his disastrous June 27 debate performance. Asked by Holt if he has weathered the worst of it from his own party, Biden responded that 14 million Democratic voters selected him through the primaries and added, "I listen to them."

His mental acuity is "pretty damn good," Biden added, but he said the question of his age was "legitimate" to ask. Yet Biden grew visibly testy when asked whether he was eager to "get back on the horse" by participating in another debate against Trump, even before their next scheduled one in September. "I'm on the horse. Where have you been?" a defensive Biden said. He rattled off his recent travels across the country and a lengthy press conference last week in Washington where he parried questions from nearly a dozen reporters. He said he is "demonstrating to the American people that I have

command of all my faculties, that I don't need notes, I don't need teleprompters" — although Biden has used notes and teleprompters in recent appearances, which is not unusual.

As for a potential repeat of his rocky debate, Biden said, "I don't plan on having another performance on that level." The Biden campaign recalibrated some of its political plans in the immediate aftermath of the assassination attempt on Saturday, pulling advertising off the air and hitting pause on messaging. The White House also scrapped Biden's planned Monday visit to the Lyndon B. Johnson library, where he had been slated to deliver remarks on civil rights.

Biden also spoke privately to Trump after the assassination attempt, a call that the president described in the NBC interview as "very cordial." "I told him how concerned I was and wanted to make sure I knew how he was actually doing," Biden said.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa attack: 8 soldiers, 10 terrorists killed

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

At least eight soldiers of the Pakistan Army and 10 terrorists were killed when a group of 10 terrorists attacked a major military cantonment in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the army said on Tuesday. All 10 terrorists who launched the daring attack were also eliminated after they attempted to enter the Bannu Cantonment on Monday, with security forces effectively thwarting the move, the statement said.

The terrorists' failed attempt forced them to ram an explosive-laden vehicle into the perimeter wall of the cantonment, leading to the collapse of a portion of the wall and damaging the adjoining infrastructure. Eight soldiers were killed in the ensuing operation and all the terrorists were "sent to hell", the statement added. "This timely and effective response by the security forces prevented major catastrophe, saving precious innocent lives,"

the statement said, adding that the heinous act was undertaken by the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, which operates from Afghanistan and has used Afghan soil to orchestrate acts of terrorism inside Pakistan in the past as well. Pakistan has consistently raised its concerns with the interim Afghan government, asking them to deny persistent use of Afghan soil by the terrorists and take effective action against such elements, the statement said, adding that the Pakistani side will take all necessary measures as deemed appropriate against these threats emanating from Afghanistan.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur condemned the attack and said the sacrifices of the Pakistan Army in the war against terror would not go to waste.

"Security forces' timely action saved Bannu Cantonment from a big catastrophe," he said. Pakistan has witnessed an increase in terrorist activities

over the past year, particularly in regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan following the cessation of a ceasefire between the government and the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militant group in November 2022. Last week, Islamabad reiterated its stance against engaging in talks with the TTP and called for Kabul's action against terrorists operating from Afghan territory.

According to the Centre for Research and Security Studies' annual security report, violence and casualties in Pakistan saw a notable decline in the second quarter of 2024. The report said there was a 12 per cent reduction in overall violence, with 380 fatalities reported compared to 432 in the preceding quarter. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan were identified as the epicentres of violence, accounting for over 90 per cent of fatalities and 84 per cent of all attacks involving both terrorist incidents and security force responses.

Violent clashes over govt jobs injures many in Bangladesh

AP ■ DHAKA

Police fired tear gas and charged with batons during violent clashes between a pro-government student body and student protesters overnight, leaving dozens injured at a public university outside Bangladesh's capital, authorities and students said on Tuesday.

The violence spread early Tuesday at Jahangir Nagar University in Savar, outside Dhaka, where protesters demanded an end to a quota reserved for family members of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971, allowing them to take up 30 per cent of government jobs. While job opportunities have expanded in Bangladesh's private sector, many find government jobs stable and lucrative. Each year, some 3,000 such jobs open up to nearly 400,000 graduates. Protesters argue such quota appointments are discriminatory and should be merit-based. Some even said the current system benefits groups



supporting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Some Cabinet ministers criticized the protesters, saying they played on students' emotions. Hasina said on Tuesday war veterans — commonly known as "freedom fighters" — should receive the highest respect for their sacrifice in 1971 regardless of their current political ideologies. "Abandoning the dream of their own life, leaving behind their families, parents and everything, they joined the war with whatever they had..."

she said during an event at her office in Dhaka. Meanwhile, Protesters gathered in front of the university's official residence of the vice-chancellor early Tuesday when violence broke out. Demonstrators accused the Bangladesh Chhatra League, a student wing of Hasina's ruling Awami League party, of attacking their "peaceful protests". According to local media reports, police and the ruling party-backed student wing attacked the protesters.

UK gurdwara attack being treated as religiously aggravated: Police

PTI ■ LONDON

The gurdwara attack in southeast England last week in which a 17-year-old boy was arrested and charged with multiple offences, including threats to kill, is being treated as "religiously aggravated", the local police have said.

The Kent Police said the boy appeared before Maidstone Crown Court where he was further charged with attempted grievous bodily harm along with assault occasioning actual bodily harm, using or threatening unlawful violence, threats to kill, threatening a person with a bladed weapon and possessing a bladed article in a public place. He was bailed by the court

over the incident at Sri Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara in Gravesend last Thursday and was "immediately detained by officers for a mental health assessment".

"This is an isolated incident and our initial enquiries suggest it is not terrorism-related," said Chief Superintendent Angie Chapman, North Kent Divisional Commander for Kent Police.

"We are treating it as religiously aggravated. It was upsetting for local people and our officers will remain on patrol in the area for reassurance and engagement with the community. I would like to thank the local community for their ongoing support and assistance while this investigation continues," she

said. He will next appear before Medway Youth Court on Thursday after a mental health assessment.

Earlier, investigators from the Kent and Essex Serious Crime Directorate charged the boy, who cannot be named as a minor, over what the local police referred to as a "disturbance" at the gurdwara in Gravesend on July 11 evening.

The Gurdwara, one of the largest outside India, held an "All Sangat Meeting" at its Lecture Theatre on Sunday to reassure the community after it stated that 'Guru Granth Sahib Ji' was not present in the Darbar Hall at the time of the attack. Two women suffered cuts and bruises in an assault outside the building shortly afterwards.

