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INDIA'S SERVICE SECTOR GROWTH SOFTENS TO FIVE MONTHS LOW: PMI

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NDA on June 8: Third time is the charm



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP president JP Nadda and other leaders during a meeting of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at 7, Lok Kalyan Marg, in New Delhi, on Wednesday

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners will stake claim to form the Government on June 7. Modi is likely to take oath on June 8. This is the first time since Jawaharlal Nehru that a Prime Minister will be returning to power for a third consecutive term. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners on Wednesday met at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's residence 7 Lok Kalyan Marg

and unanimously elected him as the alliance leader, paving the way for him to take the oath for a third consecutive term, a first for any ruling alliance since 1962. The NDA has won 293 seats in the Lok Sabha election, comfortably above the majority mark of 272 in the 543-member House. Besides, 10 Independents have also extended their support to NDA and its partners, making its tally to 303. Though, the new Government is likely to be different in composition and character with a bigger share

for the BJP's allies. "NDA MPs will meet on June 7 and the alliance leaders will then go to the President of India to submit their letters of support, HAM (Secular) leader and former Bihar Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi said after attending the meeting. How soon the BJP and its allies reach an agreement on matters like the share of Ministries each party may get and other terms of negotiations could also be a factor in deciding the timing of the swearing-in or they could put off the tricky issues for resolution at a later stage.

Sources said the second meeting of the NDA partners' leaders will take place on Friday and on the same day, they will stake the claim to form the Government. Sources said senior BJP leaders JP Nadda, Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah and Piyush Goyal have been assigned to coordinate with NDA partners. Earlier in the day, Modi tendered his resignation to President Droupadi Murmu along with his Council of Ministers after the Cabinet meeting.

'Political loss, moral defeat for Modi'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Struggling for a tally to form a Government at the Centre by dislodging BJP-led NDA claims, the Congress led INDIA Bloc on Wednesday welcomed all parties that share a fundamental commitment to the values enshrined in the Preamble of Constitution towards formation of a government. Indicating for an "appropriate time", the INDIA Bloc in a statement said it will continue to fight against the fascist rule of the BJP-led by Narendra Modi. "We will take appropriate steps at the appropriate time to realise the people's desire not to be ruled by the BJP Govt. This is our decision that whatever promises we have made to the people, we will keep it up," Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said while addressing the Opposition leaders who converged at his residence for the first meeting of the Bloc after its impressive gains in Lok Sabha that pulled down the ruling BJP's mark below the majority figure of 273 of the 543 members of Lok Sabha. "The mandate is decisively against Modi, against him and the substance and style of his politics. It is a huge political loss for him personally apart from being a clear moral defeat as well. However, he is determined to subvert the will of the



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav, DMK supremo and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin amongst other INDIA Bloc partners at a meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday

people," he said. "The INDIA alliance welcomes all parties which share its fundamental commitment to the values enshrined in the Preamble to our Constitution and to its many provisions for economic, social and political justice," the Congress chief said in his opening remarks. Thanking the INDIA Bloc partners, he said, "I welcome all INDIA alliance partners. We fought well, fought unitedly, fought resolutely." The constituents of the INDIA Bloc thanked the people of India for the

overwhelming support received by our alliance. The people's mandate has given a befitting reply to the BJP and their politics of hate, corruption and deprivation, said a resolution. This is a mandate in defence of the Constitution of India and against price rise, unemployment, and crony capitalism and also to save democracy, it further added. Those present in the meeting were Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, KC Venugopal, NCP's Sharad Pawar NCP, Supriya Sule, DMK chief and Tamil Nadu Chief

Minister MK Stalin and his party colleague R Balu, Samajwadi Party supremo Akhilesh Yadav, SP's Ramgopal Yadav, TMC's Abhishek Banerjee, Sanjay Raut and Arvind Sawant from Shiv Sena (UBT), RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, CPI(M)'s Sitaram Yechury CPI(M), D Raja from CPI JMM leader and Jharkhand CM Champai Soren, jailed JMM leader Hemant Soren's wife Kalpana Soren, Sanjay Singh and Raghav Chadha from AAP and National Conference leader Omar Abdullah amongst other constituents of the INDIA Bloc.

Fadnavis takes blame, offers to quit as Dy CM

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Accepting "full responsibility" for the ruling BJP's dismal show in the Lok Sabha polls in Maharashtra, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday offered to resign from his post in the State Government so that he could work "full time" for the party to improve its performance in the State Assembly polls scheduled for October this year. Talking to media persons here, Fadnavis said he would ask the BJP's Central leadership to "relieve" him from all the responsibilities in the Maharashtra Government" so that he could work "full time" for the party ahead of the State Assembly polls. "I take full responsibility for the dismal performance of the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls in Maharashtra. I accept that I fell short somewhere that contributed to the party's setback in the polls," Fadnavis said. "I am going to tell the Central BJP leadership that I want to work full time for the party ahead of the State Assembly polls. I am going to request my party leadership to relieve me from the State Government and give me an opportunity to work for the party," the



senior State BJP leader said. Fadnavis' statement should be seen in the light of the fact that the ruling MahaYuti - comprising BJP, Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and NCP (Ajit Pawar) - collectively won just 17 seats out of total 48 seats as against 30 seats won by the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) - comprising Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and Shiv Sena (Sharad Pawar). At the individual level, the BJP won mere nine seats as against 23 seats it had won in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. In comparison, the Opposition Congress performed very well by winning 13 seats as against just one seat that it had won in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, in which it had put up a miserable performance.

After 24 years, Patnaik bows out as Odisha CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/BHUBANESWAR

Marking the end of his 24-year-rule in Odisha, BJD supremo Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday resigned from the post of the Chief Minister after the defeat of his party in the Assembly elections in the State. Patnaik handed over his resignation letter to Governor Raghuraj Das at the Raj Bhavan, sources said. Patnaik had for the first time taken oath as the chief minister of Odisha on March 5, 2000. Though a number of BJD leaders had gathered at Patnaik's residence, he came alone to the Governor's house to tender his resignation. The BJD supremo only waved at

waiting journalists and left the premises after submitting his resignation letter. The BJP stormed to power in Odisha by securing 78 of the 147 Assembly seats, while the BJD managed to win only 51 seats. Congress bagged 14 constituencies and CPI (M) secured one, while three Independent candidates also emerged victorious. Patnaik and BJP and Congress State presidents Manmohan Samal and Sarat Pattanayak respectively, had to suffer defeats in the Odisha Assembly elections. Although Patnaik won from his traditional Hinjili Assembly seat in Ganjam district by a slender margin of 4,636 votes, the five-term



Outgoing Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik meets Governor Raghuraj Das to submit his resignation following the defeat of his party in the State Assembly elections at Raj Bhavan in Bhubaneswar on Wednesday

former Chief Minister had to suffer a humiliating defeat to a political novice in Kantabanji constituency in Bolangir. The BJD supremo lost

to suffer a humiliating defeat in his political career spanning 26 years. Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee president Sarat Pattanayak suffered a worse fate as he finished fourth in Nuapada assembly segment, bagging only 15,501 votes. The seat was bagged by BJD candidate Rajendra Dholakia, who got 61,822 votes, while Independent nominee Gishiram Majhi came second, securing 50,941 votes. Amid speculations over who would be the next chief minister of Odisha, state BJP president Manmohan Samal on Wednesday the party's parliamentary board will take a decision on it in a day or two.

World hails Modi on historic third term in office

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day after NDA scored a victory in Lok Sabha polls, more than 50 world leaders have congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his third-term win. Presidents of Sri Lanka, Maldives, Iran, Seychelles and Prime Ministers of Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Mauritius have sent congratulatory greetings. Among G20 countries, Prime Ministers of Italy, Japan and the President of South Korea have congratulated the Prime Minister. Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also congratulated Modi. China also lauded the victory. French President Emmanuel Macron said, "India has concluded the biggest election in the world! Congratulations Narendra Modi, my dear friend. Together we will continue to further strengthen the strategic partnership that unites India and France." From Africa, Presidents of Nigeria, Kenya, Comoros have extended congratulatory messages.

Nightmare on D Street ends

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rebounding from their worst single-day slide in four years, benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty soared over 3 per cent each on heavy value buying by investors after NDA alliance partners started talks on Government formation. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 2,303.19 points or 3.20 per cent to settle at 74,382.24 on value buying in banking, auto and oil shares. All Sensex shares closed in the green. During the day, it zoomed 2,455.77 points or 3.40 per cent to 74,534.82. The NSE Nifty climbed 735.85 points or 3.36 per cent to 22,620.35 with all its constituents ending with gains. During

the day, the benchmark soared 785.9 points or 3.59 per cent to 22,670.40. Heavy buying in HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Reliance Industries helped benchmark indices log sharp gains. Investors became richer by Rs 13.22 lakh crore on Wednesday with markets making a strong comeback. Senior leaders of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance deliberated on the details of government formation at a meeting here on Wednesday, a day after the ruling coalition won a majority in the Lok Sabha election which paved the way for a third term for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Coalition partner TDP also affirmed that it was with the NDA assuaging investors' concerns over Government

formation and triggering a sharp value buying in recent losers. "Indian market exhibited a spirited recovery driven by broad-based buying across various sectors, as political stability appears assured. However, attention will remain on the formation of the Government and the forthcoming RBI policy meeting," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. Among Sensex companies, IndusInd Bank jumped over 7 per cent. Tata Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bajaj Finance, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Hindustan Unilever, HDFC Bank, Axis Bank and JSW Steel also emerged as big gainers.

A novel #Plant4Mother green drive

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As rising temperatures underscore the threat to Mother Earth, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on World Environment Day on Wednesday unveiled a novel campaign named 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' (a tree in the name of mother) aiming to plant millions of saplings across the country. The initiative, highlighting the nurturing and life-sustaining role of saplings in our ecosystem and drawing a parallel to the care provided by mothers, aims to plant millions of saplings across the

country in the coming months. The Government has also plans to target planting 80 crore saplings by September 2024 and 140 crore saplings by March 2025, following a "whole of Government" and "whole of society" approach. The theme aligns with the D day's theme "land restoration, desertification, and drought resilience", underscoring the importance of combating land degradation and promoting sustainable land management practices. Planting a sapling at Buddha Jayanti Park in Delhi, Modi urged citizens to share pictures of saplings planted in

their mothers' names using the hashtag #Plant4Mother. Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav and Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena were also present at the event. Central and State Government Departments and Local Bodies have been asked to identify public spaces to support the campaign. Earlier, President Droupadi Murmu addressed the nation, emphasising the urgent need to combat climate change and calling for collective efforts to build a sustainable and greener world. She noted that protecting Mother Earth is a fundamental responsibility.

