

Bomb threat delays Air India's London flight; suspect held

PTI ■ KOCHI

A London-bound Air India flight received a bomb threat on Tuesday but it turned out to be a hoax and a 29-year-old man suspected of making the threatening call has been apprehended here by authorities, an official said. Security personnel conducted extensive checks on the aircraft and found no danger, allowing the flight to proceed as planned, a Cochin International Airport spokesperson said in a statement here. According to him, a bomb threat call was received by the Air India call center in Mumbai early on Tuesday for flight AI 149, scheduled to fly from Cochin to London Gatwick. The alert was promptly communicated to Air India here and the Cochin International Airport Limited



(CIAL) at 1.22 AM. Following established protocols, a Bomb Threat Assessment Committee (BTAC) was immediately convened at CIAL. The threat was assessed and declared specific. Following this, thorough security checks were conducted by the Airport Security Group (ASG-CISF),

airline security personnel, and inline baggage screening systems. In accordance with the recommendations from the Cochin Airport BTAC, the aircraft was moved to an isolated aircraft parking point, and comprehensive security measures were undertaken. The aircraft was thoroughly

checked and subsequently cleared for flight. The check-in process for AI 149 was completed by 10:30 am. The flight left for its destination at 1.25 PM. It was originally scheduled to depart at 11.50 AM on Tuesday. Efforts were made to identify the caller who reported the threat to the Mumbai call center. Investigations revealed the call was made by Suhaib (29), a native of Kondotty in Malappuram district, who was scheduled to travel to London on the AI 149 flight. Suhaib, along with his wife and daughter, was intercepted by ASG at Cochin Airport's international departure terminal during check-in. "He has since been handed over to the police for further questioning and legal action," the spokesperson said in a statement.

Amarnath Yatra: High-end CCTVs installed to monitor traffic on J&K highway

PTI ■ JAMMU

Ahead of the beginning of the annual Amarnath Yatra, high-end CCTV cameras have been installed along the Jammu-Srinagar national highway to monitor both pilgrimage and regular vehicular traffic, officials said on Tuesday. The traffic department has installed 10 360-degree CCTV cameras from Udhampur to Banihal in Ramban district, while the police department has placed 60 cameras along the highway to monitor vehicular movement and identify suspicious individuals, they said. The 52-day pilgrimage to the 3,880-metre-high cave shrine in south Kashmir is set to start on June 29 and conclude on August 19, as announced by the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB). "We have installed 10 high-end CCTV cameras at various



key points from Udhampur to Banihal to monitor traffic," Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Traffic National Highway, Rohit Baskotra, told PTI. These cameras are positioned at locations, including the Jakhani area of Udhampur, Dalwas, Khoni Nallah, Mehar, Battery Cheshma, Nachlana, Banihal

Chowk, Tunnel-5, Shaligadi and Cutpoint, he said. A control room has been established in Ramban to oversee traffic movement around the clock, Baskotra said. "The control room monitors the highway 24/7, enhancing our efficiency in managing congestion, traffic jams, and

other issues," the SSP said. The cameras are strategically placed at points where traffic conditions are particularly problematic and accidents are frequent, he added. The traffic police have also issued an advisory for drivers on the highway during the Amarnath yatra, emphasising lane driving and warning of heavy fines for traffic violations. Contact numbers for technical support are also provided in case of vehicle breakdowns. "With the CCTV cameras, if a vehicle breaks down or a traffic jam occurs, it will be visible in the control room, allowing a police team to quickly respond," Baskotra said. Special preparations have been made by the traffic police of Ramban and Udhampur to ensure smooth traffic flow on the national highway, a significant challenge during the pilgrimage period, he said.

Bihar Govt cancels ₹826-crore contracts awarded during Mahagathbandhan regime

PTI ■ PATNA

The NDA government in Bihar has cancelled 350 contracts worth Rs 826 crore, which were awarded during the previous 'Mahagathbandhan' dispensation in the state for supplying drinking water in rural areas, a minister said on Tuesday. The decision to cancel the contracts was taken after an inquiry by the Public Health Engineering Department revealed that there were "irregularities in the process of selecting contractors," he said.



The minister, however, refused to give details of the alleged irregularities detected by the department. "It is not appropriate time to divulge the details as the matter is being investigated by a competent authority," he said. According to documents available by PTI, Bunka district tops the list where a maximum of 106 contracts related to rural water supply systems have been cancelled, followed by Jamui (73), Lakhisarai (20), Aurangabad (18) and Ara (11). Commenting on the Bihar government's decision to cancel the contracts of the PHE department, RJD's state unit spokesperson Mrityunjay Tiwary, said, "Chief Minister and JD(U) supreme Nitish Kumar and BJP leaders are scared of our leader Tejashwi Yadav. The previous 'Mahagathbandhan' government in the state had executed several people-friendly projects and taken major decisions like employment to 7-8 lakh youths and providing social security to the economically and socially weaker sections of the society." The NDA partners are also "scared" of the impact of the

welfare initiatives taken by the previous government, which benefitted lakhs of people in the state, he claimed. "RJD is not scared of any probe...let them (the NDA government) do whatever they want to," he added. The PHE department is responsible for ensuring the installation of hand pumps and mini water supply systems in small habitats and wards. It may be recalled that Nitish Kumar had snapped ties with the RJD and returned to the NDA in January this year. Soon after the formation of the Nitish Kumar-led NDA government in the state, an order was issued to review all the decisions taken by the departments headed by former deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav and then two ministers of RJD — Lalit Yadav and Ramanand Yadav. In a letter issued by the Cabinet Secretariat in February this year, officials of the health, road construction, urban development and rural works departments had been asked to review the decisions taken during the previous grand alliance government in the state.

Odisha Govt asks district collectors to remain alert for possible floods

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government has asked all district collectors and municipal commissioners to remain fully prepared for probable flood situation in the monsoon season. In a letter to all collectors and municipal commissioners, Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) Satyabrata Sahu on Monday said IMD has forecasted that an intense spell of rainfall due to active monsoon would occur throughout the state from June 26. "As a result, there may be instances of flash floods, flood like situation, waterlogging



and landslides at different locations. Keeping this in mind, you are requested to take immediate action," Sahu told the collectors. He said the field-level functionaries should not leave

the headquarters and they should be deployed in strategic locations of flash flood or waterlogging and ready to meet any eventuality. As low-lying areas in urban pockets may have

waterlogging and roads may be submerged, the SRC directed the urban local bodies (ULBs) to keep the drains and storm water channels decongested and deploy adequate dewatering pumps. In case of very heavy rain, movement of vehicles on submerged roads should be regulated and people in low-lying areas may be shifted to safer locations temporarily, he advised. The SRC also asked for pre-positioning of water pumps with generators in low-lying areas susceptible to waterlogging. "Ensure supervision of weak and vulnerable points in river and canal embankments. Flood

fighting materials may be pre-positioned at such places. Drainage clearance must be ensured for free flow of rainwater," he directed. According to IMD Bhubaneswar Centre's bulletin, heavy rainfall is expected in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Rayagada, Kalahandi and Koraput on June 26. Some places of Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khurda, Nayagarh, Ganjam, Gajapati, Mayurbhanj, and Keonjhar districts would also experience thunderstorm and lightning on Wednesday, it said.

Pune bar case: Two excise officials suspended; liquor, other materials seized

PTI ■ PUNE

The Maharashtra excise department has suspended two of its inspector-rank officers for alleged dereliction of duty in connection with a probe into violation of rules by a bar in Pune, a senior official said on Tuesday. The official also said they have seized 241 litres of foreign liquor and other materials valued at Rs 3 lakh from the Liquid Leisure Lounge or L3, located on the Fergusson College Road here, and suspended the bar license. Pubs in the state's second largest city have come into focus after a video, allegedly from L3, on Sunday showed some youth with a drug-like substance. A police probe into the viral video has led to the arrest of eight persons, including an event organiser, and suspension of four police personnel after the L3 bar was found operating beyond the



permissible time limit. Besides, the excise department has arrested six waiters of L3 for allegedly flouting norms related to serving of liquor and its stock. According to the police, the bar was operating till 5 am on Sunday and liquor was being sold beyond permissible time limit. Bars and pubs in Pune are allowed to remain open till 1.30 am. An official on Tuesday said 14 regular squads and three special squads of the excise personnel have been set up to check illegal manufacturing of alcohol, its transportation and sale in Pune district. "The state excise

commissioner has suspended an inspector and a sub-inspector rank officer of the department for dereliction of duty in the case related to the Liquid Leisure Lounge," Excise Superintendent, Pune division, Charansingh Rajput told PTI. The official said they have seized 241 litres of foreign liquor and other materials of Rs 3 lakh and suspended the bar license for allegedly making internal changes at a permit room in the establishment. Citing the viral video, the prosecution on Monday told a Pune court that it has emerged through social

media that the accused had given narcotic-like substances to its patrons in the establishment and they want to probe the issue further. Prima facie, it has been found the accused used social media to invite patrons to the establishment to consume narcotics substances, alcohol and smoke cigarettes, the prosecution said, adding the police want to conduct a probe further about these customers. The police want to trace the youth as well as a minor seen in the viral video, it said in the court. Samples have been collected from the toilet of L3 and sent for an examination to check the presence of narcotic substance, police told the court on Monday while seeking the custody of eight persons, including the bar owners and staffers. The police also said they want to send blood samples of the arrested persons for tests to find out if they had consumed drugs.