Thailand to launch controversial \$13.8 bn digital money handout

AP ■ BANGKOK

Thailand's prime minister has said that eligible businesses and individuals can register from August for digital cash handouts, a controversial programme that will cost billions of dollars and is meant to boost the lagging economy. The government announced in April the widely criticised ambitious plan, named the Digital Wallet, meant to give 10,000 baht (about \$275) to 50 million citizens in digital money to spend at local businesses.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin posted on the social platform X on Monday, saying the registration will begin Aug 1 and that he has given instructions to ensure the smooth implementation of the program. The "Digital Wallet" was a major campaign promise of the ruling Srettha's Pheu Thai party ahead of last year's general election. The government says

that this scheme will cause an "economic tornado," and Srettha has said the stimulus and subsequent consumption are expected to boost gross domestic product growth by 1.2 to 1.6 percentage points.

However, economists have criticised the programme, calling it an ineffective way to contribute to sustainable economic growth compared to other measures. In addition, its financing has faced several hurdles, delaying its planned implementation. At first, the government said the state Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives would cover some of the funding needed. However, after warnings by financial experts, it was announced that the project's funding would come out of the 2024 and 2025 fiscal budgets. Deputy Minister of Finance Julapan Amornvivat said at a news conference on Monday

the budgetary funding became possible after the plan's estimated cost dropped from 500 billion baht (\$13.8 billion) to 450 billion baht (\$12.4 billion), asserting that all estimated 50 million people will still be part of the program as only up to 90% of those eligible utilised them in previous handouts. Julapan added that the Digital Wallet committee has agreed to exclude tens of thousands of shop owners and cash recipients who have a record of committing fraud in past programmes.

The plan also has certain limitations, such as excluding certain goods that are yet to be decided, and earlier proposals suggested oil, services, and online purchases should be among them. Julapan said the Commerce Ministry would handle the exclusions set to be announced next week after the detailed plan is submitted to the Cabinet.



Shiite Muslims touch a horse, that symbolizes the horse that carried Imam Hussein during the battle of Karbala, during a Muharram procession, in Lahore, Pakistan, Tuesday.

AP/PTI



AWS' KUMARA RAGHAVAN SEES HUGE POTENTIAL IN STARTUPS

NEW DELHI: The Indian startup ecosystem is mature, with multiple tailwinds that are poised to escalate India to become the third largest economy in the world, said AWS' Kumara Raghavan. In a conversation with PTI, Raghavan, Head, Startups, Amazon Web Services (AWS) India, and South Asia, discussed the vibrant Indian startup scene, noting its strength and innovation potential. "We are the 5th

largest economy, we are trending towards becoming the 3rd largest... factors that will contribute to it are labor addition, infrastructure growth, and efficiency improvements, where technologies like GenAI will play their part, a large developer ecosystem, the ability to build products in the country and serviced all over the world, then there are regulatory tailwinds as well," he said.

Sensex, Nifty close at record high levels for 3rd day in a row

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty settled at record high levels in their third straight day of gains on Tuesday following buying in FMCG, telecom and select IT shares and FII inflows. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 51.69 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at a new lifetime high of 80,716.55. During the day, it advanced 233.44 points or 0.28 per cent to hit a fresh record high of 80,898.30. The NSE Nifty went up by 26.30 points or 0.11 per cent to settle at an all-time closing high of 24,613. Intra-day, it rallied 74.55 points or 0.30 to hit a new record peak of 24,661.25. Sensex and Nifty have been on a record-breaking run since Friday as foreign investors have turned buyers in the Indian equities ahead of the presentation of the Union Budget for 2024-25. Encouraging quarterly results by blue-chips have also



supported the rally despite high valuation concerns, according to analysts. Among Sensex shares, Hindustan Unilever, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Mahindra & Mahindra, ICICI Bank, ITC and Asian Paints were the biggest winners. On the other hand, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Reliance Industries, NTPC, UltraTech Cement and Power Grid were among the laggards. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 2,684.78 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai settled higher, while Hong Kong ended lower

Gold rallies ₹550; silver jumps ₹400 amid strong global cues

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rallied by Rs 550 to Rs 75,700 per 10 grams in the local market on Tuesday on the back of fresh buying by jewellers as well as strong trends in the international markets. According to All India Sarafa Association, the precious metal rates had closed at Rs 75,150 per 10 grams on Monday. In the national capital, gold of 99.9 per cent and 99.5 per cent purity quoted higher at Rs 75,700 per 10 grams and Rs 75,350 per 10 grams, respectively. Traders attributed the rise in gold prices to a pick-up in demand by local jewellers and retailers in the domestic market. In addition, silver prices also jumped by Rs 400 to Rs 94,400 per kg. It had ended at Rs 94,000 per kg in the previous session. "Gold and silver prices witnessed a sharp recovery on the back of rate cut expectations. "No major data points were



scheduled on Monday, however, comments from US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell were in limelight," Manav Modi, Senior Analyst, Commodity Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd (MOFSL), said. Fed Chair Powell said that second quarter data has given policymakers greater confidence that inflation is heading down to the central bank's 2 per cent goal. Powell reiterated that the US central bank is in no rush to cut rates but he also raised concerns regarding ease off in labour market and increase in deficits.

This week, traders will keep an eye on important data points like US retail sales, industrial production and a few housing numbers, which could provide clarity on overall economic health, Modi added. On the overseas front, spot gold at Comex was traded at USD 2,436 per ounce, registering a gain of USD 28 per ounce from previous day. According to Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, gold prices traded higher amid ETF demand and speculative buying as the global gold prices hovering near the record high. "...Decline in the treasury yields and US dollar index also supported the spot gold prices," Parmar added. Additionally, silver was also quoted higher at USD 30.77 per ounce. In the previous session, it had finished at USD 30.68 per ounce. "Gold continues to trade positive, supported by a steady US dollar and easing bond yields as focus remains on an early rate cut by the Federal Reserve.

Govt likely to scale down fiscal deficit target to 5% or less in Budget: ICRA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is likely to lower fiscal deficit to 4.9-5 per cent of the GDP for this financial year in the upcoming Budget aided by revenue buoyancy. The government had pegged the fiscal deficit estimate at 5.1 per cent for the current financial year when it presented the interim Budget in February. "The union government is likely to set a fiscal deficit target at 4.9-5 per cent, lower than projected 5.1 per cent of GDP, without compromising the capital expenditure target of Rs 11.1 lakh crore," ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar told PTI. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is set to present the full Budget on July 23. This will be her seventh Budget in a row. This Budget aims to set the foundation for India's journey towards becoming a developed nation (Viksit Bharat) by 2047. The government achieved a fiscal deficit of 5.6 per cent of the GDP during the previous financial year.