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Setting aside BJP's disappointing performance in the Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended heartfelt birthday greetings to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, aiming to uplift his spirits amidst rising speculations about his leadership. On his social media platform X, Modi highlighted Yogi's significant contributions to the development of Uttar Pradesh and his efforts toward empowering the underprivileged, wishing him a long and healthy life. Post-election, Yogi cancelled



official engagements on Tuesday but convened a crucial meeting with party leaders to dissect the electoral outcomes. Despite the setback, support from Modi and other senior leaders is seen as an effort to solidify

Yogi's position within the party. Yogi expressed his gratitude for the birthday wishes, particularly appreciating the Prime Minister's encouragement, which he described as inspirational in

working towards a self-reliant and prosperous Uttar Pradesh. The BJP insiders attributed the electoral failure to the inability of alliance partners to secure the Other Backward Classes (OBC) votes, despite alliances with various caste-based parties like the Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP), NISHAD Party, Apna Dal (S), and Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD). Aiming ambitiously to win all 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh to meet its national target of 400 seats, the BJP fell short. "Our allies failed to mobilise the voters. The caste-based leaders did not galvanise their support base to vote for the BJP," lamented a senior BJP leader. Facing competition from the Samajwadi Party's (SP) PDA

formula, the BJP re-inducted SBSP president Om Prakash Rajbhar into the NDA, hoping to secure Rajbhar votes. Rajbhar had previously left the BJP for SP before the 2022 Assembly elections. Additionally, the BJP enticed OBC leader Dara Singh Chauhan and successfully split RLD from the INDIA alliance in February. Despite allotting seats to all NDA allies-with SBSP contesting one seat, and Apna Dal (S) and RLD contesting two seats each-the anticipated support failed to materialise. Praveen Nishad, Sanjay Nishad's son, was allocated the Sant Kabir Nagar seat for a second time.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

The enigma

The BJP 'loss' amid victory and Congress 'win' in defeat is a perplexing question

Predicting the course Indian politics will take is akin to forecasting monsoon or betting on the next World Cup winner — notoriously unpredictable. Election results routinely buck conventional wisdom, leaving even the most astute political pundits perplexed and scratching their heads. This time round, these pundits may want to hang their boots as well; they have no clue as to what happened, or what will happen, for that matter. Intriguing is also the fact that no one knows for sure which side won and who lost; and if there was a clear winner. The latest results present a paradoxical landscape where victories feel like defeats and losses masquerade as triumphs. The BJP seemingly tasted defeat despite emerging the single largest party, while the Congress celebrated a moral victory despite just about touching the 100-mark. This electoral paradox underscores the nuanced dynamics at play beyond mere seat counts, reflecting the intricate interplay of factors such as voter sentiment, strategic alliances and the evolving political narrative. The BJP, known for its formidable electoral machinery and strategic acumen, found itself grappling with an unexpected conundrum: It falls short of reaching the coveted '300 ke paar,' let alone Narendra Modi's ambitious target of '400 ke par.'

Despite securing the most seats in Parliament, the party failed to meet its lofty expectations. This phenomenon can be attributed to several factors, including anti-incumbency sentiment, regional variations in voting patterns and the emergence of INDIA bloc, economic hardships of people, disgruntled elements in the party and many more. One crucial aspect contributing to the BJP's "loss despite victory" narrative is the erosion of its traditional vote base in certain constituencies. Issues such as agrarian distress, unemployment and socio-economic inequalities have fuelled disenchantment among segments of the electorate, leading to a dent in the BJP's support base. Additionally, the party's religious undertones, emphasis on the construction of the Ram temple and attempts at polarisation along religious and caste lines failed to resonate with the electorate. Lastly, what we observe is a noticeable decline in the appeal of 'Brand Modi'. For the first time under his leadership, the party must rely on its allies to form a Government, thereby subjecting it to the whims of these allies. At the other end, the Congress is desperately gasping for an oxygen mask. Despite facing a decline in its traditional support base, the Congress has pulled off a moral victory from the jaws of defeat. This paradoxical triumph stems from the party's ability to exceed dismal expectations, mount a credible challenge to the ruling dispensation and portray itself as a resilient Opposition force, though it needs to work more on it. In every conflict, perception often outweighs tangible triumphs. The NDA lost the battle of public perception, while the Congress ascended to the moral high ground, validating its political approach and ideology.



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PICTALK



A pedestrian walks past a mural, made to create awareness on the environment and reforestation, in Mumbai

PTI

Virtual communication over spoken words

Each one of us needs appreciation, or validation, through a kind or loving word, and sometimes through a touch or even an occasional hug

We were fond of a nursery rhyme during our hostel days, "One for sorrow, two for joy, three for letter, four for toy..." I realised much later that we had tweaked the rhyme to suit us, to help us cope with separation. The original did not have any reference to letters. Most of us had come out of the sheltered life of our familiar surroundings for the first time.

Emails and mobiles were not even on the horizon in 1974. Many homes did not have landline telephones. We were homesick and eagerly looked forward to handwritten letters from home. Each day, we anxiously crowded around the table outside the mess where the postman dumped all the posts. A few would gleefully pull out theirs, while others walked into the dining hall dejected.

A few years later, I was engaged to be married to a young girl within the next five months. It was a long-distance courtship. I was posted in a government job in Calcutta, she was in the final year of her graduation in Delhi. I did not have the benefit of telephone facilities either at the office or



at home. I did the next best thing — write her a letter every day. She also responded, with almost the same frequency. Almost four decades later, I do not recall the contents of our letters; but I am sure they would have served the same purpose that today's practice of youngsters going out several times over months serves. We have begun to rationalise and accept the change in the younger generation for a better understanding before committing to a future relationship; while we did it after we had been engaged in an arranged relationship by our parents. The traditional has given way to the new to suit the changing times. Age and familiarity bring inevitable changes in life. As years rolled on, we also

got busier in our daily lives — jobs, raising children, and many other things, which some may call mundane, but which I call as the flow of life. There would be bickering between the two of us, interspersed with silences, which we had not even envisaged through the rose-tinted glasses that we wore while writing those long letters during our courtship. Now in our sixties — my wife is short of that magical number by less than a year — we even communicate through these silences. We are more like the couple of birds that I recently spotted sitting a little apart from each other on an electric wire looking in different directions, contemplating life, and probably in silent communication with each other.

Technology has also changed our lives in many ways. Virtual communication is the new order over the verbal or the written word. There are more messages of greetings on social media from and to family members living under the same roof. In the earlier days, when we did not have social media at our beck and call, a written note was something to be preserved and cherished. One might argue that it is better than not communicating at all. My counterpoint is that not all communication should be silent or on the net. Each one of us needs appreciation, or validation, through a kind or loving word, and sometimes through a touch or even an occasional hug. Lord Tennyson said almost two centuries back, "The old order changeth, yielding place to new." Change is inevitable and needs to be welcomed with open hearts. To not change is to stagnate. It is within us to differentiate and embrace the good.

(The writer conducts workshops on creative writing for young adults and corporate executives. Views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

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Agenda for the Modi Government 3.0

If Modi gets his next term, he might bring about transformative changes and ambitious plans to navigate India's diverse challenges and opportunities



KALYANI SHANKAR

Elections have resulted in surprises and upsets before. India's stability lies in its ability to transition power smoothly. The verdict is out now and the winner is announced. To fortify its democracy, India requires a stable government and strong Opposition.

After the seven-phase elections, the June 4 results indicate that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will likely be the next prime minister. The INDIA bloc, a coalition of regional parties, also competed, but its chances were slim. Election results often surprise. 2004, the U.P.A. formed the government even though the B.J.P.'s "India Shining" campaign did not click. Regardless of the outcome, the winning party and the Opposition bloc will face challenges. Modi has claimed that his last ten years in office have been the appetizer, and the main meal will come in his third term. Modi stated, "Wait for bigger decisions in the third term. I'm already working on a roadmap that will be completed soon."

Modi's aspiration for a third term is not just about securing his legacy across all sectors. It's a daring attempt to surpass Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's three-term record. However, this ambitious pursuit has challenges, including public opinion and internal party dynamics that could significantly influence the political landscape.

While Modi's previous terms have seen significant achievements, his 'Modi 3.0' government will not be without its challenges. These include navigating the post-pandemic recovery, addressing social unrest, managing foreign policy issues, and meeting the diverse expectations of the electorate. Modi has an unfinished agenda of BJP's core issues. This means implementing a Uniform Civil Code, 'one nation-one poll', propelling India to become the third largest economy and continuing to make essential changes to land and labour policies. Over the past three months, the Modi government has been working on a '125-day plan' for the next phase of governance. Initially, the plan was for 100 days, but it was



extended by another 25 days, with a focus on the youth. The agenda is expected to cover 50 to 70 key objectives and will set out the direction and priorities of the new government. Modi might discredit his opponents and potentially break up the Indian coalition, which could significantly change India's political landscape. Modi wants to simultaneously hold all elections in the country, from local to national, which he calls 'one nation, one poll.' This change could make the electoral system more efficient and organized, but it could also concentrate power in the hands of the ruling party and reduce the frequency of elections. Modi has already laid the groundwork for this proposal. A committee under former prime minister Ram Nath Kovind's leadership has suggested holding Lok Sabha and all state elections together. However, the delimitation exercise involves redrawing the boundaries of parliamentary and assembly constituencies. The decennial census must be completed before that. The delimitation could have significant political implications, especially for the



NO DOUBT, THE CLAIM "MY KURTA IS WHITER THAN HIS" EXTENDS TO POLITICS. BUT IT SHOULD NOT LEAD TO AN EXERCISE OF ABUSING AND BELITTLING THE RIVALS. THE SPEECHES DELIVERED BY SOME OF THE LEADING POLITICAL PARTIES WERE DEPLORABLE AND DESPICABLE

Southern states. An affidavit submitted to the Supreme Court stated that the delimitation is expected to increase the number of Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 888 and Rajya Sabha seats from 250 to 384. Modi has ensured that there will be enough seating in the new Parliament building. The South's population control policy has led to a decrease in its population, potentially resulting in a loss of at least 100 seats for Southern states in the delimitation process. This could create a North-South divide, causing contention among regional parties in the South. The BJP is pushing for a Uniform Civil Code applicable to all citizens of India, regardless of religion. Uttarakhhand, governed by the B.J.P, is taking steps to implement it, and other BJP-ruled states will soon follow. However, this raises concerns about potential social disruption and backlash from religious communities. During the campaign, the Opposition expressed concerns that the B.J.P. might change the Constitution to remove the word 'secular'. A Modi government with a substantial majority could alter the

Preamble and eliminate the terms 'socialist' and 'secular' added by the 42nd Amendment but that did not happen. Modi aims to make India the world's third-largest economy through 'Viksit Bharat', prioritizing manufacturing, technology, infrastructure, and clean energy. However, funding, implementation, and public acceptance challenges could impact its success and the Indian political landscape. Despite being hamstrung by arrests and other crackdowns, the Opposition mustered its most united front in years. Still, exit polls indicated it could not cut into the BJP's parliamentary majority. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh claims that the Opposition bloc will get more than 272 seats and will choose the PM candidate in 48 hours. If the Indian coalition manages to form a government despite the odds, it could herald a significant shift in India's political landscape. It would face challenges, such as selecting a Prime Minister and executing its ambitious plans. (The writer is a popular columnist views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SAFEGUARDING GANGETIC DOLPHINS

Madam — Regarding the news story "Small is beautiful for Gangetic dolphin," published on June 4, here are my thoughts. As a daily newspaper reader, it's heartening to see smaller rivers in the Ganga basin finally getting the attention they deserve for their crucial role in preserving the endangered Gangetic dolphin. The joint study by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the National Mission for Clean Ganga highlights the often-overlooked importance of these smaller rivers. Despite covering 1,290 kilometers of tributaries and identifying 620 kilometers of critical habitats, it's clear that these smaller water bodies need more focused conservation efforts.