Congress will respond appropriately to Ministers pushing for 3 more DCMs in Karnataka: Shivakumar

PTI ■ MANGALURU

Seemingly expressing his displeasure against ministers demanding three more deputy chief minister posts in Karnataka, state Congress President D K Shivakumar on Tuesday said the party would respond to them appropriately. Currently, Shivakumar from the Vokkaliga community is the only DCM in the Siddaramaiah-led cabinet. Some of the ministers in the cabinet have been pitching for DCM posts to be given to leaders from Veerashaiva-Lingayat, SC/ST and minority communities. "You people (media) put in news if someone says something. Why should I say no to people who are happy (by appearing in news)... Let anyone make any demand, the party will respond to them appropriately. Simple," Shivakumar told reporters here in response to a question. Asked whether there is a plan in the party to

have more deputy chief ministers, he said, "You please meet Mallikarjun Kharge (AICC president) and our in-charge general secretary or ask the chief minister." A section within the Congress is said to be of the opinion that the statement by ministers seeking three more DCM posts was part of a plan by Siddaramaiah's camp to keep Shivakumar in check, amid talks that he might seek the CM post after two-and-a-half years of this government's tenure, and to counter his influence both in the government and the party. The ministers — Co-Operation Minister K N Rajanna, Housing Minister B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan, Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi and few others — who have pitched for three more DCMs are considered close to Siddaramaiah. The Congress had decided that Shivakumar will be "the only" deputy CM amid stiff

competition between him and Siddaramaiah for the chief minister's post after the assembly election results in May last year. It was also said to be a "commitment" made by the Congress leadership to Shivakumar while convincing him to give up his claim for the CM post and to take up the role of deputy chief minister. Asked whether he or his brother and former MP D K Suresh would contest in the assembly bypolls from Channapatna, Shivakumar, who has recently been making repeated visits to the segment, did not want to give any direct response but indicated that he may contest. "My brother is not interested, as people have decided to give Suresh a rest (through defeat in Lok Sabha polls), but there is a desire to work for the party, as people there (Channapatna) have trusted us and given us (Congress) about 85,000 votes (in Lok Sabha polls). We have to save them," he said.

SP demands cancellation of NEET exam

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

The youth wing of the Samajwadi Party (SP) on Tuesday organised a protest march here over alleged malpractices in the conduct of medical entrance exam NEET-UG, demanding cancellation of the exam and resignation of the education minister. Starting from the party headquarters, the slogan-shouting agitators climbed the barricades placed by the police on Vikramaditya Marg to stop them. The police used 'lathis' to disperse the protesters, who were later taken into custody and removed from the protest venue. SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and his party have been vociferously raising the issue of the alleged question paper leak in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET)-UG as well as the police recruitment exam under the BJP government in the state.



FIRST COLUMN

WE ARE PLAYING THE SCRIPT OF LIFE

The world is a stage where we each have a unique, pre-scripted part to play



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

Recently a veteran actor from the Indian film industry was given the Highest Civilian Award for his contribution towards spreading cultural values across the Globe through his acting career. While he was given the award, everyone in the audience stood up to give him a standing ovation with so much love and respect to the legend, who brought so many characters to life on celluloid screen. We all have experienced this euphoria in theatres, while a heroic character makes an entry on screen, there are loud cheers, whistles, applause and more. And at the end of the film, the hero wins the audience's hearts and steals the show. Whether he plays a prince or a pauper, it does not matter as his fans through the theatres to catch a glimpse of him. The beauty of his performance lies in his ability to internalize the character to the extent that he and his role seem one to his fans. But even while doing it, he is very much conscious of the fact that he is merely an actor in a particular drama, his role is carved, his dialogues are scripted and the costumes are designed for that particular character. Hence, his greatness lies only in playing the role to the best of his capability. On his long journey to stardom, every actor often turns a spectator and critiques his own work so that he can improve upon his act. It is this element of detachment from the different roles he plays that allows him to progress, play multiple roles simultaneously with clarity and then return to his personal life at the end of the day.

Not many of us know that the world cycle is very much similar to this drama in which all of us are actors with unique parts. Everyone is the protagonist in his life and can become a hero who draws applause. However, today we hardly find anyone cheering for the other person. Because, there is great dissatisfaction either with each other's performance or the script. As a result the drama appears to have become a tragedy. There is widespread chaos with actors criticizing each others' performances instead of theirs. The reason for this trouble is that most of us act without the knowledge that the earth is a stage and we have all come here to play our individual roles. Secondly, each actor's role is unique and pre-scripted and hence trying to match it with anybody else's



is futile. Thirdly, the biggest law of the world drama is that it is ever beneficial for everyone. In the absence of this understanding or its consciousness, we get attached to our roles, forget to change our costumes and make-up and lose the flexibility to adapt to each part. Take a simple example of a person who plays a son, a husband, a father, a friend and several other roles at the same time. If he is in the consciousness of being a male, he could dominate his wife at home or look down upon his female staff at office. At work, he would stick to his role of being a boss so much so that he forgets to become their colleague. On the other hand, if he is conscious that he is an actor and must like a hero win everyone's hearts, then he would understand the requirements of his role and become active, accurate and attractive at whatever he does. Living the peaks and troughs of each character we play, we drain ourselves and are unable to muster enough strength to meet the demands of each role or take well the twists in the scenes, as a result of which there are emotional upheavals and sorrow becomes a regular visitor when the purpose of the drama is to help the actors experience joy and happiness. On the other hand, if we become detached to the roles we play and keep faith in the eternal law that the drama has been scripted for universal benefit, the feeling of loss and gain, comfort and pain would begin to dissolve and our mind would stop to question the developments in every scene. So, the moral of the story is that we should be detached and yet be involved in the part we are playing. That's the quality to be a superstar in this World Drama. (Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)



RAJDEEP PATHAK

personal, social, and spiritual well-being. The campaign also calls for treating people who use drugs with respect and without judgment, aiming to change societal attitudes. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) underscores the significance of eliminating stigma and adopting a people-centered approach based on human rights and evidence-based practices to effectively

combat drug abuse globally. Besides, the primary objective is to address the multifaceted issues of drug abuse and trafficking by raising public awareness, promoting preventive measures, and advocating for robust policies and programs. Educating communities about the severe dangers and consequences of drug abuse and illicit trafficking is essential. Fostering international cooperation is crucial for a comprehensive approach, emphasizing global partnerships and collaboration among law enforcement agencies to dismantle drug trafficking networks. Addressing these objectives will create a more informed, prepared, and united front against the global drug crisis. Going by the 2024 theme -

"The evidence is clear: invest in prevention", the message of the Secretary General of the United Nations António Guterres is pertinent in which he reiterated that drugs inflict profound suffering, deteriorating health and wellbeing, with overdoses claiming countless lives annually. To him, the rise of more lethal synthetic drugs and record-breaking illicit drug production fuels crime and violence globally, impacting the most vulnerable, especially youth. Those struggling with substance abuse face repeated victimization from the drugs, societal stigma, and harsh responses. To break this cycle, "we must invest in evidence-based prevention programs that safeguard individuals and communities, disrupt illicit

economies, and prioritize rehabilitation, education, and harm reduction". He cited the example of Portugal saying that prevention is effective. António Guterres said, "As this year's theme reminds us, breaking the cycle of suffering means starting at the beginning, before drugs take hold, by investing in prevention." But what does 'Drug Abuse' actually mean? Drug abuse can be defined as the improper or excessive consumption of illegal drugs or prescription medications for non-therapeutic purposes. Drug abuse severely impacts physical health, manifesting in serious conditions. Reports point that chronic cocaine or methamphetamine abuse leads to cardiovascular issues, including heart disease and

stroke. Smoking drugs like crack cocaine can cause lung cancer, while intravenous drug use increases HIV risk. Other risks, as medical reports point, include nasal damage from snorting, liver and kidney disease from prolonged substance use, and oral cancer from smokeless tobacco. Contaminants in illicit drugs are linked to leukemia, and severe weight loss is common among stimulant addicts. Besides, mental health issues include depression, anxiety, memory and learning problems, insomnia, violent behaviour, delusions, paranoia, confusion, extreme mood swings, and substance dependence. Some report also suggests that the relationships between drug-related crime, crimes that affect the environment,

and convergent crime are complex and evolving. Drug cultivation and trafficking and crimes that affect the environment are surging in the Amazon Basin. Also, the 'UNODC World Drug Report 2023' highlights social and economic inequalities driving drug problems and their environmental and human rights impacts and rising conflicts. Treatment coverage remains low, with only one in five affected receiving help, notably lacking in some regions. Recent data from the Government of India reveals alarming statistics: more than 10% of the population grapples with psychiatric disorders such as depression, anxiety, and psychosis. A substantial segment, comprising 15 individuals per 1000, engages in drug

use, while chronic alcohol addiction affects 25 per 1000 people. The availability of psychiatric and de-addiction beds starkly contrasts with demand, with only 20% of the required facilities accessible nationwide, leaving an alarming 80% shortfall in inpatient care capacity. Following a tailored treatment plan involving detoxification, counseling, and possibly medication is crucial. Lifestyle adjustments such as adopting healthy habits and avoiding triggers support recovery. The way out is, facing the problem, discussing and treating it with experts' guidance, but not being the escapist. (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

Water crisis in Delhi is entirely man-made



UTTAM GUPTA

The ruthless exploitation of natural endowments and that too when resources are being put to misuse is unconscionable

The gravity of water crisis facing Delhiites has forced the Delhi government to approach the Supreme Court (SC) seeking its intervention to direct neighboring states Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh (HP) to provide additional raw water supply to the national capital. Initially, the SC directed HP to release 137 cusecs of raw water which translates to 70 million gallons per day (MGD) of more water for the city. It also asked Haryana to make arrangements for ensuring its free flow to Delhi.

But, now with HP claiming that it can't release more than what it is already giving (70 MGD), the top court has directed the Upper Yamuna River Board (UYRB) to convene a meeting with all parties and take a decision expeditiously. The mandate of UYRB is to inter alia regulate the allocation of available water flows amongst the beneficiary States and also monitoring the return flows. Is Delhi really short of water?

According to Delhi's Economic Survey Report 2023, the overall water requirement of the city is 1,290 MGD, with an increase in the summer months. Against this, the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) which has the mandate to manage the water supply in the city (including procurement of raw water from various sources, its processing in water treatment plants or WTPs and its distribution) had said on April 3, 2024 in a written statement that water production in the capital stood at around 990 MGD on average between March end and start of April. The DJB actually produced 1,002 MGD on June 7, 2024.