"There is also a high likelihood of reducing the net market borrowings for the current financial year by Rs 35,000-Rs 55,000 crore vis-à-vis the interim Budget estimate of Rs 11.8 lakh crore, which would augur well for yields, along with the demand boost for G-secs owing to their inclusion in the J P Morgan Government Bond Index," she said. The incremental revenue receipts of Rs 1.2 lakh crore can be split to increase the revenue spending and facilitate fiscal consolidation, she said, adding, the government could utilise it for spurring consumption by providing

some income tax sops. She further said that reducing the absolute size of the fiscal deficit will be quite difficult over the next 3-4 years, with the decline in the fiscal deficit-to-GDP ratio largely dependent on the increase in nominal GDP. If the government continues with capex at 3.4 per cent of GDP over the medium term (in line with the FY2025 Interim Budget), then incremental fiscal consolidation would require a sustained compression in the revenue deficit, she said. Notably, she said, the government has 'on-budgeted' a large portion of previously off-budget capex; this should be considered while determining the endpoint of the awaited fresh fiscal consolidation roadmap beyond FY26. Assuming that capex of about 1 per cent of GDP has been brought on budget, the government could consider further reducing its fiscal deficit target to 4 per cent of GDP over the medium term, from the expected sub-4.5 per cent of GDP in FY'26, she added.

Incuspace takes on lease 1.15 lakh sq ft office space in B'luru to start coworking centre

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Coworking firm Incuspace has taken on lease a 1.15 lakh square feet area in Bengaluru to open a new centre as part of its strategy to expand business amid a rise in demand for flexible workspace. In a statement, the company said it has expanded its portfolio in Bengaluru with leasing of 1.15 lakh sq ft office space at Whitefield, a major hub for the tech industry. "The new facility will accommodate 1,800 seats," Incuspace said. "Our new facility is designed to foster creativity and collaboration among businesses," said Sanjay Choudhary, founder and CEO of Incuspace. Incuspace said it aims to expand its portfolio in southern India, with a focus on Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad. Since its inception in 2016, Incuspace has 44 centres across 18 cities



and a total portfolio of 3 million square feet. The company embraces the 'space-as-a-service' model, integrating technology with real estate to deliver innovative solutions tailored for enterprises, MSMEs, and startups. "Bengaluru is India's most active office market, accounting for the highest absorption of 23 per cent in pan-India during H1 2024. While the IT-ITes sector accounts for nearly half of the city's absorption, flex spaces account for 5.4 per cent of the total absorption in H1 2024," Vestian CEO Shrinivas Rao said. Flex spaces nearly account for 16 per cent of the total absorption in pan-India during the same period.

Rupee rises 3 paise to close at 83.58 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled for the day 3 paise higher at 83.58 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, on firm domestic markets and sustained inflow of foreign capital. Forex traders said a decline in crude oil prices favoured the rupee, while a strong US dollar capped sharp gains. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.59, and touched an intraday high of 83.53 and a low of 83.60 against the dollar during the trading session. It finally settled at 83.58 (provisional) against the American currency, registering a gain of 3 paise from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee depreciated 10 paise to 83.61 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading marginally higher by 0.11 per cent at 104.29. "The US dollar gained on positive US markets and a surge in US treasury yields on



rising expectations that Donald Trump may be re-elected as the President of the United States in the upcoming elections in November," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, were trading 0.68 per cent lower at USD 84.27 per barrel. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on the strong US dollar and weak Asian currencies. However, a decline in crude oil prices and continued foreign inflows may support the rupee at lower levels," Choudhary said, adding that any intervention by the RBI may also support the local unit. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended the day 51.69

points, or 0.06 per cent, higher at 80,716.55 points. The broader NSE Nifty settled 26.30 points, or 0.11 per cent, higher at 24,613.00 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Monday, as they purchased shares worth Rs 2,684.78 crore, according to exchange data. Meanwhile, India's merchandise exports in June increased 2.56 per cent to USD 35.2 billion despite global challenges, even as the trade deficit widened to USD 20.98 billion during the month. On the price front, wholesale inflation in the country surged to a 16-month high of 3.36 per cent in June on account of a rise in prices of food articles, especially vegetables and manufactured items.

Telecom Ministry to work on actionable plan on issues identified by panels: Scindia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The telecom ministry will work on actionable plan with defined timelines on issues that have been discussed with telecom operators and other players in the sector, Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Tuesday. The minister held meetings with three of the six committees set by his ministry. The meeting with the committee on telecom operators was attended by telecom chiefs including Reliance Jio Chairman Akash Ambani, Bharti Airtel Founder and Chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal, and Vodafone Idea MD and CEO Akshaya Moondra. "We've identified a rather deep agenda for these committees. Now the members of these committees and us will be working together," Scindia said. Industry body Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) Director General S P Kochhar was also part of the meeting. Scindia said there are varied schedule for the first presentation of these committees that will be over the next couple of weeks. "Then we will be taking on each individual issue, delving into the details and devising an action plan, timelines and actionable items, so that we can take our sector forward," Scindia said. He said the six committees

are the backbone of the Indian communication sector. "By forging these committees we hope to take the sector forward realising Prime Minister's goal of creating not only a Atmanirbhar (self-reliant) Bharat but a telecom superpower within India that we will hopefully transcend our boundaries in days to come," Scindia said. The minister also met representatives of internet service providers and infrastructure committee as well as those of academia and R&D committee. On Monday, Scindia held meetings with three advisory groups on satellite, communications and electronics ecosystem and original equipment makers to prepare a roadmap for achieving self-reliance and global leadership in the sector. The meetings were attended by Nokia India Country Head Tarun Chhabra, Samsung President and CEO Southwest Asia J B Park, Cisco System India Managing Director Harish Krishnan, STL Managing Director and CEO Ankit Agarwal, Tejas Non-Executive Chairman N G Subramaniam, Viasat India Managing Director Gautam Sharma, and Hughes Communications India CEO, President and Managing Director Shivaji Chatterjee, among others.