The dwindling range of the Gangetic dolphin in various rivers, now extirpated from several key areas, is alarming. These smaller rivers harbour significant portions of the dolphin population and contribute to the overall biodiversity and health of the Ganga river system. The study emphasises engaging local communities, addressing their concerns and linking them to broader conservation initiatives. This holistic approach is essential for the long-term survival of these majestic aquatic mammals.

Meera Kakkar | Mumbai

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES OF CRIME

Madam — Regarding the news story "Crime and Conscience," published on June 4, here are my thoughts. The tragic hit-and-run involving a teenager and two IT professionals is a stark reminder of the complex nature of crime. Criminal psychologists argue that crimes often occur in moments of high tension or uncontrollable passion. This suggests that if individuals could resist these impulses, many crimes could be prevented.

Our legal system punishes criminal actions, but it seldom addresses the psychological state preceding these actions. Anger, jealousy, greed and fear drive

Market volatility amid elections



propos the news story "Uncertainties dwindle investors' confidence," published on June 4, this is my response. The recent stock market plunge from 76,010 to 73,866 highlights the market's sensitivity to political and economic uncertainties. Despite the RBI's 7 per cent growth forecast, investor confidence remains shaky, with major institutions predict-

ing slightly lower growth rates. This cautious sentiment is compounded by rising US bond yields and global market pressures. Investor anxiety is further aggravated by the prolonged election period. The extended phases, particularly in northern and eastern India, not only increase administrative costs but also disrupt economic activities. Shortening the election duration could help stabilise the market and restore investor confidence. Meanwhile, the RBI's actions, such as targeting 4.5 per cent inflation and addressing banking risks, are steps towards economic stability. However, the ongoing volatility and heavy foreign fund outflows underline the need for innovative financial policies. The new government faces the challenge of navigating these uncertainties to rejuvenate the market and economy, balancing political and economic priorities effectively.

Isha Joshi | Pune

people to commit crimes. To truly reduce crime, society must focus on eradicating these negative emotions through spiritual education and meditation. Such measures could enhance individuals' resilience against stress and temptation, ultimately preventing criminal behavior. The cost of implementing widespread psychological and spiritual education is significantly less than maintaining the legal and penal systems. By addressing the root causes of crime, we could create a more harmonious society, reducing the burden on our judicial and penal systems.

Aryan Nair | Ranchi

WE ARE EXPLOITING OUR PLANET

Madam — Apropos the news story "Is it possible to restore the lost vigour of our planet?" published on June 4, this is my response. Humans often only consider our planet during celebrations or catastrophes. In normal times, we exploit it mercilessly, forgetting that resources are finite and meant for future generations too. Historically, we

have always harmed the environment, but the last two centuries have seen unprecedented destruction due to advances in science and technology. We have abandoned the sustainable practices our ancestors valued for short-term gains. As a daily newspaper reader, it's evident that this neglect is leading us toward a bleak future for our children. We must ask ourselves: What good is wealth if our descendants inherit a degraded planet? Efforts to restore our environment, such as reforestation and wetland restoration, show promise. Successful examples like China's Loess Plateau and Srinagar's Khushal Sar Lake illustrate the potential of coordinated, large-scale environmental rehabilitation. This year's World Environment Day, focusing on land restoration, reminds us of the urgent need to act and reverse the damage for a sustainable future.

Arjun Desai | Chandigarh

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Forge a greener future by maximising resources and minimising waste



SHAINY SHARMA

Living in the so-called globalised world, the term electronic waste/E-waste is a time bomb for it comprises electronic devices that are unwanted, not working or have reached the end of their "useful life". However, it is not just a technology-based problem but everyone's problem. Around 80 to 85 per cent of electronic products are discarded in landfills. While it's good to recycle, at the same time it is crucial to prioritise safety and proper practices when handling such waste. No doubt that recycling does aim to reduce pollution, but it should not contribute to environmental harm just because of human irresponsible practices.

However, the serious environmental risks associated with e-waste are significant and multifaceted, affecting ecosystems, wildlife as well as human health.

As per several research studies, the fastest increase in e-waste output is people's insatiable need to own technological devices. With the growing age and generation, the rapid technological innovation has led to frequent releases of new models of electronic devices. Moreover, human greed too has encouraged consumers to upgrade to the latest versions, resulting in the disposal of older but still functional devices. Frequent disposal of small equipment such as microwaves, toasters, mobiles, laptops, computers, printers, and televisions followed by large equipment such as washing machines, dishwashers, refrigerators and many more just to maintain the status quo makes Asia generate the most e-waste by the America, Europe, Africa and Oceania with a recycling rate of just 17.4%. Not only this, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), several adverse health effects are also caused by exposure to e-waste like negative birth outcomes such as premature birth, changes in lung



functions and respiratory issues. And not to be surprised, these challenges are emerging day by day.

With recycling and dumping issues emerging, today many electronic products are often designed with shorter lifecycles due to planned obsolescence, where manufacturers intentionally limit the lifespan of a product to encourage repeat purchases, but improper e-waste disposal leads to habitat destruction. For example, when e-waste is dumped in natural areas, it can disrupt local wildlife habitats, leading to a loss of biodiversity. In some countries, regulations governing e-waste management are either lacking or not effectively enforced, leading to improper disposal and recycling practices. In regions without Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies, manufacturers are not held accountable for the end-of-life management of their products, contributing to the accumulation of e-waste. By addressing these underlying factors through comprehensive policies, public awareness campaigns and improvements in recycling infrastructure, it is possible to mitigate the growing e-waste problem and promote more sustainable practices in electronic consumption and disposal. Also, by addressing the environmental risks of e-waste, one can work towards more sustainable and safer management practices that protect both the environment and public health. While recycling e-waste is generally better for the environment than disposing of it in landfills, some recycling processes are energy-intensive and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Improving the efficiency of recycling technologies and processes can help mitigate this impact.

It is time to embrace the power of circular thinking as one transforms waste into opportunity, by taking one step at a time. It's time to break free from the linear mindset and forge a path towards a greener future, where resources are maximised and waste is minimized.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Fight to preserve our fragile ecosystems

It is crucial to adopt sustainable practices to protect our environment and ensure a secure future for the coming generations, or it may be too late before we realise it



RAJDEEP PATHAK

The planet is grappling with unprecedented environmental challenges. According to media reports on May 29, 2024, Delhi recorded the highest temperature of over 50 degrees Celsius, a record-breaking event in 80 years. Then, there is the impending water crises, looming large in the Capital City – between politics and their blame game. Meanwhile, forest fires ravage the hills amidst the political fire ignited by the biggest dance of democracy, the Lok Sabha Elections which has finally ended and a new government will soon join the league of service within this 'democratic' panorama.

Not only this, according to media reports, a massive fire broke out in Kashmir's Rannagar forest division early Sunday, June 2, 2024, causing immense damage and an estimated loss of crores of rupees in timber and other natural resources. Another major fire has been raging for three days in Daya Dhar of Ghordi Block, Udhampur District, intensifying, despite continuous firefighting efforts. The Daya Dhar forest, home to a significant population of peacocks, has suffered extensive harm, impacting these birds and other wildlife. The forest fires in Udhampur pose severe threats to the environment, wildlife, and local communities, with the destruction of vegetation and the release of harmful pollutants having far-reaching consequences.

Not just this, the social media 'Instagram' is upbeat with a heart-wrenching visual display of hundreds of people of all age groups raising their solidarity in preventing the authorities from felling over 2000 trees of the Khalanga forest, prominently the Sal trees in the hill state of Dehradun. The reason for felling the trees – to address the water crises faced by the City.

This proposal has sparked significant opposition from local activists and citizens, who are protesting, pleading, and urging officials, including authorities – from the Chief Minister to the bureaucrats – to reconsider this move. They highlight that the Khalanga Forest, a vital green lung for the city, contains century-old trees and diverse species, crucial for maintaining ecological balance. Activists suggest constructing the reservoir in Dwara village, which has barren land and suffers from water scarcity, as a more sustainable alternative.

According to a report, dated May 9, 2024, published at <https://groundreport.in/latest/dehradun-2000-trees-will-be-cut-in-khalanga-forest-to-make-a-reservoir-4550484>, activists are voicing strong opposition, citing the ongoing climate challenges like wildfires, etc. Citizens believe that the plan to cut 2,000 trees from the reserve forest requires serious rethinking. Further, residents of Doon, led by Colonel Vikram Thapa (retd), president of Bal Bhadra Khalanga Vikas Samiti, suggest using barren land instead of encroaching on lush green forests. Initially proposed for the Kulhan Mansingh area, the site was shifted to Khalanga. Demonstrators, including 'Nature Buddies', 'Citizens for Green Doon', 'Balbhadra Vikas Samiti', 'Toy Foundation', 'Proud Pahadi', and 'Pahadi Peddlers', symbolically tied "Rakshasutra" (see Instagram video) on marked trees.

Not only this, in another such incident, the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway construction, aimed at improving connectivity, resulted in the felling of over 7,500 trees, along a 16-km section. Approximately 4,983 trees were in Uttarakhand, while



DESPITE COMMITMENTS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 13 BY 2030, CLIMATE CHANGE PERSISTS WITH ESCALATING DEVASTATION. GLOBAL TEMPERATURES ARE RISING, FUELLING CATASTROPHIC EVENTS LIKE EUROPE'S 2019 HEATWAVE AND AUSTRALIA'S 2019-2020 BUSHFIRE SEASON

2,592 were in Uttar Pradesh. To compensate, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) proposes to plant 1.76 lakh trees.

Welcome to the celebrations that marked the 2024 World Environment Day on June 5. Amidst these glaring adversities and threats to the environment, the World Environment Day 2024 celebrations – whose underlying theme this year is "Our land. Our future" – are #GenerationRestoration, calls for global action for protecting the environment and rethinking the decisions, that could be detrimental to Mother Nature and her inhabitants. No doubt, this year's World Environment Day (WED) campaign, focused on land restoration, desertification and drought resilience. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hosted the 2024 World Environment Day global celebrations.