Further, the Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023-24, says, "As per Outcome Budget (Q2 of 2023-24) of DJB, the total distribution losses are at about 52.35 percent". Distribution losses is a sophisticated nomenclature for pilferage of water supplies by tanker mafia and industries. The pilferage is happening at all stages of the water supply chain viz. the WTPs, conveyance systems and distribution systems. This couldn't have happened without the connivance of the authorities.

Deduct 52 percent pilferage or 520 MGD from production of around 1000 MGD, the quantity available for consumption by households in Delhi would be 480 MGD. This is barely 37 percent of the demand estimated at 1290 MGD. It sounds bizarre! If, that were the case, nearly 2/3rd of Delhiites would have been without drinking water; a complete disaster. That hasn't happened even as we see people chasing water tankers in several parts of Delhi.

So, what are we missing? There is something fundamentally wrong with the way mandarins in the government estimate the requirement. Ideally, this should be done from the demand side which involves conducting household survey, collecting data on how much each unit needs, aggregating and so on. Instead, they look at the total supply in the past say 2023-24, presume that that much quantity was consumed and apply an incremental factor/percentage increase to arrive at the requirement for 2024-25.

In this process, they end up including even the pilfered quantity in the requirement. It means that 1290 MGD also includes 520 MGD of water plundered by dubious operators from the system



A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION TO DELHI WATER WOES REQUIRES THAT THE STATE GOVERNMENT ADDRESSES PILFERAGE ON A WAR FOOTING. YET, ITS OVERWHELMING FOCUS HAS BEEN ON GETTING MORE RAW WATER FROM HARYANA, UTTAR PRADESH, HP ETC.

(assuming that 52 per cent pilferage has continued in the current year). Minus this, the requirement of households was 770 MGD. This being higher than the net availability of 480 MGD, Delhiites are feeling the stress.

Unambiguously, plunder of water by tanker mafia is at the root of Delhi's water woes (last year, Delhiites were spared as the HH demand being muted, the net supply after accounting for the greed of the tanker mafia was sufficient to meet it). But, for this, the entire production of 1000 MCD would have been available for HH consumption resulting in a surplus of 230 MCD (1000-770) forget any shortage that we are experiencing today.

A sustainable solution to Delhi water woes requires that the State government addresses pilferage on a war footing. Yet, its overwhelming focus has been on getting more raw water from Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, HP etc. While, making the demand it is oblivious of the fact that all its nine WTPs are already operating above their installed capacities (yielding a total of around 1000 MGD which is around 47 MGD more than the combined capacity of all nine WTPs) and that the DJB won't be able to deliver more even if it gets more raw water from the neighboring states.

As for addition to the processing capacity, last year, the Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had approved an action plan to increase water production by 131 MGD in the short-term and by 380 MGD in the long-term. It

involved construction of a new plant at Chandrawal, with a capacity of 105 MGD and completion of another plant at Dwarka, which has the potential to increase production by 50 MGD. That plan hasn't made much headway. While, work on Chandrawal plant is yet to start, even the Dwarka project which was to come up by March 2024 is running behind schedule.

Unable to manage water supplies from the rivers viz. Yamuna, Ravi-Beas, Ganga and so on, the Delhi government is now increasing its dependence on groundwater which currently contributes a little more than 10 percent - almost 100 percent increase over the level five years ago. According to the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), over 41 percent of Delhi's total area is overexploited even as it has been drawing more groundwater than it recharges. The total annual groundwater recharge decreased from 0.41 billion cubic meters (bcm) in 2022 to 0.38 bcm in 2023, while the annual extractable groundwater resource available decreased from 0.37 bcm to 0.34 bcm.

This is not a healthy trend. The ruthless exploitation of natural endowments and that too when resources are being put to misuse (read: diversion of water meant for HH consumption to industrial use) is unconscionable.

Apart from the huge imbalance between the demand and supply, the gross mismanagement and irregularities in running Delhi's water supply systems is also push-

ing DJB to the brink of financial bankruptcy. Pilferage of more than half of water supply means the Board doesn't get any revenue on that much quantity. Then, you have Kejriwal's free scheme that involves no payment for consumption up to 20,000 litres a month per household.

Even for HHs who get the bills and haven't paid for years, the Chief Minister has been trying to get a one time settlement package cleared by the Lieutenant Governor which will tantamount to the State exchequer foregoing thousands of crore. Finally, there are reports of payments having been made by the households albeit to private entities (authorized to collect the money) but never reached the revenue department.

All this has led to a pathetic situation whereby DJB which until a decade back was making profit today has an accumulated debt of over Rs 70,000 crore. The Board is able to run its operations solely because it can borrow money from banks and other financial institutions (FIs) backed by sovereign State guarantee. Left to fend for itself, it would have collapsed long ago. One shudders to think of what this would entail for water supply to the capital city. The water crisis as also seriousness of problems on other infrastructure fronts such as electricity etc and overall governance issues in Delhi calls for some drastic action by the Centre.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Navigating the complexities of drug abuse and illicit trafficking

With a strong emphasis on prevention, awareness, and eliminating stigma, the UN champions a holistic approach to tackling drug abuse

Annually observed on June 26, 'The International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking' was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1987 to combat drug abuse globally. The day serves to highlight the challenges posed by drug abuse and illicit trafficking, stressing the need for international cooperation. The 2024 campaign, "The evidence is clear: invest in prevention", focuses on raising awareness about the importance of providing help and treatment to individuals struggling with drug use. It advocates for a compassionate approach, emphasizing empathy and care over punitive measures. This shift, aims to promote understanding of the negative impacts of drugs on

Ukraine, Moldova all set to launch EU membership talks

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Ukraine is set to officially launch membership talks with the European Union on Tuesday in what President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has described as a dream come true for his country's citizens more than two years into a war with Russia.

Deputy prime minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration Olga Stefanishyna will lead Ukraine's delegation at an intergovernmental conference in Luxembourg marking the official opening of talks to align the country's laws and standards with those of the 27-nation bloc.

A few hours later, Moldova, which applied to join the EU after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and was granted candidate status four months later, will take part in a separate intergovernmental conference to officially launch its own accession process.

Ukraine, too, sought candidate status in the days after Russia invaded. By June 2022, EU

leaders had quickly made it official. But things have moved more slowly since then and membership, if it comes, might be years away.

Turkey's accession talks have lasted almost two decades without result.

Still, starting the talks process is sending another strong signal of solidarity with Ukraine beyond the billions in financial support the EU has provided. It's also a show of support for Moldova, which has faced its own challenges with Russia.

"Generations of our people are realizing their European dream. Ukraine is returning to Europe," Zelenskyy said in an online post after EU member states agreed on Friday to open the talks.

Tuesday's intergovernmental conference marks the launch of talks but the negotiations themselves are unlikely to begin for a few months.

Candidate countries must bring their laws and standards into line with those of the EU in 35 policy areas, known as chapters, ranging from the free movement of goods through

Death toll from attack in Russia's Dagestan reaches 21

Moscow (AP): The death toll in the attack by Islamic militants in Russia's southern region of Dagestan has risen to 21 after a wounded police officer has died in a hospital, officials said on Tuesday.

Sunday's attack, in which militants attacked Christian and Jewish houses of worship and fired at police in the cities of Derbent and Makhachkala in the predominantly Muslim region in the North Caucasus, was the deadliest in Russia since March, when gunmen opened fire at a concert in suburban Moscow, killing 145 people.

An affiliate of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan, which claimed responsibility for March's raid, was quick to praise the attack in Dagestan, saying it was conducted by "brothers in the Caucasus who showed that they are still strong."

The Investigative Committee, Russia's top state criminal investigation agency, said all five attackers were killed.

Mavsum Ragimov, head of the Derbent region, said Tuesday that a police sergeant died of his wounds in a hospital, bringing the total number of victims to 21, 16 of them police.

Medical authorities in Dagestan said Monday at least 46 people were injured, 13 of them police. Among the dead was the Rev. Nikolai Kotelnikov, a 66-year-old Russian Orthodox priest at a church in Derbent. The attack came as the Orthodox faithful celebrated Pentecost, also known as Trinity Sunday.

In the early 2000s, Dagestan saw near-daily attacks on police and other authorities that were blamed on militant extremists.

After the emergence of the Islamic State group, many residents of the region joined it in Syria and Iraq.

The violence in Dagestan has abated in recent years, but in a sign that extremist sentiments still run high in the region, mobs rioted at an airport there in October, targeting a flight from Israel. More than 20 people were hurt — none of them Israelis — when hundreds of men, some carrying banners with antisemitic slogans, rushed onto the tarmac, chased passengers and threw stones at police.



Christian F Nunes, president of National Organization for Women speaks as abortion rights activists and Women's March leaders protest as part of a national day of strike actions outside the Supreme Court in Washington on Monday

Russia keeps up frontline pressure before Ukraine receives a boost from Western military aid

AP ■ DONETSK REGION

Relentless Russian attacks on Ukrainian positions defending the strategically important eastern city of Chasiv Yar are disrupting troop rotations and the delivery of some supplies, soldiers in the area say.

The Kremlin's army is seeking to press its advantages in troop numbers and weaponry before Ukrainian forces are bulked up by promised new Western military aid that is already trickling to the front line, analysts say.

It has been hitting civilian targets just as hard, using powerful glide bombs that obliterate buildings and leave huge craters. Its monthslong campaign to cripple Ukraine's electricity supply aims to sap public morale and deny energy to Ukraine's burgeoning arms industry.

Attacks on such civilian targets brought arrest warrants from the International Criminal

Court on Tuesday for former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and military chief of staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov for alleged war crimes. Judges said there is evidence they "intentionally caused great suffering or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health" of Ukrainian civilians.

For Ukrainian soldiers defending the eastern Donetsk region, the Russian ground assaults and aerial barrages allow little respite after more than two years of war.

"We work, you could say, without rest," said a platoon commander who, in line with his brigade's rules, identified himself only by his first name, Oleksandr.

"So no two days are alike. You always need to be ready to work day and night," he told The Associated Press on Monday.