NAREDCO pitches for raising tax exemption limit on home loan interest to ₹5 lakh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realtors' body NAREDCO on Tuesday suggested that the tax exemption on interest on self-occupied property loans should be increased to Rs 5 lakh in the upcoming budget from Rs 2 lakh currently to boost housing demand amid a rise in housing prices and mortgage rates. Builders also sought some tax incentives to boost demand and supply of affordable homes. NAREDCO noted that under Section 24 of the Income Tax Act, the deduction allowed on interest on loans for self-occupied property is limited to Rs 2 lakh. "Given the rising property prices and interest rates, NAREDCO proposes

increasing this limit to at least Rs 5 lakh," the association said in a statement. The realtors' body mentioned that currently the annual value of property held as stock-in-trade and not let out is considered nil for up to two years from the end of the financial year in which the construction completion certificate is obtained. After this period, the notional income is taxed. It suggested that this provision should not apply to real estate developers holding stock due to weak market conditions and recommended increasing the time limit from two to five years. G Hari Babu, President of NAREDCO, said these recommendations, if implemented, will not only provide much-needed relief to developers but also



stimulate demand in the housing sector. Ramani Sastri - Chairman & MD, Sterling Developers, said, "This year, the demands go beyond the usual expectation of single-window clearance and industry status, which could unlock financial advantages and streamline project approvals. There is an express need for more tax sops for both homebuyers as well as investors." The government should raise

the deduction limit for interest payment on home loans from the existing Rs 2 lakh a year to Rs 5 lakh, which will add momentum to housing demand, he added. "The budget should offer a degree of personal tax relief, either by ways of lower tax rates or by readjusting tax slabs, which is the need of the hour," Sastri said. In his wishlist, Dhruv Agarwala, Group CEO, Housing.Com and

PropTiger.Com, said the demand and supply for affordable homes have shown fluctuating trends over the last three years across major tier I and tier II cities. "In response, the upcoming budget should focus on revitalising both demand and supply for homes in the Rs 15-75 lakh per unit price bracket. Introducing interest subsidy programmes could incentivise potential homebuyers effectively," he said. To boost supply, Agarwala said the government could strategically deploy its extensive land banks in partnership with private developers, offering land and capital at concessional rates. "Implementing tax incentives for developers engaging in these affordable projects

could further stimulate activity in this sector. It's noteworthy that substantial demand persists within the Rs 15-75 lakh price category, necessitating focused governmental action in the upcoming budget," he observed. Agarwala said this approach would not only catalyse growth in the real estate sector but also stimulate approximately 200 ancillary industries, substantially boosting job creation across these sectors. "Moreover, longstanding sector demands, such as granting industry or infrastructure status and raising tax exemption limits on home loan repayments, should be considered to sustain long-term growth in the housing sector," he added.

Auto industry needs 2 lakh skilled people by 2030 to meet 30% EV adoption target: SIAM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian automotive industry will need up to 2 lakh skilled people by 2030 to meet the government's vision of 30 per cent electric vehicle adoption, the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers said on Tuesday. A total talent investment of Rs 13,552 crore is expected for hiring and training the workforce. "As we look ahead, one of the major constraints the auto industry will face is the dearth of skilled electric vehicle capable manpower," Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) President Vinod Aggarwal

said while addressing a workshop on empowering EV-ready workforce in the Indian auto industry. Aggarwal, who is also MD & CEO, Volvo Eicher Commercial Vehicle Ltd, pointed out the need for specialised domain skills in the areas of battery technology, powered electronics and motor design. "To keep the pace of global trends and make our auto industry a globally competitive industry, there is an urgent need that our workforce be equipped with new skills by upskilling, rescaling and skilling them," he added. Detailing the gap, SIAM Vice President Shailesh Chandra said, "By 2030, India will need nearly one to two



lakh people with specific skills to meet the government's mission of 30 per cent EV adoption." The talent need will be spread across multiple blue-collar and white-collar professionals, ranging from technicians in manufacturing and testing to PhD scientists and engineers in R&D, he added. "The talent requirements will

also span across multiple disciplines like electrical and mechanical, chemical and electronics engineering," added Chandra who is also MD, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd & Tata Passenger Electric Mobility Ltd. According to the 'SIAM EV Skill Gap Study' report in order to achieve 100 per cent localisation of EV components, India needs to

add 30,000 EV-ready workers per year till 2030, up from a current rate of 15,000 per year. The report pointed out that 43 per cent of technical competencies between Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) and EV have minimal overlap and therefore would require fresh skilling of talent. On the other hand, 27 per cent of technical competencies have a high overlap between ICE and EV and may require re-skilling of existing talent. "The estimated hiring cost would be Rs 7,671 crore, while the training cost would be around Rs 5,881 crore. The total talent investment is expected to be around Rs 13,552 crore," the report said.

Graphisads launches G Force

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Graphisads Limited, a leading advertising Company and Outdoor Media owner, has entered into a groundbreaking partnership with the prestigious Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Lucknow to unveil "G Force," an innovative accelerator programme. This initiative aims to cultivate and empower aspiring entrepreneurs within the Media sectors through a dynamic collaboration of industry expertise and academic leadership.

Balaji has explosive game, we can't be written off just like that: Bopanna

PTI ■ PARIS

As if a fine wine, Rohan Bopanna is all fired up for his last hurrah at the Olympic Games. Not the one who would rail against circumstances or crib about not having the strongest of partners, the veteran Indian tennis player says his comrade N Sriram Balaji has enough firepower and the scratch pairing is potent enough to test the big teams in Paris. Had Bopanna been ranked outside the top-10, India would not have any representation in the men's doubles event at the Paris Olympics, starting July 26. The 44-year-old had to make a choice between Balaji and Yuki Bhambri and after consulting his coaches -- Scott Davidoff and Balachandran Mannikkath -- he eventually settled for the more "athletic and agile" Balaji. "I really believe that when we go out there, we genuinely have a chance to win every match, whoever we play against. It's not like we're just going to be written off, I feel," Bopanna told PTI in an exclusive interview. Bopanna has reason to have that confidence in Balaji's ability to rise to the occasion. He had a chance to test Balaji at

the French Open where Bopanna was pushed along with Matthew Ebden by the Tamil Nadu player and his Mexican partner Miguel Reyes-Varela. Not only this, Balaji had a consistent run on the ATP Tour where he scalped a few big names such as Americans Rajeev Ram and Austin Krajicek -- both top-10 players -- at the Houston ATP 250 event on clay. With his German partner Andre Begemann, Balaji also defeated Austria's top-50 players Alexander Erler and Lucas Miedler. Balaji also showed that he can quickly adapt to conditions when he was asked to do the singles duty during the Davis Cup tie against Pakistan on grass. The rival was not of the highest quality but Balaji showed that he was willing to come out of his comfort zone if the team demands. "The idea is to go prepared, at least believe in as a team. That is what we're trying to do. With Bala, he definitely has the firepower to do well," Bopanna said. He also gave his reason for picking Balaji over Bhambri. "I felt Balaji, depending on the surface we're playing with, which is the clay, would have been the ideal partner. Currently, even if you look at



(Matthew) Ebden, who I'm playing with, he's somebody who's more agile, more explosive on that surface. "And for clay, especially, I need a partner who would suit me

better in terms of going by the surface. If it was a hard court or a grass court, maybe Yuki would have been the preferred choice." Bopanna though admitted that

it was not an obvious but a difficult choice since he has not played with either of them on the Tour. "Balaji can move well on both flanks? I think he is, given on

the clay court, he's definitely more athletic, given the two of us. Between me and Bala, I definitely need a partner who's more athletic, more agile. "Bala has similar capabilities as