Despite commitments to Sustainable Development Goal 13 by 2030, climate change persists with escalating devastation. Global temperatures are rising, fuelling catastrophic events like Europe's 2019 heatwave and Australia's 2019-2020 bushfire season. Melting ice caps imperil coastal regions and islands like the Maldives, Miami, and Venice. Extreme weather events, including record-breaking hurricanes and deadly typhoons, wreak havoc, exacerbating water scarcity through prolonged droughts and shifting precipitation patterns.

Addressing climate change requires a comprehensive approach: reducing greenhouse gas emissions, adapting to changing conditions,

and promoting sustainable development. Transitioning to renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and geothermal is crucial, with countries like Germany and Denmark leading in adoption. Enhancing energy efficiency in buildings, transportation, and industries can further reduce emissions. Sustainable agricultural practices, like agroforestry and organic farming, help lower emissions and enhance food security, while urban farming and vertical agriculture offer innovative solutions. Protecting and restoring natural ecosystems, which act as carbon sinks, is vital. Efforts like the Bonn Challenge and Costa Rica's reforestation initiatives demonstrate the benefits of increasing forest cover and biodiversity.

Promoting a circular economy can reduce resource consumption and greenhouse gas emissions by minimizing waste and reusing materials. The European Union's Circular Economy Action Plan exemplifies this approach, aiming to transition from a linear "take-make-dispose" model. Sustainable urban development, focused on creating resilient, low-carbon cities, emphasizes public transportation, green building practices, and smart city technologies.

Education and awareness are also critical, as schools, universities, and community organizations play essential roles in fostering environmental stewardship. Through environmental education programmes and campaigns, individuals can be empowered to make informed decisions and take action to protect the environment.

In this context, Mahatma Gandhi's poignant reflection on our connection to the Earth resonates profoundly in these times: "If Earth is not we are not. I feel nearer to God by feeling Him through the Earth. In bowing to the Earth, I at once realise my indebtedness to Him, and, if I am a worthy child of that Mother, I shall at once reduce myself to dust and rejoice in establishing kinship with not only the lowliest of human beings, but also with the lowest forms of creation whose fate-reduction to dust I have to share with them." This profound statement encapsulates the essence of environmental stewardship and the need for sustainable development.

James Lovelock, a British scientist, proposed the Gaia hypothesis, which views the Earth as a self-regulating system. This idea aligns with Mahatma Gandhi's view of the Earth as a living entity with which we share a deep connection. Lovelock's work emphasizes the interdependence of all living and non-living components of the Earth, suggesting that harming one part affects the whole system. As we face the pressing issue of climate change, it is imperative to adopt sustainable practices to protect our environment and secure the future for coming generations. Individual actions, combined with collective efforts, can pave the way for a sustainable world, ensuring that future generations inherit a healthy and thriving planet. It is now or never.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

Reshaping film festivals and cinemas with OTT platforms

By embracing a hybrid approach that combines virtual access with in-person screenings, festivals have the opportunity to broaden their audience reach

In the age of instant communication and paradigm shifts, transformative changes are progressively taking place in the content domain as it is being collated, consumed and distributed across media platforms. The communication landscape is witnessing a sea of opportunities, being available to access content in a form suitable to viewers, audiences and stakeholders. Cinema also is witnessing an innovation & disruption bringing forth a change in the status quo of viewing on the silver screen.

The exponential growth of OTT platforms has redefined the mode & matrix of cinema viewing globally. Apart from promoting binge-watching, and accessible viewing, OTT



CHAITANYA KUMAR PRASAD

has become a convenient pastime for home viewing. Today the OTT domain is a witness to a recalibration of distribution channels, new revenue models, focus on artistic merit and reconfiguration of the content with outreach mechanisms. India has also been seeing a rise in the OTT domain with quality content being produced in huge numbers.

The global film festival circuit is also witnessing winds of change giving rise to new collaborative partnerships, renewed style of storytelling, narration, participation and branding of cinematic appeal. As a consequence, film festivals have repositioned themselves as platforms with broadened appeal, wider audiences and a variety of diverse themes related to storytelling. Cannes Film Festival 2024, is responding to these changes by forging new collaborative partnerships and adopting fresh storytelling techniques. This dynamic is evident as film festivals broaden their thematic scopes and embrace diverse cinematic expressions, integrating OTT content that resonates with global audiences. Notable examples include Alfonso

Cuarón's "Roma" and Pawel Pawlikowski's "Cold War," both of which received significant accolades at major international festivals, underscoring the increasing acceptance and influence of OTT-produced content within the mainstream cinema landscape. This is evident in the case of Indian OTT content representation as well, with many big-name international film festivals accepting its nominations. India's representation at Cannes 2024 exemplifies this trend, showcasing films that bridge traditional Indian narratives with contemporary global themes, thus appealing to a wide array of audiences. The increasing inclusion of Indian OTT content at Cannes highlights a strategic shift

towards embracing digital storytelling platforms, reflecting a broader trend of film festivals adapting to the digital age. This evolution is mirrored in the increased recognition of web series and digital features, which are now celebrated for their creative quality and innovation at such international platforms. Indian presence at Cannes 2024 has been a testament of diversity, talent and unique identity; which was showcased by the multiple nominations in various categories and innumerable wins that Indian creators and films have bagged this year. Since 2023, there has been an increase in the inclusion of OTT content in film festivals showing a shift influenced by the popularity of direct-to-

consumer streaming platforms. Major film festivals are integrating digital content into their programs, recognising the potential of OTT to bring innovative storytelling and diversity. Some have even introduced awards for web series to highlight the creative quality of OTT productions. Over the years IFFI, Goa has created unique templates for integrating the festival with the OTT narrative, reinforcing storytelling with fresh perspective, imagination participation & collaboration. The 51st edition of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) made history by introducing a hybrid format in 2021. This innovative approach allowed attendees to participate both in person and virtu-

ally showcasing the benefits of blending digital components. The pioneering move not only tackled the challenges posed by the pandemic but also set a new gold standard for Film Festivals worldwide. The success of IFFI in 2021 as a hybrid model inspired other prestigious festivals like TIFF to adopt similar formats in subsequent years ensuring ongoing engagement and inclusivity. The 52nd IFFI kept up the momentum. More than 50 films were screened simultaneously on OTT platforms. 10 Masterclasses. For the 54th edition, IFFI introduced the Best Web Series (OTT) Award and honoured "Panchayat Season 2", from Amazon Prime Video, for its authentic depiction of rural Indian life.

This move has fostered bridging the gap between traditional and digital film realms. By embracing a hybrid approach that combines virtual access with in-person screenings, festivals have the opportunity to broaden their audience reach and promote inclusivity. Collaboration between festivals and streaming services could encompass sponsorships, premieres, acquisitions or joint projects with filmmakers enriching the festival experience and aligning with audience preferences for personalised viewing options. (The writer is a Former Addl. DG DFF & Festival Director IFFI, Views are personal. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad, and Vaishnavie Srinivasan)

'Over 1 mn in Gaza at risk of starvation by mid-July'

AP ■ CAIRO
United Nations agencies warned Wednesday that over 1 million Palestinians in Gaza could experience the highest level of starvation by the middle of next month if hostilities continue. The World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation said in a joint report that hunger is worsening because of heavy restrictions on humanitarian access and the collapse of the local food system in the nearly eight-month Israel-Hamas war. It says the situation remains dire in northern Gaza, which has been surrounded and largely isolated by Israeli troops for months. Israel recently opened land crossings in the north but they are only able to facilitate truck loads in the dozens each day for hundreds of thousands of people. Israel's incursion into Rafah has meanwhile severely disrupted aid operations in the south. Egypt has refused to open its Rafah crossing with Gaza since Israeli forces seized the Gaza side of it nearly a month ago,

instead diverting aid to Israel's Kerem Shalom crossing nearby. The Israeli military says it has allowed hundreds of trucks to enter through Kerem Shalom in recent weeks, but the UN says it is often unable to retrieve the aid because of the security situation. It says distribution within Gaza is also severely hampered by ongoing fighting, the breakdown of law and order, and other Israeli restrictions. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, the world authority on determining the extent of hunger crises, said in March that around 677,000 people in Gaza were experiencing Phase 5 hunger, the highest level and the equivalent of famine. The two UN agencies said in their report Wednesday that that figure could climb to more than 1 million — or nearly half of Gaza's total population of 2.3 million — by the middle of next month. "In the absence of a cessation of hostilities and increased access, the impact on mortality and the lives of the Palestinians now, and in future generations, will increase markedly with every day, even if famine is avoided in the near term," it said. On Tuesday, a separate group of experts said it's possible that famine is underway in northern Gaza but that the war, and restrictions on humanitarian access, have impeded the data collection to prove it. "It is possible, if not likely," the group known as the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, or FEWS NET, which is funded by the US Agency for International Development, said about famine in Gaza. Last month, the head of the World Food Program, Cindy McCain, said northern Gaza had already entered "full-blown famine," but experts at the UN agency later said she was expressing a personal opinion. An area is considered to be in famine when three things occur: Twenty percent of households have an extreme lack of food, or are essentially starving; at least 30 per cent of

Rights group claims Israel has hit residential buildings with white phosphorous in Lebanon

Beirut (AP): A global human rights group claimed that Israel has used white phosphorous incendiary shells on residential buildings in at least five towns and villages in conflict-hit southern Lebanon, possibly harming civilians and violating international law, in a report published on Wednesday. Human Rights Watch said in its report that there was no evidence of burn injuries due to white phosphorous in Lebanon, but that researchers had "heard accounts indicating possible respiratory damage." Human rights advocates say it's a crime under international law to fire the controversial munitions into populated areas. Israel maintains it uses the white phosphorous only as a smoke screen and not to target civilians. The white-hot chemical substance can set buildings on fire and burn human flesh down to the bone. Survivors are at risk of infections and organ or respiratory failure, even if their burns are small. The HRW report includes interviews with eight residents in conflict-hit southern Lebanon, and the group says it has verified and geolocated images from almost 47 photos and videos that show white phosphorous shells landing on residential buildings in five Lebanese border towns and villages. The Lebanese Health Ministry says at least 173 people have required medical care after exposure to white phosphorous. The researchers found that the controversial incendiaries were used in residential areas in Kfar Kila, Mays al-Jabal, Boustan, Markaba, and Aita al-Shaab, towns that are among the hardest-hit in eight months of fighting. The New York-based rights group alongside Amnesty International also accused Israel of using white phosphorous in residential areas in October 2023, less than a month after clashes began between the Israeli military and the powerful Hezbollah group along the southern Lebanon-Israel border, a day after the Israel-Hamas war broke out on October 7. The war began when Hamas and other militants stormed across the border into Israel on October 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostages. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 36,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials. Most of Gaza's population have fled their homes, often multiple times, and the offensive has caused widespread destruction.