His platoon is part of Ukraine's 43rd Artillery Brigade. It dashes to positions and without

Pak: New counter-terror op won't be large-scale military campaign

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Sharif on Tuesday clarified that the planned counterterrorism campaign "Vision Azm-i-Istehkam" would entail intensifying ongoing intelligence-based operations (IBOs) rather than a "new and organised" military offensive, Dawn newspaper reported.

The clarification comes after the PM's Office (PMO) late Monday night said that "Operation Azm-i-Istehkam" would not be a kinetic large-scale military operation, nor would it entail the mass displacement of the local population.

"Operation Azm-i-Istehkam" announced by the government on Saturday, is the latest in a series of counter-terrorism operations launched by the Pakistan Army since the mid-2000s. The announcement came after the Central Apex Committee of National Action Plan meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

The Opposition parties, including the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Jamiat Ulema Islam-Fazl and Awami National Party have refused to support the new counterterrorism operation. They demanded that Parliament be taken into confidence before any offensive against militancy was launched.

ongoing IBOs will be intensified rather than [launching] a new and organised armed operation," he added.

The PMO said that "previous kinetic operations were conducted to physically dislodge terrorists from their known locations which [became] no-go areas and compromised the writ of the state. These operations required mass displacement of the local population and systematic clearance of affected areas."

"As there are no such areas in the country anymore and terrorists' ability to carry out large-scale organised operations inside Pakistan had been "decisively degraded by earlier kinetic operations... no large-scale military operation is being contemplated where displacement of population will be required," the statement said.

Meanwhile, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has assured opposition parties that their reservations regarding the newly announced counterterrorism campaign would be addressed.

Hong Kong court inches closer to sentencing democracy activists

AP ■ HONG KONG

A Hong Kong court began mitigation hearings for prominent pro-democracy activists who were convicted under a national security law and now face up to life in prison. The activists were among 47 democracy advocates who were charged with conspiracy to commit subversion in 2021 for their involvement in an unofficial primary, in the biggest case brought under the Beijing-imposed national security law.

They were accused of attempting to paralyze Hong Kong's government and topple the city's leader by securing a legislative majority and using it to block city budgets.

Forty-five of the defendants either pled guilty or were convicted by a three-judge panel whose membership was approved by the government. The judges said their plans to effect change through the election would have undermined the government's authority and created a constitutional crisis, in a verdict that critics said raised doubt about judicial independence.

The first batch of defendants to plead for lenient sentences contains legal scholar Benny Tai and activists Au Nok-hin, Andrew Chiu, Ben Chung and Gordon Ng. The mitigation hearings are expected to continue until early August.

Barrister Stewart Wong, representing Tai, told the judges that his client should be jailed for two years. He's expected to continue laying out his argument Tuesday on.

Hours before the hearing began, dozens of people were queuing up outside the court building tightly guarded by police. Some of them, including retiree William Wong, arrived at about 6 p.m. on Monday despite summer heat.

Pak court reserves verdict on suspension of Imran, wife's sentence in 'iddat' case

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani court on Tuesday reserved its verdict on petitions requesting suspension of sentences handed out to jailed former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the 'iddat' case, a judgment that was widely criticised by civil society and women activists.

Khan, 71, and Bushra, 49, were sentenced to seven years in prison each on February 3 by a trial court for contracting their marriage during iddat, a mandatory period for a woman in Islam to wait before a second marriage after the death of her husband or divorce.

Islamabad district and ses-

sions court on Saturday, while resuming the hearing for pleas seeking suspension of sentences, asked the counsel for Bushra Bibi's ex-husband, Khawar Fareed Maneka, to conclude his arguments by June 25 as the court would then take up the main appeals against their convictions, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Khan and his wife had challenged the conviction before district and sessions judge Shahrukh Arjumand, who recused himself at a time when the hearing had been concluded and the court was supposed to announce the verdict, the report said.

Subsequently, the case was transferred to Additional District and Sessions Judge

Knife attack at school bus stop in China wounds 3

Beijing (AP): A suspect has been detained in China after a knife attack at a school bus stop that injured three people, including a Japanese woman and her child, a spokesperson for the Japanese Embassy confirmed on Tuesday.

A man stabbed the woman and her child at a bus stop for a Japanese school, and then seriously injured a Chinese woman on the bus who tried to block him when he tried to get on, the spokesperson said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of embassy policy.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said the man was arrested at the scene after the Monday afternoon attack in Suzhou, a tech centre and historic canal city outside Shanghai. "It is a regrettable incident," she said. "China

will continue to take effective measures to earnestly protect the safety of all foreigners in China." The motive for the attack was unclear, the Japanese Embassy spokesperson said. An investigation is ongoing.

The Chinese woman was being treated at a hospital, Mao said. The injuries to the Japanese mother and child were not serious. In an email sent to Japanese nationals living in China, the Japanese Embassy warned them to take precautions as stabbing incidents have occurred in various parts of China in public places including parks, schools and subways.

Earlier this month, a Chinese man stabbed four US university instructors at a public park in Jilin in the northeast, as well as a Chinese person who tried to intervene.

US, allies clash with Tehran, Moscow over Iranian N-programme

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The United States and its key European allies clashed with Iran and Russia over Tehran's expanding nuclear programme, with the US vowing "to use all means necessary to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran" in a UN Security Council meeting on Monday.

The US, France, Britain and Germany accused Iran of escalating its nuclear activities far beyond limits it agreed to in a 2015 deal aimed at preventing Tehran from developing nuclear weapons, and of failing to cooperate with the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Iran and Russia accused the US and its allies of continuing to apply economic sanctions that were supposed to be lifted under the deal, and insisted that Tehran's nuclear programme remains under constant oversight by the IAEA.

The clashes came at a semi-annual meeting on implementation of the nuclear deal between Iran and six

major countries — the US, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany — known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Under the accord, Tehran agreed to limit enrichment of uranium to levels necessary for the peaceful use of nuclear power in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

Then-President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the deal in 2018. Trump said he would negotiate a stronger deal, but that didn't happen.

The council meeting followed an IAEA report in late May that Iran has more than 142 kilograms (313 pounds) of uranium enriched up to 60 per cent purity, a technical step away from weapons-grade level of 90 per cent. The IAEA said this was an increase of over 20 kilograms (45 pounds) from February.

The IAEA also reported on June 13 that its inspectors verified that Iran has started up new cascades of advanced centrifuges more quickly enrich uranium and planned to install more.

US deputy ambassador Robert Wood

told the council that the IAEA reports "show that Iran is determined to expand its nuclear programme in ways that have no credible civilian purpose."

Wood said the US is prepared to use all means to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, but said it remains "fully committed to resolving international concerns surrounding Iran's nuclear programme through diplomacy."

The three Western countries that remain in the JCPOA — France, Germany and the United Kingdom — issued a joint statement after the council meeting also leaving the door open for diplomatic efforts "that ensure Iran never develops a nuclear weapon."

They said Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium is now 30 times the JCPOA limit, and stressed that Iran committed not to install or operate any centrifuges for enrichment under the JCPOA.

Their joint statement also noted that "Iranian officials have issued statements about its capacity to assemble a nuclear weapon."

Iran's UN Ambassador Amir Saeed Iravani blamed "the unilateral and unlawful US withdrawal from the JCPOA" and the failure of the three European parties to the deal "to honour their commitments," saying it is "crystal clear" they are responsible for the current non-functioning of the agreement.

In the face of US and European sanctions, he said, Iran has the right to halt its commitments under the JCPOA.

Iravani reiterated Iran's rejection of nuclear weapons, and insisted its nuclear activities including enrichment are "for peaceful purposes" and are subject to "robust verification and monitoring" by the IAEA.

The Iranian ambassador strongly endorsed the JCPOA, calling it a "hard-won diplomatic achievement" "that effectively averted an undue crisis."

"It remains the best option, has no alternative, and its revival is in the interest of all of its participants," he said. "Our remedial measures are reversible if all sanctions are

lifted fully and verifiably." But France, Germany and the UK said some of Iran's nuclear advances are irreversible.

Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenizia said US promises "to abandon the policy of maximum pressure on Tehran and to return to the nuclear deal remained empty words." He accused some other JCPOA parties, which he didn't name, of "doing everything possible to continuously rock the boat, jettisoning opportunities for the implementation of the nuclear deal."

Nebenizia urged the European parties to the agreement and the United States to return to the negotiating table in Vienna and "demonstrate their commitment to the objective of restoration of the nuclear deal."

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, the coordinator of the JCPOA, said the compromise text he put forward two years ago for the US to return to the JCPOA and for Iran to resume full implementation of the agreement remains on the table.

Sensex breaches 78,000 level for first time

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex breached the historic 78,000 level for the first time while Nifty settled at a new record high on Tuesday on buying in blue-chip bank stocks and Reliance Industries.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 712.44 points or 0.92 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 78,053.52. During the day, the benchmark soared 823.63 points or 1 per cent to hit a fresh lifetime high of 78,164.71.



Toubr, Bajaj Finserv, State Bank of India, Reliance Industries and Infosys were the biggest gainers. Power Grid, Asian Paints, Tata Steel, Nestle, Maruti and JSW Steel were among the laggards.

other sectors ended in the negative," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.26 per cent while the smallcap index dipped 0.03 per cent.

A rally in the banking stocks pushed Nifty to hit another record - 34th time this year though a host of

surplus in Q4 FY24. This will take away the pressure on the rupee and pave the way for FII inflows when clarity emerges on the Fed rate cuts," said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services. India recorded a current account surplus of USD 5.7 billion or 0.6 per cent of GDP in the March quarter, the Reserve Bank of India said on Monday. This is the first time in ten quarters that the crucial metric of the country's external strength has turned into surplus mode.

signaling a resumption of the uptrend after a brief pause. Nifty traded within a range during the first half, but selective buying in heavyweight stocks, particularly from the banking sector, spurred a sharp surge," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. "We believe the current buoyancy in banking, coupled with notable strength in IT, will dictate the trend, while other sectors may contribute on a rotational basis," Mishra added.