Matthew. Bala would be fast, quick, swift like Ebden. But Ebden comes with a lot of experience and Bala hasn't played at that level much." It also means that Bopanna has to be leader of the team all the time. On the Tour he has Ebden to pull the team out of the pit if Bopanna is having an off day. In the past Olympics, he had illustrious teammates like Leander Paes, Mahesh Bhupathi and Sania Mirza. In Paris, it will Bopanna, who has to do the heavy lifting. But did he have any choice? "There is nobody currently in the country who has played that kind of experience as Matthew Ebden. So, no matter who I played with on the country, it would be the same scenario." Due to the considerable gap in their rankings in the past, Bopanna could never play with Balaji on the Tour. But they have planned to compete in a couple of ATP events, starting with Hamburg Open, to prepare for the Olympics. "This is my time at home basically to rest, recover and then come back into the circuit. But I thought it'll be nice to get to know whoever the partner I'm playing with. Try and work and at least try and prepare better than what we have done before

maybe." As the discussion veered over Balaji's game and how he compliments him, Bopanna had a good things to say about his partner. "His serve is definitely a big strength. He's got a powerful shot there. Which definitely helps in the doubles game. No question on it." Bopanna also said that they don't just want to show up and get back. They consider themselves worthy of a medal. "Every athlete who goes into Olympics wants to win a medal, right? There is 100 percent that belief. Everybody wants to do better than the previous time. There's no question on it, right? That's how life is. You want to do better. You want to keep going higher and higher. "Nobody can tell you what can happen. But the preparation going into the games is what really matters. "This time I was even listening that they have a fantastic medical team there to help the recovery, help the sports science, which is the first time ever, which is amazing. This is what is the progress already for what athletes can get and really see and make a difference," he signed off. Tennis events at Paris Olympics start on July 27.

Olympic tennis players return to red clay of Paris' Roland Garros after Wimbledon's grass

AP ■ PARIS

The competition surface doesn't change for most Olympic sports. A pool's a pool. A track's a track. A wrestling mat's a mat. And so on. Tennis? That's a whole other story, with tournaments contested on clay, hard or grass courts - and now there's a shift for the Paris Games. For the first time in more than 30 years, the tennis competition at an Olympics will be held on red clay, which means players who recently made the adjustment from the dirt at the French Open in early June to grass at Wimbledon in early July will need to reverse course again in short order. The "terre battue" at Roland Garros used for the French Open hosts Olympic matches starting on July 27 - two weeks after Wimbledon wrapped up with singles titles for Barbora Krejčíková of the Czech Republic and Carlos Alcaraz of Spain - and the transition back to that site is more concerning to some athletes than others. "That'll definitely be interesting. But everyone's kind of doing it. We'll all be in the same boat," said Jessica Pegula, an American ranked in the top 10 who is expected to play singles, women's doubles with U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff and perhaps mixed doubles, too. "I usually don't struggle too much with switching. And I like how the courts play there. It might be easier than some other places we play on clay. When the weather is warm in Paris, it plays pretty true. There's a good speed. There's not a lot to get used to." For her, maybe. "It's going to be the first time for me, going from grass to clay," said Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan, the 2022 Wimbledon champion and a semifinalist there this month. "It's not easy. Physically, it's not easy, (or) mentally." One additional factor on



some players' minds: There will be another brief turnaround after the Olympics to prepare for the move to the hard courts ahead of the U.S. Open, which starts in late August. That's less than a month after the medals are awarded in France. "It's awful for the schedule," said Taylor Fritz, Pegula's teammate for the United States and someone who just reached the quarterfinals at the All England Club. "It makes absolutely no sense. It screws everything up, for sure." Tennis becomes a different sport, in some key ways, depending on where it's being played. "You have to adapt to it. ... It's going to be weird, obviously, going back on the clay quickly," said Cam Norrie, who will represent Britain at the Olympics, "but we're changing surface and changing variables all the time." Clay is softer and slower, which can dull the power on serves and groundstrokes and create longer exchanges, putting a premium on stamina, while the grittiness can magnify the effect of heavy topspin. Grass is speedier and balls bounce lower. Hard courts tend to produce truer, midrange

bounces and generally will reward those who go for point-ending shots. The biggest difference among them might be the footwork. Clay requires sliding. Grass is more about choppy steps, to avoid slipping. Hard courts generally do not cause as many falls as either of the others. "For a clay-court player, the adjustment's not that hard," 1989 French Open champion Michael Chang said. "For (people) that have grown up playing on the surface, you just know the surface so well." So someone like Iga Swiatek, who has won four of the past five French Opens, should feel comfortable and confident on clay, by far her best surface. The same goes, of course, for Rafael Nadal, a 14-time champion at Roland Garros. Novak Djokovic has won at least three Grand Slam titles at each of the sport's biggest events, the only man to do so, and the adjustments required come rather naturally to him. Then again, Alcaraz, whose title at Roland Garros this year made him, at 21, the youngest man to win a major trophy on clay, hard and grass courts, had this to say about going from London to Paris: "It's not easy to change surfaces in just a week.

Messi loses fitness battle at Copa America, puts goal of playing 6th World Cup on hold

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

Lionel Messi cried uncontrollably after he exited from a Copa America final before fulltime for the first time in his career. Beyond the severe pain in his right ankle on Sunday night in Miami Gardens, the tears on the face of Argentina's captain showed a deeper anguish. Despite winning the title in one of his "last battles," as Messi described this Copa, the 37-year-old superstar did not pass the fitness test that could have opened the way for him to play his sixth World Cup in 2026. Argentina successfully defended its South American title with a hard-fought 1-0 extra-time win against Colombia. Messi left the pitch in Hard Rock Stadium in the 64th minute, breaking down without being touched. The Copa was Messi's first major tournament since leaving European soccer to play in the less competitive Major League Soccer in the US. Still, he has missed several games over the last year for his Inter Miami club and Argentina due to muscle issues. Messi felt muscular pains in his right leg in the second group match against Chile, which sidelined him from the



following game against Peru. He did not deliver an impressive performance in the quarterfinals against Ecuador and missed his chance in the penalty shootout. In the semifinal victory over Canada, he scored his only goal in the tournament in the 2-0 win. With a limp, Messi celebrated his second Copa title in modest fashion on the field. The injury still hurt the star on Monday. "One more," he said on his social media

channels. Messi did not speak to the media after the injury, and Argentina did not give details about the damage. Messi's farewell to the national team is still on hold, but there's other players aged above 35 who are likely to have played their last major international tournament; winger Angel Di Maria (36), defender Nicolás Otamendi (36), and substitute goalkeeper Franco Armani (37).