Israeli nationalist march through Palestinian area despite tensions

AP ■ JERUSALEM
Thousands of mostly ultra-nationalist Israelis were expected to take part in an annual march through a dense Palestinian neighbourhood in Jerusalem's Old City on Wednesday in an event that often sees racist chants and brawls. Jerusalem, the epicentre of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has been mostly calm throughout the Israel-Hamas war, but the march could ignite widespread tensions, as it did three years ago, when it helped set off an 11-day war in Gaza. The current war began with Hamas' October 7 attack into southern Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages. Israel responded with a massive offensive that has killed over 36,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, displaced most of the territory's population and caused widespread destruction. The United States has thrown its weight behind a phased cease-fire and hostage release outlined by President Joe Biden last week. But Israel says it won't end the war without destroying Hamas, while the militant group is demanding a lasting cease-fire and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces. The annual march commemorates "Jerusalem Day," which marks Israel's capture of east Jerusalem, including the Old City and its holy sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, in the 1967 Mideast war. Israel considers all of Jerusalem to be its capital, but its annexation of east Jerusalem is not internationally recognised. The Palestinians, who seek east Jerusalem as the capital of a future state, see the march as a provocation. In past years, police have forcibly cleared Palestinians from the parade route, and large crowds of mostly ultra-nationalist youth have chanted "Death to Arabs," "May your village burn" and other offensive slogans. The police say they are deploying 3,000 security personnel to ensure calm. At the insistence of Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, the march will follow its traditional route, entering the Muslim Quarter through Damascus Gate and ending at the Western Wall, the holiest place where Jews can pray. As buses bringing young Jewish men in for the march thronged around the Old City's centuries-old walls, Palestinian shopkeepers closed down in the Muslim Quarter in preparation. The police stressed that the march would not enter the sprawling Al-Aqsa mosque compound, the third holiest site in Islam. The hilltop on which it stands is the holiest site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount because it was the location of the Jewish temples in antiquity. Perceived encroachments on the site have set off widespread violence on a number of occasions going back decades. Counterprotests were planned throughout the day. An Israeli group, Tag Meir, sent volunteers through the emptying city streets ahead of the march to distribute flowers to Christian and Muslim residents of the Old City.

Biden and Trump win key 2024 primary contests

New York (AP): President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump won Democratic and Republican primaries in a handful of states on Tuesday, among some of the last contests on the 2024 primary calendar. Trump, appearing on the ballot for the first time since his historic conviction for felony crimes, won primaries in New Mexico, where voters could opt for his rivals who have since dropped out, and Montana and New Jersey, where he was unopposed. Biden won Democratic primaries in New Mexico, South Dakota, New Jersey, Montana and Washington, DC. Trump and Biden were both expected to easily prevail in all

of Tuesday's contests as the last major candidates still running. But with many Americans saying in polls that they don't want a rematch of the 2020 election, Tuesday's results were watched for voter concerns about their choices as November's election barrels closer. Trump's domination during the GOP primary season has also been shadowed by support from a minority of GOP voters for former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, who dropped out in March. Tuesday's contests were the first since Haley said two weeks ago that she would vote for Trump in November. In New Mexico, where she was still on the ballot, several thousand voters cast ballots for Haley, but she was running below 10 per cent of the vote late Tuesday. Biden has faced his own protest vote in recent contests as Democratic voters unhappy with his handling of Israel's war with Hamas seek to register their disapproval. There are organised campaigns in several states Tuesday to vote for "uncommitted" in the Democratic contests. In New Jersey's primary, "uncommitted" was on the ballot in many counties above the phrase, "Justice For Palestine, Permanent Ceasefire Now!" More than 35,000 people voted "uncommitted" in New Jersey as of late Tuesday.



Palestinian woman mourns relatives killed in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip outside a hospital in Deir al Balah on Tuesday. AP/PTI

Hunter's ex-wife is expected to take stand in his gun trial, as First Lady again attends

AP ■ WILMINGTON
Federal prosecutors in Hunter Biden's gun trial have spent hours showing jurors evidence of his drug problem, seeking to reveal through his own words and writing the depth of his addiction to show it was still going on when, they say, he lied on a form to buy a firearm. First lady Jill Biden went to court for the third day to support her son, ahead of her trip to France to meet President Joe Biden, who was in Europe to mark the anniversary of D-Day. Testimony was to continue Wednesday, with Hunter Biden's ex-wife, Kathleen Buhle, expected to take the stand. She was married to the president's son for roughly 20 years. They have three children, divorcing in 2016 after his infidelity and drug abuse became too much to overcome, according to her memoir, "If We Break," about the dissolution of their marriage. Buhle is among several Biden family and friends expected to testify in a trial that has quickly



Hunter Biden, accompanied by his wife, Melissa Cohen Biden, departs from federal court, Tuesday, June 4, 2024, in Wilmington. AP/PTI

become a highly personal and detailed tour of Hunter Biden's mistakes and drug usage as the 2024 presidential election looms and allies worry about the toll it will take on the president, who is deeply concerned about the health and sustained sobriety of his only living son. Prosecutors argue the testimony is necessary to show Hunter Biden's state of mind when he bought the gun. Hunter Biden has been charged with three felonies stemming from the purchase of a gun in October 2018, accused of lying to a federal-

ly licensed gun dealer, making a false claim on the application by saying he was not a drug user and illegally having the gun for 11 days. "No one is allowed to lie on a federal form like that, even Hunter Biden," prosecutor Derek Hines told jurors on Tuesday. "He crossed the line when he chose to buy a gun and lied about a federal background check...the defendant's choice to buy a gun is why we are here." "When the defendant filled out that form, he knew he was a drug addict," and prosecutors don't have to prove he was using the day he purchased the firearm, Hines said. Hunter Biden's attorney argued that his client did not believe he was in the throes of addiction when he stated in the paperwork that he did not have a drug problem. In the short time that he had the gun, he did nothing with it, and the weapon was never even loaded, attorney Abbe Lowell said in his opening statement. "You will see that he is not guilty," Lowell said.

US conducts first B-1B precision bombing drill in 7 years amid North Korea tensions

AP ■ SEOUL
The United States flew a long-range B-1B bomber over the Korean Peninsula on Wednesday for its first precision-guided bombing drill with South Korea in seven years, the South said Wednesday. The drill — seen as a show of force against North Korea — comes as tensions are rising over the North's recent launches of rubbish-carrying balloons toward South Korea and other provocations. Wednesday's training involved other advanced US and South Korean fighter jets as well as the B-1B aircraft, the second US bomber temporarily deployed over the Korean Peninsula this year. The exercise was meant to demonstrate the US security commitment to South Korea and strengthen the allies' joint defense posture, according to the South Korean Defense Ministry. During the training, the B-1B dropped Joint Direct Attack Munitions while being escorted by South Korean jets, the first such bombing drill for

a US bomber since 2017, a ministry statement said. It said South Korean fighter jets also conducted live-firing exercises to demonstrate the country's readiness to punish North Korea if provoked, it said. The JDAM bombs include "bunker-busters." JDAM is a guidance system that converts unguided, conventional bombs into more precise, GPS-guided weapons. All US fighter jets, bombers and drones can use JDAMs, and the munitions are among the weapons systems the United States has been providing to Ukraine to help it fight Russia's invasion. North Korea is extremely sensitive to drills using bunker-buster bombs, which could threaten its leadership and complex web of underground military tunnels and structures. North Korea has previously responded to the flights of powerful US aircraft in South Korea with its own missile tests. A B-1B is capable of carrying a large conventional weapons payload. North Korea has previously called the bomber's

deployment proof of US hostility. In the past week, North Korea floated hundreds of huge balloons to drop manure, cigarette butts, scraps of cloth and waste batteries across South Korea. In response, South Korea vowed "unbearable" retaliatory steps and suspended a fragile tension-reducing military deal with North Korea, restoring its front-line military activities. The suspension of the 2018 inter-Korean deal allows South Korea to resume live-fire drills or anti-North Korean propaganda broadcasts via loudspeakers in border areas. Such steps will likely prompt North Korea to take provocative steps in response. Recently, North Korea launched a rocket in an attempt to place a second spy satellite into orbit in violation of UN resolutions, but it blew up shortly after liftoff. It also test-fired nuclear-capable weapons for a drill simulating a pre-emptive strike on South Korea, and allegedly jammed GPS navigation signals in South Korea. **Johannesbur (AP):** Top officials in South Africa's African National Congress have had initial talks with representatives of five other parties over a coalition or other agreement to form a government, but no decision has been made and the talks are at an early stage, the ANC said Wednesday. South Africa faced an election deadlock after the long-ruling ANC lost its 30-year majority in an election last week but no party managed to overtake it. The ANC remained the biggest party. ANC spokesperson Mahleghi Bhengu-Motsiri told reporters that there had been "exploratory" talks with the main opposition Democratic Alliance, the far-left Economic Freedom Fighters and three other smaller parties. She said the ANC had "repeatedly" reached out to the new MK Party of former President Jacob Zuma for talks, but there had been "no positive response." Zuma is a former ANC leader who has turned his back on the party and become fiercely critical of current President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Will Biden's new border measures be enough to change voters' minds?

AP ■ WASHINGTON
President Joe Biden tried to address a major liability for his reelection campaign by taking executive action to significantly restrict asylum at the US-Mexico border. But it's unclear whether his efforts will be enough to change the minds of voters who have increasingly voiced alarm over the record influx of migrants on his watch. Polls have found immigration and border security to be a top issue this election year and one that has been seized on by former President Donald Trump and his campaign. Biden has shifted far to the right on immigration since his winning campaign four years ago, when he criticised Trump's immigration priorities and promised he would restore asylum protections. Many Democrats acknowledge Biden now faces a wholly different political reality, even as key parts of his base push him to repudiate border restrictions and compare his move to