Rupee settles 3 paise higher at 83.44 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI



The rupee appreciated 3 paise against the US dollar on Tuesday, tracking a firm trend in domestic equities amid stable global crude oil prices. However, a strengthening American currency in the overseas market weighed on the local unit and restricted the up move, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.46 and hit the intraday high of 83.41 and a low of 83.48 against the greenback during the session. It finally settled at 83.44 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 3 paise from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee appreciated 10 paise to settle at 83.47 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias as positive domestic markets and a soft US dollar may support

0.48 per cent lower at USD 85.60 per barrel. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose 712.44 points, or 0.92 per cent, to close at a new peak of 78,053.52. The broader NSE Nifty settled 823.63 points, or 1.00 per cent, higher at a record 23,721.30. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Monday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 653.97 crore, according to exchange data. On the domestic macroeconomic front, S&P Global Ratings on Monday retained India's GDP growth forecast for the current financial year at 6.8 per cent and said high interest rates and lower fiscal spur would temper demand. Moreover, India recorded a current account surplus of USD 5.7 billion or 0.6 per cent of GDP in the March quarter, the Reserve Bank of India said on Monday.

Industry pitches for tax reduction, rationalisation of duty structure in Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



In an effort to boost the economy, representatives of various industries on Tuesday urged Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to reduce the incidence of indirect taxes and rationalise duty structure wherever required.

In a pre-budget meeting with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, FIEO president Ashwani Kumar made a case for an extension of the Interest Equalisation Scheme for the next five years. "We request the scheme which is valid till 30th June, 2024 may be extended for a period of 5 years. Looking into the rates in interest rates consequent to the increase in Repo rate from 4.4 per cent to 6.5 per cent in the last 2 years, the subvention rates may be restored back from 3 per cent to 5 per cent for manufacturers in MSMEs," Kumar said.

Sardana, President & Head of Petchem-Industry Affairs, at Reliance Industries, said there is a need for a review of tariffs on imported goods from China related to the petrochem industry. "China has created a lot of overcapacity...They are putting a lot of products in India at a very cheaper price and a lot of dumping is happening. So, what we

requested is a review of the tariffs regime so that the domestic capacity can be increased," Sardana said. Shree Cement Chairman HM Bangur said the government should spend more on capital expenditure so that the cement industry benefits. "We sought faster and simultaneous environmental clearances and no hindrance in capex," he added.

Representing the services sector, Nasscom Vice President and Head of Public Policy Ashish Aggarwal said, "From the Budget perspective, we are looking for easing the transfer pricing regime as a lot of our industry is not able to benefit from transfer pricing provision." Nasscom also made a case for enhancing the scope of the safe harbour regime by increasing the threshold limit from Rs 200 crore in international transactions to Rs 2,000 crore so that global capability centres can take benefit from the safe harbour, he said. "We also suggested for strengthening of advance pricing agreement mechanism for promoting ease of doing business," he added.

Leather, footwear exporters seek PLI scheme in Budget to boost jobs, manufacturing, shipments

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Leather and footwear exporters body CLE on Tuesday sought an extension of the Production-linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for the sector with a view to boost job creation, domestic manufacturing and shipments. In a pre-budget meeting with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Council for Leather Exports Chairman Rajendra Kumar Jan also urged the government to provide import duty exemption on wet blue, crust and finished leather. "Implementation of PLI will lead to structural transformation of the industry and will make the country a major manufacturing hub," Jan said.

and an additional employment generation of about 2 million labour workforce, both directly and indirectly," he said. He added that the import of wet blue, crust and finished leathers during 2022-23 was USD 450.73 million, but the export of value-added products was USD 5.26 billion, which is more than 10 times the value of import. "Hence, it is requested that the 10 per cent import duty now being levied on wet blue, crust and finished leathers may kindly be removed to increase the price

competitiveness of the value-added products segment," Jan urged. "Jalan also requested the government to allow the export of all value-added leathers including crust leathers without any export duty. "This will lead to a quantum jump in the export of value-added leathers by at least USD 1 billion in the next 2-3 years," he said. Presently, there is a 40 per cent export duty on raw and pickled hides, crust and wet blue leather and 30 per cent on raw buffalo hides.

Stanley Lifestyles IPO subscribed over 96 times

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The luxury furniture brand Stanley Lifestyles got subscribed a whopping 96.25 times on the last day of subscription on Tuesday. The Rs 537 crore initial share-sale received bids for 98,56,97,520 shares against 1,02,41,507 shares on offer, according to NSE data. The portion for Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs) fetched 222.10 times subscription while the quota for non-institutional investors got subscribed 118.65 times. The quota for Retail Individual Investors (RIIs) attracted 18.13 times subscription. The Initial Public Offer (IPO) has a fresh issue of up to Rs 200 crore and an offer for sale of up to 91,33,454 equity shares. The initial share-sale has a price range of Rs 351-369 per share. The IPO of Stanley Lifestyles got subscribed 1.43 times on the first day of subscription on Friday.

Telcos eye four spectrum bands

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom operators showed interest in four spectrum bands -- 900 MHz, 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, and 2,500 MHz -- as the auction entered the fourth round around 3pm on Tuesday, sources said. Spectrum auction for over 10,500 Mhz mobile services worth over Rs 96,238 crore started at 10 am, an official statement said. "There was activity in four spectrum rounds initially -- 900 MHz, 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, and 2,500 MHz band. Spectrum auction entered the

fourth round around 3pm," a source told PTI. It is the 10th spectrum auction since the process for sale of radiowaves started through an online bidding process in 2010. The last spectrum auction was held in August 2022, which, for the first time, included radio waves for 5G services. The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has initiated the spectrum auction and notice inviting applications was issued on March 8. "The Ministry of

Communications announced that the following spectrum bands will go up for bidding in the upcoming auction -- 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, 2,300 MHz, 2,500 MHz, 3,300 MHz and 26 GHz. "Total quantum of spectrum being auctioned is 10,522.35 MHz in various bands valuing Rs 96,238.45 crores at reserve prices," the statement said. The 3,300 Mhz band and 26 Mhz band are seen as suitable bands for 5G services. Reliance Jio has deposited the highest earnest money of Rs 3,000 crore for the auction,

which provides the company with the potential to bid for maximum radio waves. According to pre-qualified bidder details released by the Department of Telecommunications, Bharti Airtel has submitted the earnest money deposit (EMD) of Rs 1,050 crore and Vodafone Idea (VIL) of Rs 300 crore. Telecom industry body Cellular Operators' Association of India Director General SP Kochhar said the 5G auctions will catalyze the rapid rollout of 5G services across the country, leading to

enhanced coverage and vastly improved connectivity. "By bridging the digital divide, the 5G spectrum auctions will ensure that even the most remote areas of our country gain access to high-speed internet, thereby fostering greater economic opportunities and social advancement. "The auctions also symbolize our commitment to 'Viksit Bharat' and we are confident that the outcomes of these auctions will lay a strong foundation for a prosperous and digitally empowered India," Kochhar said.

Tata Motors partners Bajaj Finance for commercial vehicle finance

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Motors on Tuesday said it has partnered with Bajaj Finance Ltd for offering financial solutions across its entire commercial vehicle portfolio. The company has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bajaj Finance Ltd, part of Bajaj Finserv Ltd, for the same and customers will benefit from the latter's wide reach, competitive interest rates, flexi loan and

digitally-enabled loan processing, Tata Motors said in a statement. "We are confident that their (Bajaj Finance) inaugural venture into commercial vehicle financing will allow them to tap the immense potential that the transportation sector brings in, and this partnership will benefit entrepreneurs across the country," Tata Motors Commercial Vehicles Vice President & Business Head - Trucks, Rajesh Kaul said.

With Bajaj Finance's wide network in rural and urban areas, customers will have easy access to financing solutions as per their requirements, he added. Bajaj Finance Deputy Managing Director Anup Saha said, "... We aim to make the process of purchasing a commercial vehicle accessible and hassle-free. We are confident that the partnership will empower more commercial vehicle owners with financing solutions."

Bank holds blood donation camp in G'gram



Gurugram: As part of its ongoing commitment to community welfare and to commemorate its 117th foundation day on Monday Punjab and Sind Bank Zonal Office Gurugram hosted a series of impactful initiatives starting from plantation drive on June 19, blood donation camp on June 20 and donation of water coolers to schools and hospitals on June 21. Darpan Agarwal, Zonal Manager Zone Gurugram expressed the enthusiasm for these initiatives, emphasising their importance in fostering a positive impact and strengthening community bonds.

Tenth spectrum auction for radiowaves worth ₹96,238 crore begins

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Auction for Rs 96,238 crore worth spectrum began on Tuesday that is expected to see firms like Airtel and Reliance Jio bidding to acquire airwaves that will help augment their 5G services. It is the 10th spectrum auction since the process for sale of radiowaves started through an online bidding process in 2010. "The government begins the auction of Spectrum for Telecom Services today at 10:00 AM," an official statement said on Tuesday. The last spectrum auction was held in August 2022, which, for the first time, included radio waves for 5G services. "To augment existing telecom services and maintain continuity of services, the

government will hold the spectrum auction on Tuesday, 25 June 2024. This is in line with the government's commitment to facilitate affordable, state-of-art high quality telecom services to all the citizens," the statement said. The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has initiated the spectrum Auction and notice inviting applications (NIA) was issued

on March 8. "The Ministry of Communications announced that the following spectrum bands will go up for bidding in the upcoming auction - 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1800 MHz, 2100 MHz, 2300 MHz, 2500 MHz, 3300 MHz and 26 GHz. Total quantum of spectrum being auctioned is 10,522.35 MHz in various bands valuing Rs 96,238.45 crores at reserve prices," the statement said.

The 3300 Mhz band and 26 Mhz band are seen as suitable bands for 5G services. Reliance Jio has deposited the highest earnest money of Rs 3,000 crore for the spectrum auction, which provides the company with the potential to bid for maximum radio waves. According to pre-qualified bidder details released by the Department of Telecommunications, Bharti Airtel has submitted the earnest money deposit (EMD) of Rs 1,050 crore and Vodafone Idea (VIL) of Rs 300 crore. Telecom industry body Cellular Operators' Association of India Director General SP Kochhar said the 5G auctions will catalyze the rapid rollout of 5G services across the country, leading to enhanced coverage and vastly improved connectivity.