Argentina does have up-and-coming players and a squad averaging 28 years of age when the veterans are not counted. That is partly why it held strong against Colombia despite the absence of its star for 56 minutes of play. "I don't know whether we marked an era, but this team never ceases to surprise. It recovers from difficulties," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "When (Messi) leaves, the team multiplies with the one that comes in and we play better in a different way." Young talents such as Alejandro Garnacho, Valentin Carboni, Thiago Almada, Claudio Echeverri and Valentin Barco are not to be compared with the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner, but they can help Argentina remain competitive when it defends the World Cup in 2026. Key squad members such as goalkeeper Emiliano Martínez, defender Cristian Romero, midfielder Rodrigo de Paul and striker Lautaro Martínez are likely to remain. Argentina will return to action in September in World Cup qualifying against Chile and Colombia. The Argentines lead South America. That international window will give more hints about whether Messi's legend will go on or stop at Sunday's title.

Nagal attains career-high ATP ranking of 68

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympic-bound Sumit Nagal continued his ascent in the ATP singles chart, climbing to a career-high ranking of 68. The 26-year-old rose five spots in the latest ATP ranking list released on Monday. His previous best was 71. Nagal thus moves past former world No. 71 Sashi Menon to become the fourth highest-ranked Indian man since 1973. Vijay Amritraj (ranked 18th in 1980), Ramesh Krishnan (ranked 23rd in 1985) and Somdev Devvarman (ranked 62nd in 2011) are the only other Indian players who have



held a higher rank than Nagal. A string of impressive results in recent times has not only helped Nagal improve his ranking but also make the cut for singles event at the Paris Games. Nagal, who will be the sole Indian in the men's singles

event at the Paris Olympics, has so far logged 779 ATP points. The year began with a win against Alexander Bublik, the 31st seed from Kazakhstan at the Australian Open. He also competed at the French Open and Wimbledon. He had won the men's singles crown at the Heilbronn Neckarcup 2024 Challenger event in Germany earlier this month and the Chennai Open in February. Nagal, who is currently the best-ranked Indian singles player, has won four ATP Challenger titles since 2023 and Heilbronn was his fourth title on clay.



Gareth says he will step down as England manager

AP ■ LONDON

After eight years, four tournaments and two finals, Gareth Southgate announced he was stepping down as England manager on Tuesday, saying it was "time for change." Sunday's 2-1 loss to Spain in the European Championship final proved to be his last game in charge of the national team. "As a proud Englishman, it has been the honour of my life to play for England and to manage England. It has meant everything to me, and I have given it my all," he said. "But it's time for change, and for a new chapter." Southgate's contract was due to expire this year and his announcement comes after months of uncertainty surrounding his future. Mikel Oyarzabal's 86th-minute winner in Berlin was a painful way to end his reign after he transformed the fortunes of England's underperforming national team. Hired in 2016, he led England to back-to-back finals at the Euros and to the semifinals of the World Cup in 2018. But, ultimately, he was unable to end the nation's decades-long wait for a first major trophy since the World Cup in

1966. "Gareth has made the impossible job possible and laid strong foundations for future success. He is held in the highest regard by the players, the backroom team, by everyone at the FA and across the world of football," said Mark Bullingham, chief executive of the English Football Association. Southgate said before the European Championship that it would likely be his last tournament if England did not win. During it, he faced fierce criticism for the team's early performances and some fans throw plastic beer cups towards him at the end of the 0-0 draw with Slovenia in the group phase. But he achieved what no other England manager has by leading his team to two finals, including the first final on foreign soil. "We look back at Gareth's tenure with huge pride - his contribution to the English game, including a significant role in player development, and in culture transformation has been unique. However, it is his record of winning tournament games which is most extraordinary," Bullingham said.

On incredible day, Mbappé welcomed by Real Madrid fans at packed Santiago Bernabeu

AP ■ MADRID

Kylian Mbappé finally put on a Real Madrid jersey on Tuesday, fulfilling his childhood dream in front of a packed Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. Nearly 80,000 fans were in hand at the Bernabeu to welcome the 25-year-old France star during his official presentation as the club's newest player. After signing his five-year contract with the Spanish powerhouse alongside club president Florentino Pérez, Mbappé entered the stage set up at the Bernabeu to loud

cheers by the Madrid fans. Wearing the No. 9 jersey, Mbappé smiled broadly and waved to the fans who chanted his name, then embraced Pérez and former Madrid player and coach Zinedine Zidane, who invited Mbappé to visit the Spanish club for the first time when he was just a teenager. "It's incredible day for me," Mbappé told the crowd, in Spanish. "Since being a kid I dreamed about playing for Madrid and today I'm here. It means a lot to me." Mbappé's relatives, club officials and several former players were by the stage at the



Bernabeu, which had its roof closed for the midday ceremony in the Spanish capital. Kids linked to

Mbappé's foundation were also on hand. The record-15 European Cups won by Madrid were also on display on the stage where Mbappé was introduced. The message "Welcome, Mbappé" was shown on the large video boards at the newly revamped Bernabeu. Some of the club's most iconic moments were also shown while the song "Nessun Dorma" was played on the loudspeakers. Images of Mbappé's career were also displayed, as well as photos including Mbappé wearing Madrid's uniform as a kid and

posing alongside former club star Cristiano Ronaldo. Pérez called Mbappé's presentation a "historic act" for the club. "Today we welcome an exceptional player who today is fulfilling his childhood dream," Pérez said. "Today you are here because it's something that you wanted. Thank you for making a great effort to be able to wear this white jersey." Mbappé's presentation came after he played at the 2024 European Championship, where France lost to eventual champion Spain in the semifinals.

HARDIK PANDYA TO LEAD INDIA IN T20s AGAINST SRI LANKA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star all-rounder Hardik Pandya is all set to lead India in the three-match T20 International series against Sri Lanka starting July 27. However, one of the heroes of India's T20 World Cup victory last month will take a break during the three-match ODI series, which is scheduled in August, due to "personal reasons". "Hardik Pandya was India's T20 vice-captain under Rohit Sharma. He is completely fit and available for the three-match T20I series and will lead the side," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity. Rohit retired from T20 Internationals at the end of the World Cup. The T20Is against Sri Lanka will run from July 27 to 30 in Pallekele, followed by the ODIs from August 2 to 7 in Colombo. The squad for the series is expected to be announced in the next couple of days. While there is still no clarity on who would be Pandya's deputy, the toss-up is between Shubman Gill, who recently captained India to a 4-1 series win over Zimbabwe, and Suryakumar Yadav, who led the side during the T20Is against South Africa last year. About the ODIs, the official confirmed that Pandya has asked for leave and has already communicated this to regular skipper Rohit Sharma, who is also taking a break from this series.