Trump's policies as president. Sue-Ann DiVito, a 61-year-old realtor from the Philadelphia suburb of Jenkintown who became an immigration advocate during the Trump administration, says Republicans have been successful at spreading anti-immigrant messages in communities like hers, making some of her friends who are Democrat worry about the high number of people arriving in the US. "I think that's why we see people who would normally support immigrants are now more quiet," DiVito said. A challenge for Biden among Democrats and Latinos The border has been a top issue for voters throughout the presidential campaign so far. According to Gallup's monthly data, Americans named immigration as the top issue facing the country in February, March, and April, surpassing even the share who cited the economy despite persistently higher prices. Immigration came up less frequently as a top issue in Gallup's May poll as attention

turned to Trump's criminal trial and as the number of illegal crossings ebbed. The issue was still tied with the government and the economy as what voters saw as the nation's most important problem. Most Americans, 56 per cent, say Biden's presidency has hurt the country on the issue of immigration and border security, according to an AP-NORC poll conducted in April. That's far higher than the number — 37 per cent — who said the same about Trump's time in office. Even among Democrats, only about 3 in 10 say that Biden's presidency has done more to help the country on immigration and border security, while about the same share say it has hurt. Nearly 9 in 10 Republicans say Trump's presidency helped on this issue. Hispanic adults are also more likely to think Trump's presidency helped the country with immigration and border security, compared to Biden's. About half of Hispanic adults in March said that Biden's presidency had

done more to hurt the country on immigration and border security — a potentially alarming number as Trump's campaign works to chip away at Democrats' advantage with Hispanic voters. "President Biden had no choice. He saw what was going on at the border. The numbers were higher than ever in terms of people trying to come here to seek asylum, and he knew he had to do something," said Maria Cardona, a Democratic strategist. Frank Luntz, a longtime pollster who has previously worked for Republicans, said immigration seemed to be especially resonating earlier this spring across the political spectrum in a way it never had before. He said he believes Biden is especially vulnerable with African American men under 40 who are worried about newcomers competing for jobs and Latinos who may resent those entering illegally. "The reason why immigration matters so much to so many is that it is a living, breathing illu-

stration of the failure of Washington to solve what everyone else in America sees as a crisis," he said on Tuesday. "Biden's decision seems too little and too late. The public doesn't think he cares, and therefore thinks he doesn't get it." Trump's record includes family separation Trump has been campaigning on the border and immigration since he launched his 2016 bid with a speech in which he cast migrants from Mexico as criminals and rapists and vowed to build a southern border wall. While in office, his administration separated immigrant parents and children to try to deter families from illegally crossing the border, a measure that drew widespread condemnation. Border crossings hit record highs — albeit far below the marks they've reached under Biden — until falling sharply as the COVID-19 pandemic began. As he runs to return to the White House again this year, Trump has escalated his already alarmist rhetoric, accusing Biden of orchestrating a "border bloodbath" and highlighting cases of women and children killed by people who entered the US illegally. He's vowed to carry out the largest deportation operation in US history if elected again. His campaign quickly tried to cast Biden's effort as ineffective and one that would permit thousands of migrant crossings each week. "This executive order from Biden can only be understood as a pro-invasion, pro-illegal migration executive order," said former Trump senior adviser Stephen Miller, who orchestrated some of Trump's most hard-line immigration policies, during a call with reporters organised by the campaign ahead of Biden's announcement. Trump pollster John McLaughlin said the campaign believes the issue resonates especially among a group he calls "safety moms" — suburban, college-educated women who are worried about crime and the safety of their families. "There's a sense of insecurity," he said. "It's not just the border communities, it's all over the country." Trump has always turned to alarmist rhetoric on the border in election years. The difference now, according to Trump campaign aides and pollsters, is the reality voters are seeing day to day. Crime overall is down and immigrants — even those who entered the country illegally — commit fewer crimes than those born in the US, according to studies of available data. But in Democratic-led cities like New York, local news reports were flooded earlier this year with images of migrants clashing with police and alarm over strained city budgets and resources to care for an influx of people coming from the border. Conservative media and Trump's campaign also seized on high-profile incidents like the killing of nursing student Laken Riley. A Venezuelan man in the US illegally has pleaded not guilty to charges in her death. Splits in the Democratic base Biden's announcement laid bare lasting divisions among Democrats, with some left-leaning lawmakers and immigration advocates that form a key part of his coalition criticizing Biden's actions as a return to the measures that marked Trump's tenure. Rep. Pramila Jayapal, the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said she was "profoundly disappointed." During a news conference with immigration advocates outside the Capitol, Jayapal pushed the administration to take action that would provide relief for immigrants already in the US. Jayapal, D-Wash., said Tuesday's order "means that we have people, desperate people seeking asylum who should be able to apply, and yet they will not be able to." Sen. Alex Padilla, a California Democrat who has been involved in the Biden campaign's outreach to Latino communities, cast the order as a revival of "Trump's asylum ban" in a release on Tuesday. "You can build a wall as high as you want.

India's service sector growth softens to five months low: PMI

New export orders at 10 years high, says PMI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's service sector growth eased to a five-month low in May amid fierce competition, price pressures and a severe heatwave, even as new orders from international markets expanded at the steepest pace in a decade, according to a monthly survey released on Wednesday. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services Business Activity Index fell to 60.2 in May from 60.8 a month earlier, its lowest mark since last December. Survey participants attributed the figures to domestic new orders easing slightly while remaining robust, implying strong demand conditions and successful advertising. In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction. May data showed that robust increases in new business intakes continued to underpin output growth across India's service economy. As per the survey, another positive takeaway was a rebound in business confidence to its strongest in eight months. Growth was reportedly supported by rising sales, productivity gains, and demand strength. The upturn was somewhat hampered by competitive and price pressures.



Maitreyi Das, Global Economist at HSBC, said: "India's service activity rose at a slightly softer pace in May, with domestic new orders easing slightly, but remaining robust, implying strong demand conditions and successful advertising. "On the price front, cost pressures ticked up in May led by higher raw material and labour costs. Firms were only able to transfer a part of the price rise to customers." Like for output, new orders rose at a substantial pace, but were the slowest in the calendar year-to-date, even as fierce competition and extreme heat across the country dampened growth. One area that improved

substantially in May was new export orders, with growth climbing to the fastest seen since the inception of the series in September 2014. Survey participants noted strong growth of demand from Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and the US. Cost pressures intensified in May. According to panel members, outlays on materials and labour rose — while some companies suggested that additional labour costs stemmed from overtime payments and upward salary revisions due to demand strength and productivity gains, several firms indicated having taken on extra staff. Not only did employment rise markedly, but also to the

greatest extent since August 2022, the survey said. Outstanding business volumes rose at the quickest pace in nearly three-and-a-half years, it said, adding that the overall level of positive sentiment climbed to an eight-month high. Meanwhile, the HSBC India Composite Output Index slipped to 60.5 in May from 61.5 in April, highlighting the slowest rate of expansion since last December. There were softer increases in both factory production and services activity and aggregate sales rose at the weakest pace in the calendar year-to-date, albeit one that was historically sharp. Goods producers outperformed service providers, though growth softened in both cases. "Good news is the level of optimism about the year-ahead outlook rose at the fastest pace in eight months, leading service firms to increase their staffing levels. Overall composite output rose at a slightly slower pace, led by slower rises in both factory production and service activity," Das added. Composite PMI indices are weighted averages of comparable manufacturing and services PMI indices. Weights reflect the relative size of the manufacturing and service sectors according to official GDP data.

Government looking to develop more airstrips, calibrate airport regulations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The civil aviation ministry is looking at developing more airstrips as well as calibrating regulations for major and small airports to boost air connectivity, a senior official said on Wednesday. India is one of the fastest growing civil aviation markets in the world, with domestic air traffic on the rise and airlines expanding their fleet as well as operations. Civil Aviation Secretary Vumlunmang Vualnam said the number of airports in the country has increased to 157 from 74 in the last ten years. The ministry has reviewed



the full list of 453 airstrips in the country and around 157 of them are operational, he said and added that more airstrips would be developed as brownfield projects. Also, efforts will be made to jointly develop more defence airfields for civil aircraft operations.

Speaking at the CAPA India Aviation Summit 2024 in the national capital, the secretary said the ministry would look at calibrating regulations for major and small airports. These are steps aimed at further boosting air connectivity, especially to Tier 2 and 3 cities. IndiGo and Air India have placed huge aircraft orders, including for wide-body planes. The ministry would ensure a conducive ecosystem for airlines and their expansion. Among others, the ministry is working to ensure that "taxation would not be a bottle neck" for the MRO (Maintenance, Repair and

Overhaul) organisations, the secretary said. With efforts on globally to reduce carbon emissions, Vualnam said the government is committed to ensure the use of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) to keep pace with the requirements. With respect to the Cape Town Convention (CTC) that pertains to leasing of aircraft, he said the paper work is ready for enacting the legislation in order for India to ratify it. In its outlook for FY2024-25, Capa India said domestic air traffic is projected to rise 6-8 per cent to 161-164 million and international traffic by 9-11 per cent to 75-78 million.

Sebi makes process of securities payout directly to client account mandatory

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

To enhance operational efficiency and reduce the risk to clients' securities, markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday decided to make the process of direct payout of such securities to the client's account mandatory. This will become effective from October 14, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a circular. Currently, the clearing corporation credits the payout of securities in the pool account of the broker, who then credits the same to the respective client's demat accounts.

Further, a facility of direct delivery to investors was introduced in February 2001. After extensive deliberations with the stock exchanges, clearing corporations (CCs) and depositories, Sebi has decided that "the securities for pay-out shall be credited directly to the respective client's demat account by the CCs". Moreover, clearing corporations should provide a mechanism for trading member (TM) or clearing members (CM) to identify the unpaid securities and funded stocks under the margin trading facility. In case of any shortages "arising due to inter se netting

of positions between clients" — internal shortages — Sebi suggested TM or CM should handle such shortages through the process of auction. Moreover, in such cases, the brokers should not levy any charges on the client over and above the charges levied by the clearing corporations. In May 2023, Sebi specified various processes for handling of clients' securities with regard to pay-in and pay-out of securities. This was to protect clients' securities and to ensure that the stock broker segregates securities of the client or clients so that they are not vulnerable to misuse.

Rupee rebounds 14 paise to 83.37 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee recovered 14 paise to close at 83.37 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, tracking strong buying in domestic equities and lower crude oil prices in international markets. However, a surging greenback against major crosses overseas and fresh foreign fund outflows restricted gains in the local currency, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.50 and touched the intra-day peak of 83.28 against the domestic unit during the session. It finally settled at 83.37 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 14 paise from its previous close. On Tuesday, the domestic currency plunged 37 paise to settle at 83.51 against the dollar.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the rupee appreciated as domestic markets recovered some losses of the previous day and reports of intervention by the RBI. "...A recovery in the US dollar and a disappointing macroeconomic data capped sharp gains," he said, adding that the rupee is expected to trade with a slight negative bias on recovery in the US dollar and selling pressure from foreign investors. India's service sector growth eased to a five-month low in May amid fierce competition, price pressures and a severe heatwave, even as new orders from international markets expanded at the steepest pace in a decade, according to a monthly survey released on Wednesday. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services Business Activity Index fell to 60.2 in May from 60.8 a month earlier, its lowest mark since last December. According to analysts, a weak tone in global crude oil prices and further intervention by the RBI may support the rupee. Also, investors are likely to move cautiously ahead of the RBI's monetary policy later this week. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.23 per cent higher at 104.29. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, inched up 0.06 per cent to USD 77.57 per barrel. "...OPEC+ decision has somewhat darkened the outlook for crude oil demand ahead, triggering sharp sell-off in WTI and Brent counters, which are down 4 per cent in last two sessions and fallen 9 per cent in last seven days," said Mohammed Imran, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. On the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 2,303.19 points, or 3.20 per cent, to close at 74,382.24. The broader NSE Nifty soared 735.85 points or 3.36 per cent to 22,620.35. Foreign investors were net sellers of Indian equities on Monday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 12,436.22 crore on a net basis. FII's bought shares worth Rs 26,776.17 crore and sold equities worth Rs 39,212.39 crore in the cash segment.