According to telecom expert Parag Kar, Reliance Jio can bid for 37.36 per cent of the total spectrum value based on EMD, Bharti 13.07 per cent and Vodafone Idea 3.73 per cent. As per Kar's analysis, Jio may be keen on bidding for 800 Mhz band only, which may lead to an estimated cash flow of Rs 18,000 crore. "Bharti's targeted approach in the upcoming auction is aimed at consolidating and enhancing its spectrum efficiency. The total outflow for Bharti will be Rs 11,512 crore at the Reserve Price," Kar said in his blog. Debt-ridden Vodafone Idea (VIL) is likely to focus on strategic acquisitions, particularly in the 26 GHz band, to bring down its spectrum usage charge.

Gold rises ₹70, silver plunges ₹400

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose Rs 70 to Rs 72,550 per 10 grams in the local market on Tuesday in line with firm global trends, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had closed at Rs 72,480 per 10 grams on Monday. However, silver prices plunged by Rs 400 to Rs 91,500 per kg. In the previous session, it had settled at Rs 91,900 per kg. "In Delhi markets, spot gold prices (24 carats) are trading at Rs 72,550 per 10 grams, slightly up by Rs 70 from the previous close," Saamil Gandhi, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said. In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,324 per ounce, up USD 6 from the previous close.

Gold traded in a narrow range on Tuesday under gloomy market sentiment, Gandhi said. "... Traders' focus is turning to macroeconomic data due at the end of this week, including US GDP and the Federal Reserve's preferred gauge of consumer inflation, which could offer clues on when the central bank will pivot to monetary policy easing," he added. However, silver was down at USD 29.40 per ounce. It had ended at USD 29.47 per ounce in the previous session. According to Praveen Singh, Associate VP, Fundamental Currencies and Commodities at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, the yellow metal is expected to range trade ahead of the US GDP and Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) inflation data.



Chennaiyin FC sign goalkeeper Nawaz for upcoming ISL season

PTI ■ CHENNAI
Chennaiyin FC on Tuesday signed young Manipuri goalkeeper Mohammad Nawaz on a two-year contract ahead of the upcoming Indian Super League season. A product of AIFF Elite Academy, Nawaz was previously part of Mumbai City FC and FC Goa. He has earned a reputation as one of the most talented goalkeepers in Indian football with his remarkable performances. "Nawaz's arrival marks an exciting addition to Chennaiyin squad alongside other goalkeepers Samik Mitra and Prateek Kumar Singh. The 24-year-old brings youthful energy and exceptional potential, and is expected to make a significant impact in the upcoming season," the club said in a release.

Nawaz began his professional career at the age of 18 with FC Goa's reserve side in the I-League second division, where his excellent performance earned him a place in the main team. He was a vital cog in the FC Goa's Super Cup and ISL League Shield-winning campaigns in 2019 and 2020 respectively. Later, he moved to Mumbai City FC in 2021, with whom he won the League Shield in 2023 as well as the ISL title earlier this year. He has also represented India at the U-17 level. Nawaz has played 83 matches so far in his professional career, keeping 23 clean sheets. In 65 ISL games, he has recorded 15 clean sheets and 150 saves. Known for his quick reflexes, composure under pressure and impressive shot-stopping abilities, Nawaz has also saved three penalties in the ISL.

Brazil held to 0-0 draw by Costa Rica in a stunner to open Copa America play

AP ■ INGLEWOOD (US)
Brazil was held to a 0-0 draw by Costa Rica, with the international powerhouse inauspiciously failing to break through in its Copa America opener. Although Brazil controlled play and outshot Costa Rica 18-2, the Seleção was held scoreless by a defense led by goalkeeper Patrick Sequeira, who made three saves while recording the team's fourth consecutive clean sheet. Brazil had an apparent goal by Marquinhos disallowed in the first half after a lengthy VAR check, but the team known for decades of sublime offensive play never got closer to a score - and never got a break on several questionable refereeing calls - in front of a lively crowd of 67,158 dominated by their yellow-clad fans at SoFi Stadium. The result left Colombia on top of Group D after its 2-1 victory over Paraguay. Brazil has won the Copa America nine times, but its current transitional squad led by Real Madrid stars Vinicius Júnior and Rodrigo got off to a discouraging start. Brazil coach Dorival Júnior said the result wasn't thoroughly poor, noting his team's wide advantages in possession and chances. "I believe that in context, it was a well-played game," Dorival said through an interpreter. "We passed the ball well and



we created good opportunities. We weren't happy with the finishes, I agree. But in general, I think we presented very positive things. Nowadays it will be like this. We have to find ways and solutions to score. We're always working on it, every moment." The draw was a monumental achievement for Costa Rica, an undermanned CONCACAF team with the youngest roster in the tournament but a reputation for overachievement and sturdy defending led by Sequeira, who plays for Ibiza in Spain's third division. Costa Rica head coach Gustavo Alfaro, the Argentine veteran leading his first major tournament since his hiring last November, was pleased by his team's tenacity. "I hope (opponents) start looking at us with respect," Alfaro said through an interpreter. "Everyone thought we were dead before the movie started. We are going to play all

the games as if they were the final." Los Ticos had lost nine straight meetings with Brazil, but Alfaro's young group capably handled a night that could have left them starstruck. "All this is a nice reward for these kids," Alfaro said. "When Vini greeted them, it meant a lot to them. He is someone who plays at the highest level, and for us who are starting out, it was a very big test." Brazil controlled from the start with 75% possession in the first half, but couldn't break through. Vinicius was taken down in the box in the 22nd minute by a big hit from Haxzell Quirós, but got no whistle. In the 30th minute, Rodrigo went low to head on Raphinha's free kick to Marquinhos, who banged it home at the far post. A 3 1/2-minute VAR review followed, and Mexican referee César Ramos eventually agreed with the assistant's decision to wave it off for offside by a minuscule margin. In the 39th minute, a kick by Lucas Paquetá appeared to go off the hand of Juan Pablo Vargas in the penalty area, but Ramos made no call. Paquetá ripped a shot off the post in the 63rd minute. Costa Rica then survived when Quirós nearly headed the ball into his own net before Sequeira smothered it. Sequeira then made a diving save in the 79th minute when Guilherme Arana ripped a shot on net. Costa Rica survived a few more moments of chaos beginning in the 86th minute, with Rodrigo failing to capitalize on a pair of scoring chances and not getting a foul call against Jeyland Mitchell in the box. Bruno Guimarães then had a clean look at the net in the first minute of injury time, but pushed it just wide. Dorival said he wants to see more "dirty movement" in Brazil's next match. "We need to make life easier for whoever has the ball at their feet," the coach said. Brazil's national team is in a transitional period - particularly without Neymar, who hasn't played since tearing a knee ligament in a match for Brazil last October. Neymar spoke to team Sunday before watching the match at SoFi Stadium, where he got massive cheers in the second half when his worried face appeared on the scoreboard.



Much changed Spain beats Albania 1-0

AP ■ DUESSELDORF (GERMANY)
Spain changed almost its entire lineup and still kept up its victorious start to the European Championship with a 1-0 win over Albania, which was eliminated. With his team already assured of winning Group B, coach Luis de la Fuente changed 10 of his starters and Spain won all three group games at a Euros for the first time since 2008, when it went on to win the tournament. A 13th-minute goal from Ferran Torres and goalkeeper David Raya's stoppage-time save from Armando Broja ensured Spain completed the group stage without conceding a goal. "Every player is ready to play in this first 11 and that's key. Anyone can decide a game for you and players coming off the bench are very important as well," Torres, who made his first start of Euro 2024, said through a translator. "I will try to make things difficult for my coach so that he will have to play me." Torres scored with a deflection off the post from Dani Olmo's pass, and put his fingers to his ears in his goal celebration. He said the gesture meant he was listening to the fans, not blocking anything out. "I don't have anything to prove out there," Torres added. Italy was the second qualifier from Group B after drawing with Croatia 1-1. Albania needed at least a draw to have any hope of qualifying for the knockout stages for the first time, even as one of the best third-place teams. The loss meant it placed last. Albania's failure to beat Spain meant England,

Varga has surgery for facial fractures

AP ■ MUNICH
Hungary forward Barnabás Varga is expected to be released from hospital on Wednesday after undergoing surgery on facial fractures he sustained in a collision with Scotland's goalkeeper at the European Championship. The match on Sunday was halted for nearly 10 minutes so Varga could get treatment after colliding with Angus Gunn midway through the second half. The 29-year-old Varga was carried off on a stretcher and taken to a Stuttgart hospital. He had surgery on Monday. "Barnabás Varga underwent a successful operation at Klinikum Stuttgart on Monday afternoon," the Hungarian soccer federation wrote on X. "According to the information of the institution's doctors



specializing in facial injuries, the intervention was uncomplicated, so the Ferencváros striker can leave the hospital on Wednesday." Hungary won 1-0 with a dramatic stoppage-time goal from substitute Kevin Csoboth to leave it with a chance of advancing at Euro 2024, though Varga will play no further part. Several of Varga's teammates appeared to be in tears as the forward received treatment

on the field. They held up blankets to shield Varga as he was tended to by medical staff. The Hungary players frantically signaled to medical staff after the incident and several have since spoken out about how long it took for Varga to receive treatment. Varga also sustained a concussion. "I think, yes, it took so long. I can understand, everybody understands the protocol, and what they have to wait, but the life is more important than the football, then the health is more important," Csoboth said on Monday. "We wanted to push them to go (on the field), it doesn't matter what will happen, and that's the problem. We did not agree with them, why they did not go (on the field) immediately?" Hungary captain Dominik Szoboszlai rushed to run with the stretcher because he was concerned with how long it was taking to bring it onto the field. UEFA insists "there was no delay in the treatment of and assistance to" Varga. "We would like to clarify that the intervention of the team doctor happened within 15 seconds of the incident, followed immediately by the second stadium doctor, to conduct a first assessment of the injury and provide appropriate treatment, as per customary medical procedures," European soccer's governing body said in a statement. "The qualified pitchside emergency team were waiting pitchside, according to their protocol, and arrived with the stretcher as soon as their intervention was requested by the medics to evacuate the player for his immediate transfer to hospital."