"The break from ODIs is for very personal reasons. Hardik doesn't have any fitness issue as is being floated in the media," the official said. For the ODIs, KL Rahul, who led in the last ODI series in South Africa, and Gill are in contention for the leadership role. **THRUST ON DOMESTIC AVAILABILITY:** BCCI secretary Jay

Shah has made it clear that even star cricketers must make themselves available for domestic engagements when they are free from national duty. But exceptions will be made for the likes of Rohit, Virat Kohli and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah. The BCCI would, however, want all the other Test specialists to play at least one or two of a couple of Duleep Trophy games

in August as a precursor to the Tests against Bangladesh and New Zealand. "This time there is no zonal selection committee for Duleep Trophy. Only national selection committee will pick Duleep teams. "All Test team contenders will be picked. For Rohit, Virat and Bumrah, it will be their choice if they want to play or not," the source added.



Harmanpreet moves to 12th, Shafali 15th in ICC T20 rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India opener Shafali Verma on Tuesday moved to 15th place while her skipper Harmanpreet Kaur climbed to the 12th spot in the latest ICC T20 rankings, following their strong performances in the series against South Africa. Harmanpreet has moved up three places and now has 613 rating points while Shafali rose two rungs to share the 15th spot with New Zealand's Amelia Kerr and Danni Wyatt

from England. The swashbuckling Smriti Mandhana continues to be the top-ranked Indian batter as she remained static on the fifth spot. In the bowlers' list, the seasoned Deepti Sharma continued her stay at the third place. Radha Yadav moved eight spots to 15th while Pooja Vastrakar climbed up six places to 23rd and Shreyanka Patil rose nine rungs to 60th. England spinner Sarah Glenn

has claimed a new career-high rating of 768 points. She has claimed eight wickets through four matches of England's ongoing T20I series at home against New Zealand. This has allowed the right-armed to maintain her place as the No.2 ranked T20I bowler in the world. The only player in front of Glenn in the ratings is teammate and fellow spinner Sophie Ecclestone and she also has eight scalps from the first four matches of the five-game series.

Lakshya underdog in reasonable Olympics draw, will play freely: Coach Vimal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The presence of some established foes notwithstanding, Indian shuttler Lakshya Sen has got a "fair" draw in his debut Olympics, according to his coach Vimal Kumar, who expects the youngster to play freely in Paris thanks to his "underdog" status and some technical improvements in his overall game. World No. 19 Sen's path to an Olympic medal has multiple hurdles as he will need to get past familiar Indonesian nemesis Jonatan Christie, last Olympics' surprise semifinalist Kevin Cordon from Guatemala, and Julian Carraggi from Belgium in Group L. "I think it (the draw) is very fair, I feel it is a very reasonable draw for him," Vimal, a former India coach, told PTI from Marseille, France

where Sen is currently training ahead of the Paris Olympics. "A couple of times, he has lost to Jonatan Christie in close matches. It's a 50-50 match. You have to convert (chances) if you have to get to the second stage. In my opinion, Lakshya has nothing to lose. He will be the underdog and he can play a lot more freely," he asserted. Describing Sen as a big-match player, Vimal said he expects Sen to trump former Asian Games champion Christie, who was also a part of Indonesia's Thomas Cup-winning team in 2022. Vimal said Sen has worked on his front-court alertness and closing stage composure. The 22-year-old would be aiming to become the first Indian male shuttler to finish on the Olympic podium. India's previous badminton medals at the Games have been clinched by

Saina Nehwal (bronze in 2012, London) and P V Sindhu (silver in 2016, Rio de Janeiro and bronze in 2020, Tokyo). "Jonathan will be the last match of the group and Lakshya should pull through. So I see a lot of positives. Not going to the Canada Open was a dampener but he has overcome that. Being away here in similar conditions will help him," Vimal said referring to Sen being forced out of his title defence in Canada Open owing to visa issues. To prepare the player from Almora, Korea's Yoo Yong-Sung, a two-time men's doubles Olympic silver-medallist, was brought back to polish his net game, improve his on-court pace and dial up the focus in crunch situations. Yoo-Sung had worked with Sen in 2022. "We have brought in a lot of speed work into closing stages, we



introduced a lot of double drills in finishing, pushing the pace towards certain points. Last three weeks, Yoo Yong-Sung has been helping us with those drills," Vimal said. Vimal said Sen has also been doing a lot of service variations practice. "(The idea is) basically to bring in

some sort of intensity in the routines. Certain sets of routines that we follow are mostly singles-oriented. He (Sen) worked on those flat exchanges, retrieving and things like approaching the net and being a little more alert at the net," Vimal explained.

For the last one week, Sen has been training at the Halles des Sports Parsemain in Fos-sur-Mer, which is about 45 minutes from Marseille city centre. Sen is also training with the Olympic-bound Popov brothers -- Christo and Toma Junior -- till July 21. Indian shuttlers Kiran George, Ayush Shetty have been roped in too for sparring. "Next week we will be doing one set of tournament practice because he needs that little bit of that match practice. It would have been good to see him in Canada. So next week I want to see how he is implementing what he learned. "Against both the Popov brothers, it will be a good test. So I'll be able to assess him. Once he gets into the village in Paris, we won't get to play much. We will have limited time for practice in the main arena."

Lakshya had struggled through much of 2023 and early part of 2024. He fell behind in the qualification race but turned things around in time with two semifinal finishes at the All England Championship and the French Open to seal his place in the Olympics. "From all that he has survived, he got an opportunity to qualify. He has been practising and has worked on his game. Lakshya has acclimatised to the conditions, he plays well there in those conditions. "We have also got some of that tournament shuttlecock (F-90) because the conditions are a little on the slower side in Paris. So we have been practising with those shuttles," said Vimal, who guided Saina Nehwal to world No. 1 in 2015. Sen, along with his coach, will be leaving for Paris on July 22.