Suraksha Group takes control of bankrupt Jaypee Infratech

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a big relief to over 20,000 homebuyers, Suraksha Group has taken control of the debt-ridden realty firm Jaypee Infratech by constituting a three-member board and will soon infuse Rs 125 crore equity fund to start construction of stalled housing projects across Delhi-NCR. The takeover follows insolvency appellate tribunal NCLAT decision on May 24, upholding Suraksha Realty's bid to acquire Jaypee Infratech while directing it to pay an additional Rs 1,334 crore as farmers' compensation. According to a regulatory filing by Jaypee Infratech on Wednesday, Suraksha Group informed the IMC (Implementation and Monitoring Committee) that May 24, 2024, i.e., the date of the NCLAT order should be treated as the 'Approval Date' as defined in the approved

resolution plan. The IMC in its meeting held on Tuesday approved the appointment of Sudhir V Valia, who is promoter of Suraksha Group, as a Non-Executive Director. It approved the appointment of Aalok Champak Dave as Executive Director and Usha Anil Kadam as independent director. Dave has also been appointed as Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer. According to the filing, Valia was an Executive Director in Sun Pharmaceuticals Industries Ltd. He is a co-founder of Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, one of the leading pharmaceutical companies and world's fifth largest generic pharmaceutical company. Valia is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India and has more than three decades of experience in taxation and finance. He has experience of more than a decade in

managing the real estate development activity and infrastructure business through Suraksha Realty and other associates having activity in real estate. According to sources, Suraksha Group will infuse an equity fund of Rs 125 crore in Jaypee Infratech by June 15 and will soon start the construction process. It will also start making payment to YEIDA as per the schedule. Upholding the National Company Law Tribunal's (NCLT) decision of March 2023, the NCLAT on May 24 had said the decision was made to avoid any further delay in the implementation of the resolution plan and also to take care of the interests of all stakeholders, including home buyers and claim of Yamuna Express development authority YEIDA for additional compensation of the farmers. The Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) against Jaypee Infratech Ltd



(JIL) was started in August 2017 over an application by the IDBI Bank-led consortium. On March 7 last year, the NCLAT approved the bid of the Mumbai-based Suraksha group to buy JIL. However, many parties, including YEIDA, filed a petition in the NCLAT TO challenge the NCLAT order.

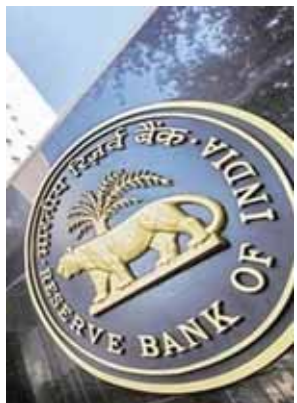
In its 99-page order, the NCLAT had said, "The impugned order passed by the adjudicating authority (NCLT) insofar as it deals with the claim of the appellant (YEIDA) of Rs 1,689 crore of additional farmers compensation is set aside and the rest of the order approving the resolution plan is upheld." The company had got 0.12

per cent more votes than state-owned NBCC, which was also in the fray. In the first round of insolvency proceedings in 2018, the Rs 7,350 crore bid of Lakshadweep, part of the Suraksha group, was rejected by the lenders. The CoC had rejected the bids of Suraksha and NBCC in the second round held in May-June 2019. In November 2019, the Supreme Court directed that the revised bids be invited only from NBCC and Suraksha. Then, in December 2019, the CoC approved the resolution plan of NBCC during the third round of the bidding process. In March 2020, NBCC got approval from the NCLAT to acquire JIL. However, the order was challenged before the NCLAT and later in the Supreme Court. On March 21, 2021, the apex court ordered a fresh round of bidding between NBCC and Suraksha Group only.

RBI rate-setting panel starts deliberations on monetary policy, decision on Friday

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rate-setting panel of RBI on Wednesday started its three-day deliberations to decide the next monetary policy amid expectations of continuation of the current interest rate. Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das will announce the decisions taken by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on Friday. Experts are of the view that the central bank is unlikely to cut the benchmark interest rate (repo) as inflation still remains a matter of concern. The MPC may also refrain from rate cut as economic growth is picking up, notwithstanding the elevated repo rate of 6.5 per cent prevailing since February 2023. The central bank last hiked repo rate to 6.5 per cent in February 2023 and since then it has maintained status quo 7 times in a row. According to a SBI research paper, the central bank needs to continue the current stance of withdrawal of accommodation. The report titled 'Prelude to MPC Meeting' expects RBI to cut repo rate in third quarter of the current fiscal and "such rate cut cycle is likely to be shallow". It also said CPI-based retail



inflation is expected to remain close to 5 per cent in May (data to be released later this month) and decline thereafter to 3 per cent in July. Inflation is expected to stay below 5 per cent beginning October till the end of 2024-25 fiscal, it added. On expectations from RBI, Dhruv Agarwala, Group CEO, Housing.Com & Proptiger.Com said India's economy continued its robust performance, achieving an impressive growth rate of 8.2 per cent in 2023-24, up from 7 per cent in 2022-23. "In light of this, it is expected that the RBI MPC will maintain its current policy stance amid ongoing inflationary pressures, with a rate cut looking increasingly unlikely this year," he said.

Anantharam Varayur, co-founder, Manasum Senior Living, too expects status quo or reduction in interest rate by the central bank in the upcoming bi-monthly policy. "We hope for measures that ease liquidity constraints in the market and boost consumer confidence, which can positively impact real estate sales," Varayur added. The government has mandated Reserve Bank to ensure retail inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side. Retail inflation was 4.83 per cent in April this year. Saurabh Rai, CEO Arahahs has RBI needs to focus on monetary policy to facilitate funding and incentives for geospatial technology, sustainability solutions. "Such initiatives will not only drive innovation but also significantly contribute to our national goals of sustainable development and economic resilience. A favourable monetary policy can accelerate the adoption of green technologies, fostering a more sustainable future for India," Rai said. The MPC consists of three external members and three officials of RBI. External members of the rate-setting panel are Shashanka Bhide, Ashima Goyal, and Jayanth R Varma.

Gold slips ₹80; silver plunges ₹1,200

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices slipped Rs 80 to Rs 72,820 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday in line with weak trends globally, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had closed at Rs 72,900 per 10 grams in the previous session. Silver prices also plunged Rs 1,200 to Rs 91,900 per kg. In the previous session, it had

settled at Rs 93,100 per kg. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,332 per ounce, down USD 3 from the previous close. "Gold prices dropped due to a firm US dollar and technical selling pressure, even though there were indications of a weakening US labour market. "This has further strengthened the expectations that the US Federal Reserve

will lower interest rates soon," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In addition, silver also dropped to USD 29.75 per ounce. Moving forward, traders will focus on macroeconomic data, including ADP non-farm employment and ISM non-manufacturing PMI data, which will be released later on Wednesday, Gandhi

added. According to Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, nonfarm payroll and unemployment data are also due later this week. "...The primary focus remains on the US Federal Reserve's policy decision on June 12th which will further provide more direction on the bullion prices," Trivedi said.

IP University bags Rising Star award

New Delhi: Delhi's Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University has been awarded with the Rising Star award by the QS World Ranking for showing the highest improvement among Indian institutions in the last 12 months after debuting in the QS rankings in the previous edition. Ben Sower, the Senior Vice President of the QS, presented the honor to the University at the QS EduData Summit 2024 in Washington D.C., where the QS World University Rankings 2025 were released on June 4, 2024. PNS

Novelis postpones US IPO due to market conditions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hindalco Industries on Wednesday announced that its US arm Novelis Inc has postponed its initial public offering (IPO) due to market conditions. Novelis will continue to evaluate the timing of the offering in the future, Hindalco said in a filing to BSE. Few days back, Novelis Inc had said it would launch an IPO to raise up to USD 945 million, with an estimated equity valuation of up to USD 12.6 billion. It had also filed papers with the US securities regulator, the Securities and Exchange Commission.



In the proposed public issue, around 45 million shares would be sold by Novelis Inc's sole shareholder A V Minerals (Netherlands) NV, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Hindalco. The company will not receive any proceeds. At present, Hindalco owns 100 per cent of Novelis through A V Minerals. Post-IPO, Hindalco will own around 92 per cent stake in Novelis.

According to sources, the sole shareholder of Novelis would receive proceeds of USD 810-945 million. If the greenshoe option is exercised, proceeds are estimated at USD 931.5 million to USD 1.08 billion. This will be the second company from the Aditya Birla group to go for listing overseas after Birla Carbon (Thailand). Novelis, which operates an integrated network of technically advanced rolling and recycling facilities across North America, South America, Europe and Asia, posted a turnover of USD 16.2 billion in FY24. Hindalco's turnover stood at Rs 2,15,962 crore in 2023-24.

CHHETRI'S LAST DANCE IN INDIA'S MUST WIN MATCH AGAINST KUWAIT

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Emotions will run high when the talismanic Sunil Chhetri leads India out one last time in a crucial FIFA World Cup qualifying match against Kuwait here on Thursday, hoping to propel his team into the next round as a parting gift after dominating the national football landscape for 19 years. The 39-year-old Chhetri will hang his boots at the end of this match and would like to ensure that the team enters the final-18 stage of the World Cup qualifiers for the first time. The top two teams from nine groups of four teams each will go on to make the third stage. This round will decide FIFA's increased allocation of eight World Cup berths for Asia. It will be a little far-fetched to imagine India in the 2026 World Cup in North America, but a win over Kuwait will take the team into the uncharted territory of being up against the best of Asia in at least 10 matches. That would also translate into some quality friendly games. Occupying the second spot behind Qatar (12 points) in Group A with four points from four games, India are ahead of Afghanistan on goal difference and Kuwait, who have three points. A victory here will put India firmly ahead of Afghanistan, who face Qatar in a tough fixture later on Thursday. Afghanistan have a seven-goal deficit against India and a win against Kuwait will virtually keep the equation out of their reach. India face Qatar, while Afghanistan take on Kuwait in the final round fixtures on



Tuesday. For 19 years, Chhetri has carried the footballing hopes of a nation labelled as the 'sleeping giant' of world football. With 94 goals from 150 appearances and a dozen trophies in his cabinet, the diminutive Indian captain is a bonafide legend of the game. And it will be an evening of high emotions at the venue where his professional football career took shape with Mohun Bagan in early 2000s. A packed crowd is expected

at the Salt Lake Stadium to celebrate Chhetri's last dance. Chhetri has happy memories against Kuwait, having played a key role in the equaliser by Sahal Abdul Samad that forced a penalty shootout and eventually a 5-4 triumph for India in the 2023 SAFF Championship in Bengaluru. That India had defeated Kuwait by a solitary goal from Manvir Singh in their group league opener in the away fixture in November last year will also be a

morale-booster for Igor Stimac's side, who then suffered a slip-up by going down to Qatar 0-3. Then came the Asian Cup shock where the team drew a blank, losing all its three matches and failing to score even a single goal. It went from bad to worse for India, who resumed their World Cup qualifiers against Afghanistan, and failed to score in a goalless draw. More misery was in store in their home match in Guwahati where the Blue Tigers suffered a 1-2 defeat,

conceding a late goal to the South Asian neighbours. The struggles against Afghanistan reveal deeper issues plaguing the national team. Despite creating opportunities, India's inability to finish crucial chances will be a significant concern. The shortcoming was quite pronounced against Afghanistan as the team managed just one shot on target compared to Afghanistan's five in their shock 1-2 defeat in Guwahati