Italy advances at Euro 2024



AP ■ LEIPZIG (GERMANY), Italy substitute Mattia Zaccagni scored in the last minute of stoppage time for Italy to advance to the knockout stage of the European Championship after drawing Croatia 1-1. Luka Modric's second-half strike looked like sending Croatia through as the Group B runner-up, but Zaccagni swept a brilliant shot inside the far post in the eighth minute of added time to cap a furious finale from the defending champions. Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic was unhappy so much time was added after a battling performance from his side. "You can't have eight minutes of added time after that game, it's nonsense," Dalic said. "There weren't so many breaks in play, or so many fouls to justify that. I don't want to cause a fuss but I think Croatia needs to be

But Spalletti bristled at a question asking if he was concerned about his team trailing going into stoppage time. "Worries and concerns are part and parcel of this job," the Italy coach said. "We did what we needed to do." Modric scored 33 seconds after having a penalty saved by Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma to become the oldest goal-scorer ever at the tournament. Modric, at 38 years, 289 days on Monday, broke the record held by Ivica Vastic, who was 38 years, 257 days, when he scored for Austria against Poland at Euro 2008. After Modric's penalty miss, Croatia immediately attacked again and Donnarumma had to save a shot by Ante Budimir. Modric pounced on the rebound in the 55th minute. The goal sent showers of beer into the sky as ecstatic Croatian fans jettisoned the cups they were holding in the celebrations. Alessandro Bastoni headed just over in response as the Italians suddenly found themselves in need of a goal. Defeat could have seen the defending champion knocked out depending on results in other games. Modric turned his skills to defense until he went off to stand ovations in the 80th. "He wasn't tired," said Dalic, who added he wanted to give his star a rest. But Italy maintained its pressure and it finally paid off at the last possible moment with Zaccagni's curling shot.

Equestrian Agarwalla to represent India in Paris Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Asian Games medallist Anush Agarwalla will represent the country in the dressage event of the Paris Olympics after pipping close contender Shruti Vora on better average, the Equestrian Federation of India (EFI) said on Tuesday. Agarwalla, who bagged gold in team dressage and bronze in individual dressage events at the 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games, was picked ahead of Vora after a careful evaluation of the recent performances of the two contenders. It will be India's first ever entry at the dressage event of the Olympics as largely riders in past editions competed in eventing categories only. Agarwalla (with his horse Sir Caramello Old) has been consistent since the qualification period began last year and achieved Minimum Eligibility Requirement four times, while veteran Vora earned the required two MERs this month. When an average was taken out of the contenders in the assessment, Agarwalla emerged winner. He had an average score of 67.695 per cent which was better than Vora's 67.163 per cent. "As per the criteria set by EFI, a rider-horse combination is required to achieve a minimum of 67 per cent twice between January 1, 2023 and June 24, 2024 to be eligible for the Paris Games



qualification," the federation said in a release. "According to EFI selection criteria, if more than one athlete is eligible then the athlete with the highest average in Grand Prix out of the best four events in the past one year shall be chosen to participate." Vora (with horse Magnanimous) had earned her second MER of the year with her second-place finish at the Brno Grand Prix in Czech Republic, where she scored 68.174 in the dressage event, there by becoming eligible for Olympic qualification. Vora had earned her first MER early this month when she became the first Indian rider to win a three-star Grand Prix event Dressage World Cup, held in Lipica, Slovenia with 67.761. Her other two GP performances had scores of 66.543 per cent and 66.174 per cent which were below MER level. Agarwalla achieved MERs four times -- 67.936 per cent (Wiesbaden, May 2024), 68.261 per cent (December 2023 in Mechelen), 67.152 per cent (December 2023 in Frankfurt), and 67.804 per cent (October 2023 in Wrocław). The decision was taken unanimously by the EFI's executive council. Fouaad Mirza had represented India at the 2020 Tokyo Games. Before him, Imtiaz Anees competed in 2002 Sydney Games, while Indrajit Lamba competed in 1996 Atlanta Games. Jitendrajit Singh Ahluwalia, Hussain Singh, Mohammed Khan and Darya Singh had all competed at the 1980 Moscow Games.

A lot of credit for my wickets goes to Bumrah: Arshdeep

PTI ■ GEORGETOWN (GUYANA)

The pinpoint accuracy of Jasprit Bumrah allows other bowlers in the Indian team to go for wickets even in extreme pressure situations, said pacer Arshdeep Singh.

The 25-year-old left-arm pacer is among the leading wicket-takers in the T20 World Cup with 15 scalps in six games at an average of 11.86 and economy rate of 7.41 runs per over.

Bumrah, on the other hand, has taken 11 wickets in the same number of games, conceding just 4.08 runs per over, a rarity in the shortest format.

"I guess a lot of credit goes to Jasprit because he puts a lot of pressure on the batters. He gives what, three or four runs

in and over," Arshdeep said after the 24-run win over Australia in Saint Lucia on Monday.

"So, batsmen are coming hard against me and when they are trying, I just have to try and bowl my best ball and there are a lot of chances of getting wickets there because on the other hand they see the runs are not coming and the asking rate is going high.

"So, they take more risk against me and there's a chance always of getting a wicket there. So there's a lot of credit of my wickets that goes to Jasprit," he said.

Spinner Kuldeep Yadav once again provided the wickets when the team was in need and only three games into the tournament, he has taken his tally to seven scalps.

"Kuldeep is a champion



spinner. Whenever he gets a chance, he delivers and he's always been in the wickets and today as well he was bowling from the tough end and even against the wind, he managed to bowl at around 6 an over and took crucial wickets.

"He is a really important player in our team and we are looking forward to take all from him and we hope he takes a lot of wickets," said Arshdeep, who had David Warner caught in the slips on Monday.

India face England in the second semi-final here on Thursday and they will have last edition's crushing semifinal loss to the defending champions in mind before taking the field at the Providence Stadium.

Asked about his plans for the

semifinals, Arshdeep added: "Right now, I'm not expecting anything out of that game, just we'll have a little celebration after this game and a long travel day ahead. And then we'll see what conditions there are and how we can do our best there."

Australia's best bowler on the day, Josh Hazlewood, also gave due credit to Kuldeep and Bumrah, saying they made the difference.

"I thought the wicket was - a pretty good wicket it was probably a 190-par score and they got the other side of it and we went underneath.

"I thought the chase was well on target for quite a lot of the time there and probably till Kuldeep and Jasprit, their eight overs, probably proved the difference again as they usually," said Hazlewood.



We let down all our fans, I apologise on behalf of team: Shanto

PTI ■ KINGSTOWN

Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto has apologised to the cricket-loving fans of his nation for their shambolic performance in the T20 World Cup and blamed his batting unit for the disappointing run that ended with a defeat against a gritty Afghanistan here.

After India beat Australia on Sunday, both Afghanistan and Bangladesh had realistic chance of making the semifinals but it was the Rashid Khan-led team that defended a below par 115 to make the last-four stage.

Bangladesh needed to knock off the target in 12.1 overs but there were all out for 105 in rain-marred Super Eight contest.

"First of all, I would like to say that as a team, we let down all the fans of Bangladesh who follow us and support us. So, I apologise on behalf of the team. As a batting group, we couldn't give the best to the people of the country," Shanto said at the post-match press conference.

"We feel sorry for that. We will try to come out of this situation in the future."

Crestfallen he may be, but Shanto drew some positives from the campaign.

"The positive side is that the bowlers have bowled very well.

Rishad (Hossain) has bowled very well in almost all matches in a big tournament like this. There were a lot of positives, but as a batting unit, we let down the fans and the people of our country.

"We gave them a hard time. But there was no lacking in our efforts. Everyone tried their best. Everyone was honest in their place. But at the end of the day, we couldn't make it. So, on behalf of the team, I apologise," he reiterated.

Shanto admitted that they had control of the proceedings against Afghanistan at one stage and should have won.

"As a whole bowling unit doing a great job especially, I mentioned Rishad whole tournament he bowled really well. I felt all the bowlers did a great job that is we can take forward and as a fielding group I think we felt really well in all the matches, so there are some lot of positive things that we can take going forward.

"It's a matter of a lot of frustration and a lot of pain too. Because before coming to play this match, everyone's plan was that we would win the match first. But if such a situation arises, then we will definitely take the chance that we had. But we couldn't take it. And the whole batting line-up made very bad decisions."

Fifties and hundreds do not matter, I want to bat with tempo: Rohit

PTI ■ GROS ISLET (ST LUCIA)

He fell short of a potentially record-shattering hundred, but milestones "don't matter" to India skipper Rohit Sharma, whose sole aim while batting is to "put bowlers under pressure" by hitting them all over the field.

Rohit's 92-run knock that came off 41 deliveries steered India to a 24-run win over former champions Australia in their final Super 8 outing of the ongoing T20 World Cup on Monday. The record for the fastest T20 World Cup hundred belongs to West Indian swashbuckler Chris Gayle, who pulled it off in 47 deliveries in the 2016 edition. Expectedly adjudged player of the match for the memorable effort, which was punctuated by eight sixes and seven fours, the 37-year-old said his focus was only on maintaining the "tempo" of the match. India will take on England in the second semifinal on June 27.

"It was a good wicket, and you want to try and back yourself to play those kinds of shots. I've been trying to do that for a few years now, and I'm glad it came off today. The fifties and hundreds don't matter, I wanted to bat with the same tempo and carry on.

"You want to make big scores, yes, but at the same time you want to make the bowlers think where the next shot is coming, and I think I managed to do that today," he added.

"You need to put the bowlers under pressure, and you need big scores for that. I tried to access all sides of the field, not just one side."

Winning was not a 'breeze' for India and Rohit said he had to tweak his batting style to take the wind out of the 2021 champions' sails.