Moudgil overcomes mental demons to secure place in shooting contingent for Paris Games



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Overcoming mental demons after being left out of the Indian team from last year's Asian Games and the World Championships was key to shooter Anjum Moudgil securing a Paris Olympic berth. Former world no.1 Moudgil, a world championships and Commonwealth Games medallist, competed in two events during the last edition in Tokyo. She finished 15th in the 50m rifle 3 position and 18th in the 10m air rifle, but in Paris, she will be featuring in only women's 50m 3 position. By her own admission, the ouster from the Indian team for Worlds and Asian Games due to inconsistent form was an eye opener for her as the 30-year-old worked on bettering her mental toughness besides focussing entirely on her training. "Three years after Tokyo was a roller-coaster ride for me. I have seen tough times but I wanted to comeback stronger. The experiences of Tokyo will surely be of helpful (in Paris)," Moudgil said in a virtual media interaction. "I really took advantage of quotas and trials, the federation told me not to lose out hope. They understood the things I was going through. I was really confident of making through to the team after I didn't make the team for World Championships and the Asian Games because of just 2 points in the trials. "I was too focussed and positive in giving

my best in the trials. I knew my strengths and how to work under pressure and it paid off. "One year after Tokyo, I won couple of medals in World Cups and became world no.1. I did mental training focus, it's been a positive step for me. I now speak up, which is a positive change heading to Paris. I used time to get better and find what works better for me," she added. Understanding the importance of mental health issues, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), has set up the Mentally Fit Helpline, a dedicated, independent and confidential mental health counselling service available to all athletes accredited for the Paris Games. "It's (mental health) so important for all the federations and IOC to understand. It's important to understand the mental side, understand how it works for an athlete, understand mental toughness. So, it's positive step to see mental helpline being introduced in Paris Olympics," Moudgil said. "Athletes have spoken in the past about mental health issues. It's a common issue which needs to be addressed not only for athletes, but in every profession. "People should respect mental health, and not hide anything. The helpline is a positive step towards admiring mental health issues." India have named a strong 21-member shooting contingent for Paris Games, which includes many youngsters,

including 22-year-old Sift Kaur Samra who will be competing alongside Moudgil in 50m 3p event. "There are so many strong, young shooters, it really helps me to push my limit. I would have been stuck if I was not pushed. There is high competition in my event, and it really helped me to push. The reason I am here because of the efforts I have put in over the last 3 years," Moudgil said. "I am very positive going into Paris with this young contingent. All of them are confident, the team is doing very well. It is positive for each and every shooter, there is no pressure. My expectation is for everyone to give their best, everyone going with positive mindset." Moudgil is counting on her difficult Tokyo experience to shine in Paris. "Competing in one rather than two events both have positive and negative sides, but I am happy. In Tokyo, the environment was different because of Covid. Everything was tentative, we had to appear for Covid test everyday and if you turn positive you are out of the competition. All of these things were disturbances. "The competition is very high in India and the pressure situations we face during trials will definitely help in Olympics. I just wanted to be my best in trials, the fire to perform in trials and the experience of last 15 years really paid off. These things will surely help me in Paris, the experience of playing in the Olympics is there with me," she said. "...We had a different experience in Tokyo because of Covid, we won quotas 3 years before and was waiting as the Games were postponed. But we really don't discuss too much baggage of Tokyo. It's just another big competition and that's what we discuss." Shooting competitions of the Paris Olympics will be held at National Shooting Center in Châteauroux, the capital city of the French department of Indre, central France, which is approximately 270km from Paris. "The preparation is going really well and according to plan. We are Luxembourg for the last phase of our training and preparation before we head to Châteauroux, France on 21st."

Bawa assures India of medal in World Junior squash, Anahat bows out

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's Shaurya Bawa guaranteed himself of a medal as he moved to the semifinals with a hard fought 3-2 win over Malaysian Low Wa-Sern in the World Junior Squash Championships in Houston. The 18-year-old from Delhi, thus, becomes only the second Indian male to reach the semifinals after Kush Kumar, who reached the last four stage in 2014. In a thrilling clash that lasted 80 minutes, Bawa was down 6-

9 and 7-10 in the fifth game but remarkably saved three match balls to eke out a 2-11 11-4 10-12 11-8 12-10 victory in the boys' quarterfinals on Monday. With the win, Bawa set up a semifinal clash with Egyptian top-seed Mohamed Zakaria. Meanwhile, compatriot Anahat Singh bowed out from the girls' quarterfinals for a third straight year. The 16-year-old women's national champion lost a close five-setter to Nadien Elhammamy, with the Egyptian winning 11-8 11-9 5-11 10-12 13-11.

Punjab FC retains five Indian players ahead of upcoming ISL season

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Punjab FC on Tuesday announced retaining five Indian players, including midfielder Ashis Pradhan and goal-keeper Ravi Kumar, on multi-year deals for the upcoming Indian Super League season. The other players retained are Ricky Shabong, Manglenhang Kippen, and Suresh Meitei. While Ravi and Pradhan will remain at the club until May 2026, centre back Meitei and midfielder Ricky will be a part of the Punjab FC till May 2027.

Kippen, also a midfielder, will continue till May 2028. "They were key players for the club in the previous season and the club has kept their faith in these players," the club said in a release. Ravi made 47 saves for the club in 16 appearances last season while Meitei made 14 appearances while assisting once for the club. "Pradhan, Shabong and Kippen made 17, 10 and four appearances respectively adding steel and creativity in the middle of the park," the club added.

Olympics-bound javelin thrower Jena says he was on verge of quitting last year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Asian Games silver medallist javelin thrower Kishore Jena says he was on verge of quitting the sport in 2023 after a string of poor performances but he heeded to his father's advice, leading to a revival of his career. Jena admitted that Neeraj Chopra's Tokyo Olympics gold medal motivated him to achieve more in his sport but he found it difficult to get the big throws and thought of quitting the sport in July last year just before the World Championships. "When Neeraj won at the Olympics, we celebrated and enjoyed his victory. But honestly, the victory also left me dejected because I too was playing the same sport. I felt it was time for me to achieve something in sports," Jena said. "I participated in Lebanon National Championships after a dip in my rankings and produced a throw of 78m. Despite giving it my all, I couldn't achieve much. I



started doubting if all the hard work was worth it. I called my father, who encouraged me to participate in next competition in Sri Lanka," he said in a JioCinema release. Jena won in Lebanon (on July 21) with a throw of 78.96m, which by any standard was a modest performance. In fact, Jena could not breach the 80m mark till the end of 2022. His first 80m-plus throw came in March 2023 during the Indian Grand Prix in Thiruvananthapuram where he came up with 81.05m effort. "I decided the event in Sri Lanka (July 30)

would be my last attempt, after which I would quit and go back to prioritizing work and family. With God's grace, I performed well, producing a throw of 84.38m which led to my qualification for the World Championships." Jena qualified for the Budapest World Championships in August 2023 through world ranking quota. He could not breach the automatic qualification mark of 85.20m. "I performed well in the World Championships as well, achieving a personal best of 84.77m," said Jena who finished fifth in the final while Chopra won the gold with 88.17m. "I followed it up with another personal best of 87.54m at the Asian Games (in Hangzhou, China where he won a silver behind Chopra) securing my ticket to Paris 2024. I now want to give my best at Paris. I am quite confident. While I haven't set any particular targets, I am aiming to improve my personal best."

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