Midfielders Anirudh Thapa and Lallianzuala Chhangte also failed to make an impact, exacerbating the problem. Their lack of creativity and precision, made worse by ineffective ball control and passing, contributed to India's misery. In between the sticks, Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, who at 71 matches is the next most experienced after Chhetri, will also have to step up. His penalty concession due to a communication failure

resulted in Afghanistan scoring the winner in March. But India will be coming in with solid preparation for this match. They have made some interesting additions in I-League forwards Edmund Lalrindika (Inter Kashi) and David Lalhlansanga (Mohammedan Sporting) who will be aiming to become the first players in five years to make national debuts from the second tier league. The defence, however, will have to cope with the

absence of Sandesh Jhingan who has been sidelined due to an injury from the Asian Cup in January. It remains to be seen if the likes of Rahul Bheke, Anwar Ali and Subhasish Bose will be able to compensate for his absence, especially the aerial strength he has provided over the years. Focus will also be on Lallianzuala Chhangte, who had a strong 2023-24 ISL season, scoring 10 goals and providing six assists for Mumbai City FC. He will look to carry this form against Kuwait, who will have the firepower of Hassan Al-Enezi in the defence. Kuwait are coming to the game after routing Afghanistan 4-0 with their key forward duo of Shabaib Al Khaldi and Mohammed Daham scoring three goals between them. The duo will once again be a big threat to the Indians. Kuwait will also have Mohsen Ghareeb who performed well in their previous encounter, will be tasked with stopping Chhangte if he starts in the left-back position.

SQUADS:
INDIA: Gurpreet Singh Sandhu (GK); Nikhil Poojary, Subhasish Bose, Anwar Ali, Jay Gupta; Jeakson Singh, Anirudh Thapa; Naorem Mahesh Singh, Brandon Fernandes, Lallianzuala Chhangte; Sunil Chhetri.
KUWAIT: Sulaiman Abdulhafour (GK); Rashed Al-Dosary, Khalid El Ebrahim, Hassan Al-Enezi, Salman Bormeya; Eid Al-Rasheedi; Hamad Al-Harbi, Faisal Zayed, Azbi Shehab, Mohammad Daham; Yousef Nasser.



Real Madrid back in the galacticos business with signing of Kylian Mbappé

AP ■ MADRID

A new "galactico" era could be in the making at Real Madrid. After years without high-profile signings, Madrid went after one of the biggest names in soccer and added Kylian Mbappé to the long list of top players who have been part of the Spanish powerhouse's history. The France great is joining a squad that already includes younger stars Vinicius Junior and Jude Bellingham, putting Madrid on the path to achieve even further success - potentially for years to come. Madrid on Saturday won a record-extending 15th Champions League title - and sixth in 10 years. Two days later, it announced it was finally signing Mbappé after a few failed attempts to lure in the playmaker. "Finally, it's official, I am going to be a Real Madrid player for the next five years. It's an immense pleasure, a dream coming true, a lot of emotions," Mbappé said Tuesday in Metz on the eve of France's home friendly against Luxembourg. "I'm very, very happy (and) relieved, very proud to be joining a club where I've always dreamed of being." Madrid hadn't been involved in a blockbuster deal since it signed Eden Hazard from Chelsea in 2019, but the Belgian playmaker never fully lived up to expectations. The last time Madrid had gone into the market to bring a top star before that was in 2014-15, when it signed Colombia playmaker James Rodríguez and Toni Kroos, who retired at the end of this season. In

2013, Madrid had signed Gareth Bale, and Luka Modric in 2012. Karim Benzema, who eventually took over Cristiano Ronaldo's reign up front in 2018, left last year to accept a lucrative deal in Saudi Arabia. He was replaced by Joselu, an unflashy striker whose goals played a key role in Madrid reaching the Champions League final this season. Mbappé, who posed for a photo with Ronaldo when he visited Madrid as a 14-year-old, said he received welcome messages from current and former Madrid players, including Ronaldo. After Ronaldo left and the club took a chance with Hazard, club president Florentino Pérez mostly stuck with players already in the squad and bet on untested youngsters such as Vinicius and Rodrygo. They were signed at early ages and slowly got incorporated into the main squad. Endrick, the latest Brazilian sensation, is arriving from Palmeiras for the new season and is expected to travel the same path. Madrid's "galacticos" had been assembled by Pérez in the early 2000s with the signings of Luis Figo, Zinedine Zidane, Brazil great Ronaldo and David Beckham, who all helped the club win one Champions League and two Spanish league titles. By not overspending in recent transfer windows - and by signing Mbappé only after he became a free agent - Madrid saved money and moved into position to add even more top players if needed.

I am god gifted, channelled anger of previous loss to win Olympic quota: Boxer Nishant Dev

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

He claims to have the perfect blend of speed, timing, and power that define a world-beating boxer and that's why the Olympic-bound Nishant Dev (71kg) says he has no qualms in calling himself "god-gifted". His assertion might sound conceited to some but perhaps, this confidence is what earned him a place at the Paris Olympics. The 23-year-old prodigal talent burst into the scene in 2021 when he reached the light middleweight (71kg) quarterfinal in his maiden world championship appearance. Two years later, he had a world championship bronze medal around his neck and now he is one of two Indian male boxers who will fly to Paris for the Olympics. "I am god-gifted, I have everything in me," Dev replied when asked to elaborate on his strengths. "I have power, speed and timing. But the main (thing) is skills. If you have that you can win against any kind of boxer," Dev said in an interaction with select media on Wednesday. Dev, who struggled with a shoulder niggle for years, booked his place in the Paris Games with a dominant show at the final qualifying event in Bangkok last week. He had narrowly missed out at the previous qualifiers after a heartbreaking loss to Omari Jones of USA. Confident in his abilities, Dev



had then promised to make the Paris cut no matter what it took. "(There were) shortcomings that I had, like low stamina in third round, my body balance and also the fact that my body function had become a little weak. I didn't have the body language that one should have in round three. I worked on all of this," he revealed. The southpaw lost out in the closing seconds of the bout against Jones after both boxers went toe-to-toe in the first two rounds. Dev said the defeat left him with a lot of pent up anger. "I have done a lot of work for the competition, I have changed my strategy a bit, like in the first round, I (usually) start calmly. (But) this time I put in the effort from the very

first second of the very first round and continued till the last second of the bout. "I took out my anger from America (the bout against Jones). I had a lot of confidence, that I will win this time." Gifted he might consider himself but Dev acknowledged that talent alone is not enough and one has to work hard as well like he did for his triumph in Bangkok. "I used my skills, I hit more body shots to completely exhaust my opponent, drain him of his energy. I have a lot of power inside me, but you cannot win a boxing match on the basis of just power. "You will have to add small things in it, like speed, timing, power, boxing mind as well. So I mixed up all these things."

After no male boxer from the country made the cut in the first world qualifier, Indian boxing went through a coaching crisis with High Performance Director Bernard Dunne tendering his resignation from Italy itself. While Dunne's departure somewhat hampered their training, Indian boxers soon found a silver lining in the crisis. They were now allowed to train on their own beyond the time table set by Dunne. "Extra training helped because a boxer should be able to use his mind. Even if you are giving 30 minutes extra time, that allows the boxer to think. "Strategy and all is there but at the end of the day, a boxer has to apply his brain during a bout."

Defending Euro champ Italy draws 0-0 against Turkey, which loses Kabak to injury. Portugal wins 4-2

AP ■ MILAN

Italy stuttered to a 0-0 draw at home to Turkey in the first of two warmup matches before it begins the defense of its European Championship title next week. Tuesday's match was overshadowed by a serious-looking injury to Turkey defender Ozan Kabak, who appears more than likely to miss Euro 2024 in Germany where he plays his club soccer. Kabak, who plays for Hoffenheim in the Bundesliga, was applauded by both teams and the whole of the stadium in Bologna when he was stretchered off shortly before halftime after injuring his right knee. The 24-year-old player fell awkwardly following a challenge with Italy forward Mateo Retegui. Turkey plays its first Euro 2024 match against Georgia on June 18 before facing Portugal and the Czech Republic. There were few real goalscoring opportunities and Italy's best chance of the match came with the last piece of action of the first half as Bryan Cristante headed a corner onto the near post. Retegui wasted a good opportunity in the 59th minute when he opted for an acrobatic overhead kick that went far over the bar. Juventus midfielder Nicolò Fagioli was brought on



shortly afterward for his Italy comeback after recently returning from a seven-month ban from soccer for betting violations. Bologna defender Riccardo Calafiori was warmly applauded when he came on in the 85th minute for his Italy debut at his home stadium. Italy has another friendly against Bosnia-Herzegovina on Sunday before kicking off its title defense against Albania on June 15. Spain and Croatia are also in Group B. R O N A L D O - L E S S PORTUGAL Without Cristiano Ronaldo, Portugal eased to a 4-2 win over Finland. Portugal coach Roberto Martinez had already said that Ronaldo would miss his country's first two friendlies - against Finland and Croatia - as he was being given a rest and allowed to go on a mini-break with his family as the season only recently ended in Saudi Arabia.

De Bruyne open to lucrative Saudi Arabia move when his Manchester City contract expires

AP ■ BRUSSELS.(AP)

Kevin De Bruyne is talking with his family about possibly moving to Saudi Arabia as a free agent next year, the Manchester City playmaker said Tuesday. The Belgian star will have just turned 34 and completed 10 seasons at the English Premier League champion when his contract expires next June. "You're talking about incredible sums of money during what might well be the twilight of my career," De Bruyne told Belgian daily Het Laatste Nieuws when asked if he would consider moving to a Saudi club. "We are increasingly having such

conversations as a family," he said, noting that his 8-year-old son "only knows England. He is also asking how long I will play for City." Saudi league clubs backed by the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund have spent hundreds of millions of dollars paying salaries and transfer fees to lure top players since Cristiano Ronaldo moved nearly 18 months ago. Karim Benzema and Neymar later followed, though Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappé resisted their offers last year. Saudi officials have said they want to focus on signing more young players at the peak of their careers, but an exception would surely be made for a generational talent like De Bruyne.



His visionary passing, reading of the game and shooting has helped Man City win six Premier League titles in his nine years there so far. "At my age you have to be open to everything," De Bruyne said about his future. He also could attract offers to start playing in Major League Soccer one year ahead of the United States co-hosting the 2026 World Cup with Canada and Mexico. De Bruyne never won a tournament title with Belgium despite being part of its so-called golden generation over the past decade. He spoke to the Belgian news outlet while in the Belgium camp ahead of the European Championship that starts June 14 in Germany.