Rohit played some delectable strokes on the off side after his opening partner Virat Kohli departed for a duck. With wind a perpetual hindrance, Rohit said he had



to play more strokes on the off side to negate the impact.

"I thought right from over number one, there was a strong breeze blowing across. They (Australia) changed their plan, bowling against the breeze, so I realised I had to open up the off side as well," he said.

"You've got to factor in the breeze and understand that the bowlers are smart as well

and open up all sides of the field. When you keep an open mind and not just think of one shot, you can access all areas of the field," said the India skipper after the match.

"...When you're playing on grounds like this where wind is a factor, anything is possible, but I thought we used the conditions very well. It was very pleasing to see

how we were getting through those overs and getting the wickets at the same time."

Rohit also said he knew wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav would be at his potent best in the West Indies after encountering seamer-friendly conditions in the US. Kuldeep repaid his faith with excellent figures of 2/24 in his four overs on Monday.

"Kuldeep, we understand the strengths he has, but you have to use it when you need it. The pitches in New York were seamer-friendly, but we knew he would play a big role later."

The skipper added that he would like India to continue playing the same way in the knockouts as well.

"We don't want to do anything different (in the knockouts). We want to play the same way, understand what the individuals need to do in a given situation, and play freely."

"So far we've been doing that consistently, and semifinals, we have to try and do the

same thing. It'll be nice (to play England in the semifinal). Nothing changes for us, we want to focus on what we can do as a team, and take the game on."

MARSH RUES MISSED CHANCES

Australian skipper Mitchell Marsh, who was guilty of grassing a sitter and also failed to build on his good start with the bat, conceded that India were better on the day.

"It's disappointing...Today India got the better of us. I think over the course of 40 overs there's a lot of small margins, but honestly, India were the better team," he admitted.

"We've seen for 15 years what Rohit Sharma can do in that kind of mood, and he got off to an absolute flier. In a run chase like that, you're in it if you can keep it at tens (10 runs per over) for as long as possible, but India were too good for us."

Warner makes low-key exit from cricket after Afghans beat Bangladesh

PTI ■ KINGSTOWN

Australia batting great David Warner's 15-year-long international career, dotted with glorious achievements and controversies in equal measure, has come to an anticlimactic end after Afghanistan beat Bangladesh, eliminating the former champions from the T20 World Cup at the Super Eight phase.

Australia, the 2021 champions, finished at third place in the Super 8s Group 1 table with just two points -- from the win against Bangladesh. They had suffered a shocking loss to Afghanistan and a humbling defeat to India.

The 37-year-old Warner, who made his international debut in January 2009 in a T20I

match, thus made a low-key exit from international cricket with Australia's 24-run loss to India on June 24 at Gros Islet being his last match.

There was no guard of honour or standing ovation, befitting one of Australia's all-time great batters. He made six runs off six balls in the match, edging Arshdeep Singh as Suryakumar Yadav took a low catch. He walked off the pitch with his head down, not knowing whether that was his last game.

Warner's retirement has been gradual. He played his final ODI match in the World Cup final win over India in November 2023 and his last Test against Pakistan in January. He has long signalled that this T20 World Cup would be his final tournament.

He retires as Australia's highest



scorer and seventh-most prolific batter in the world in T20 format with 3,277 runs from 110 matches, at an average of 33.43 and strike rate of 142.47. He scored one hundred and 28 fifties in the shortest format.

From 112 Tests, he has scored 8,786 runs at an average of 44.59 with 26 hundreds and 37

fifties between 2011 and 2024. He also scored 6,932 runs from 161 ODI matches at an average of 45.30 with the help of 22 centuries and 33 half centuries.

Warner, who has 49 centuries across formats and close to 19,000 runs in international cricket, had acknowledged that his name will forever be linked to the sandpaper gate scandal that took place at Newlands, Cape Town during a Test match against South Africa in 2018.

Warner's involvement in the scandal in the Newlands Test, when Cameron Bancroft used sandpaper to scuff the ball earned him a one-year ban, the same punishment as that of the then skipper Steven Smith.

Warner was also banned for life from taking any leadership role in the Australian cricket setup.

Test cricket at very low point in West Indies: Sarwan

PTI ■ GEORGETOWN (GUYANA)

Ramnaresh Sarwan, one of the most prolific batters to have played for the West Indies, is leading a comfortable life after retirement but when one talks him to him about the health of Test cricket in the region, he paints a grim picture, fearful of a talent exodus to the USA.

The unexpected growth of T20 cricket and players' preference for the shortest format has put red-ball cricket on the backburner. First-class teams play as little as five games per season, which Sarwan thinks should be increased to at least 10.

Speaking to PTI, the 44-year-old also lamented the lack of cricket facilities in the region. He featured in 87 Tests and 181 ODIs aggregating more than 10,000 runs across formats and played alongside fellow Guyanese Shivnarine Chanderpaul and the great Brian Lara for the better part of his career.

"Yeah well Test cricket is at a very low point to be honest. Among the games that we are playing again in the Caribbean, I don't think it's sufficient to develop our players but I also think there is this major threat of T20 cricket where a lot of people are showing interest in the shortest format," he said.

"I think one of the biggest challenges we've had is facilities in the region. I think the cricket board has been working on it. So we'll see what happens," he added.

I see lot of Caribbean players moving to USA

Sarwan has nothing against players making money from the plethora of franchise leagues but the lure is impacting the format he loves and took great pride playing.

With the way the game is going, Sarwan foresees a mass exodus of the Caribbean players to mainland America where the game has got a major push with hosting of the T20 World Cup and inclusion of the sport in the 2028 LA Olympics programme.

"I think having T20 format in the US which is so close to the Caribbean with so many players of course they would have the opportunity now to participate in the short format of the game in the US."



"So you might find a lot of people jumping ship in terms of coming to the US and start participating in T20 and of course try and see if they could find a way in terms of becoming legal in the US and then start hopefully pushing the play in the US," said Sarwan, who also spends a lot of time in the US.

The former West Indies captain has lot on his plate. He runs a couple of restaurants in Georgetown, one being an Italian-American joint and the other serves Thai and Indian fusion food.

Talking more about Tests, Sarwan, who was known for his sound technique and wrist work, said an immediate solution is not in sight.

"I don't think it's something that can be done only in the Caribbean. I think the ICC probably would have to intervene to put a limit in terms of how many T20 tournaments are being played around the world.

"Of course you want to have the best players available for all those leagues and of course you also want to be able to represent the countries. So I think it's a major challenge in terms of saying what is the ideal scenario. At some point in time, the ICC probably would have to intervene which I really don't see happening in the near future," said Sarwan.

Has the pride of playing for West Indies diminished in the era of T20 leagues?

"I don't want to say it's diminished. But probably because of the shorter format of the game, it has taken a lot of players' attention. So, they probably would have worked more in the shorter format rather than the longer format."

Afghanistan's run to semifinals will inspire youth back home, says Rashid

PTI ■ KINGSTOWN

Skipper Rashid Khan believes that Afghanistan's maiden T20 World Cup semifinal qualification, following spectacular wins over New Zealand and Australia along the way, is a momentous feat that will inspire the youth of the strife-torn nation.

Afghanistan, who became a full ICC member only in 2017, scripted history by qualifying for their maiden T20 World Cup semifinal with a win over Bangladesh here.

"I think the semi-final is going to be a massive, massive like inspiration for the youngsters back home in Afghanistan. That Afghanistan team get into the semis for the first time," Rashid said at the post match press conference.

"And we have done it under 19 level, but this level we haven't done that. Even Super Eight was first time for us and then in semis," he added.

Moments after the win, visuals of jubilant fans back home celebrating Afghanistan's historic achievement started doing the rounds on social

media.

With the feat, Afghanistan have showed how much they have progressed in the white ball formats. At last year's ODI World Cup, they upset defending champions England and former winners Sri Lanka and Pakistan. They are continuing their giant slaying run at the T20 World Cup having beaten heavyweights New Zealand and Australia.

"The cricket we have played in the whole tournament so far - I think we deserve to be in the semis. The way everyone took the responsibility of getting into the game and performing best for the team," said Rashid.

"So, I don't know how I can describe my feeling but it's a massive achievement for us as a team and as a nation to be in the semis and now looking forward to the semis."

The Afghanistan cricket team is a group of individuals who have honed their skills by plying their trade in T20 leagues around the world. But when they come together to play for their country, it's hard to find a more passionate bunch.

Afghanistan have found the



perfect head coach in former England cricketer Jonathan Trott, who balances things out with his calm and composed demeanour.

The result is a side high on self belief.

"To me, there is no good team and bad team. Every team is equal to each other. As long on a day, we took the right decision the right time, and that's where the difference comes when you're a loser. So

other than that, skill-wise, everyone is equal, I think," Rashid said.

An unbeaten South African team awaits them in the semifinal. But the Proteas were stretched a few times in the tournament, especially by minnows Nepal, who stumbled at the final juncture, losing by a run.

"Well, it's always you get that kind of inspiration for any team you watch on TV and

those small totals when team defend that it gives you lots of things to learn from and definitely the way Nepal performed in the whole competition was something pleasing to see."

"They have played great cricket against all the sides they have played. And that's how T20 is all about. You need to have that kind of self-belief that we are capable of beating any side as long we do the right thing in

the right time and we're making sure we keep the thing simple." There was a moment during the game against Bangladesh when Gulbadin Naib dramatically fell on his back, clutching his thigh after Trott signalled his players to slow things down.

But minutes later, not only was the all-rounder back on the field but he also went on to take Tanzim Hasan's wicket, causing several former players and commentators to question the genuineness of his discomfort.

But Rashid thought to play down the incident.

"Well, he had some cramp, I don't know what happened to him and I don't know what's going on in social media but that doesn't matter - it's just the end field injury which comes and then we haven't lost any overs, the rain came and we just went off, it's not something like brought a massive difference in the game."

"We came back on field after five minutes and there was no massive difference. For me, it's just like a small injury comes in, then you have to take some time."