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**weather report**

**Kolkata Weather**

34 ℃ | ℉

Precipitation 0%

Humidity 85%

Wind 21 km/h

Mostly cloudy with a t-storm

**Indian Indices**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| NIFTY 50 | | |
| 23557.90 | 92.30 | 0.39 |
| SENSEX | | |
| 77301.14 | 308.37 | 0.40 |
| NIFTY BANK | | |
| 50440.90 | 438.90 | 0.88 |
| NIFTY IT | | |
| 34802.95 | 204.40 | 0.59 |
| BSE SMALLCAP | | |
| 51694.00 | 494.01 | 0.96 |

**Gold Rates**

Today gold price in Kolkata
66,200 72,220
»
Today gold price in Bangalore
66,200 72,220
»
Today gold price in India
66,200 (₹-100) 72,220(₹-110)

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# Bridge Collapses Before Inauguration In Bihar's Araria

## Portion of bridge collapses in Bihar's Araria before inauguration



**ōPatna, 18 June:** A portion of an under-construction bridge collapsed in Bihar' Araria today. The concrete bridge over the Bakra River, built after spending crores, came apart in seconds. Visuals showed the bridge, over the fast-flowing Bakra River, tilted on one side and a crowd gathered on the banks of the river near the bridge, recording the moment it collapsed.

There are no reports of injuries. The bridge was constructed for ease of commute between Kursakanta and Sikti in the Araria district of Bihar. Built at ₹ 12 crore, the bridge collapsed before its inauguration. The collapsed portion washed away within seconds and the people started running toward safety. In another video, a few people are standing dangerously close to the edge of the remaining portion of the bride. While many people are standing under it.

A major part of the collapsed portion was built over the river. The section built on the banks of the Bakra River remains intact. In March this year, one person was killed and several others were trapped after an under-construction bridge collapsed in Bihar's Supaul. The bustling construction site near Maricha turned into a scene of chaos and devastation after the collapse in the morning, prompting urgent rescue efforts by local authorities and volunteers.

According to reports, the bridge was being built at a cost of ₹ 984 crore over the river Kosi. The accident bears an uncanny resemblance to the collapse of an under-construction bridge in Bihar's Bhagalpur, which had sparked a wr of words between the state government and the opposition BJP.

A part of a Rs 12 crore under-construction bridge over the Bakra River collapsed in Bihar's Araria district on Tuesday. A video of the Bihar bridge collapse showed the plunged ramp structure submerged half in the river, while one of the pillars inclined. Reports suggested that the bridge, being constructed on the Padaria Ghat was slated for inauguration soon.

Locals have alleged the use of poor quality material in the bridge construction and demanded strict action against the contractors and public works department officials responsible. Similar concerns were voiced by the local BJP MLA Vijay Kumar who alleged negligence by the construction company's owner.

"The bridge has collapsed due to negligence by the construction company's owner. We demand that the administration should conduct an investigation," Sikti MLA said.

According to details, the bridge's construction was complete, but since the approach roads had yet to be completed, it was not opened to the public. Eight pillars were constructed in the third phase, while the remaining eight pillars were constructed in the first and second phases.



Union Minister for Panchayati Raj and Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh called on President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi on Tuesday.

## "Scared When We Think About Travelling By Train": Survivors Of Bengal Crash

**New Delhi, 18 June:** Survivors of an double train crash that killed nine people described on Tuesday their terror when a driver missed a signal and rammed a goods train into a passenger express.The force of the crash on Monday was so strong that one carriage was initially thrust high into the air, precariously balanced on another.Heavy goods carriages were flung off the tracks, lying high in tumbled piles.

"I did not feel like I was going to survive," said one passenger, Arti Roy, who lost her belongings when the carriages crumpled, twisted and then flipped off the rails.The incident in West Bengal is the latest to hit India's rail network, which carries millions of passengers each day -- and the most recent reported failure of drivers missing signals.Jahangir Alam, 35, who lives near the crash site in the Phansidewa area of Darjeeling, rushed to offer his help.He said the sight of the wrecked trains terrified him."These accidents that are happening are very dangerous," he said."Whenever we think about travelling by train, we feel scared inside."

Jaya Varma Sinha, chairman of India's Railway Board, said that the driver of the goods train had "disregarded the signal" and hit the back of the passenger train.The driver and his co-driver both died in the crash. Sinha said the casualties could have been worse, but a guard wagon and two others carrying post at the back of the passenger train took the brunt of the crash.Officials said Tuesday that the number of dead had risen to nine after one of the around 50 injured died in hospital."The death toll from the accident has risen to nine, with the death of an injured passenger," Eastern Railway official Kausik Mitra told AFP.

"Around 40 injured people are still admitted to the hospital, but their condition is stable." But the express train -- minus its final five carriages which were derailed or damaged -- was able to limp on and continue its journey.It reached Kolkata with about 500 passengers on Monday night."It was a horrific experience," said Antara Das, 35, told AFP. "God has saved us."Trains resumed operating on parallel tracks, with work to repair the line and clear the twisted metal debris of the carriages expected to finish later Tuesday.

Many of the carriages have since been cleared from the lines, pushed onto the grassy verge.As trains passed them on Tuesday morning, passengers stared out at the wreckage.India has one of the world's largest rail networks and has seen several disasters over the years, the worst in 1981 when a train derailed while crossing a bridge in Bihar, killing an estimated 800 people.

## Kavach implementation progressing rapidly on 3,000 km routes: Railways



**New Delhi, 18 June:** A day after the collision of two trains in West Bengal, the Railway Ministry Tuesday said the implementation of Automatic Train Protection System, also known as Kavach, is going on in a rapid manner on 3,000 route kilometer, and once completed it will help prevent such accidents. A goods train rammed into the stationary Sealdah-bound Kanchanjunga Express near Rangapani, 30 km from the New Jalpaiguri station in Siliguri, on Monday morning killing 10 people and injuring around 40. The accident triggered a wave of criticism of the railways over the delay in the implementation of the Kavach.

In response, the ministry said Kavach is a very complex system involving six major sub-systems: laying optical fibre cable along the track, installing telecom towers along tracks, installing telecom equipment on these towers and on trains, setting up data centres at stations and integrating them with the signal system, installing equipment on tracks; and finally installing equipment on locomotives and trains.

"The system was finally certified in 2019. Despite Covid challenges, work progressed and now the railway as well as equipment manufacturers are geared up to take up large projects. At this point of time, work is progressing rapidly on 3,000 km routes. Design work for other routes is also progressing very fast," a senior official from the railway ministry said, requesting anonymity.

According to the railways, the Kavach system, developed by the Research Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO), can trigger automatic application of brakes in case of an emergency when the train driver fails to act in time, ensuring safe train operations even in bad weather.

"So far, Kavach has already been implemented on 1,465 route km and 121 locomotives. Besides, the Agra division has developed a complete Kavach network on the 80-km stretch between Mathura (excluding the station) and Palwal to conduct trials on various types of engines and trains," the official said.Recently, the Railway Board Chairperson and CEO Jaya Verma Sinha and railway officials of North Central and Northern Railways inspected a Kavach trial in Vande Bharat train between Palwal and Vridavan.

Sinha, while travelling in the eight-car set Vande Bharat, which ran at 160 kmph speed, had a first hand experience of Kavach working system at red signals, loop lines and other speed restriction points. The Railway Ministry also said there is a steep decline in the number of consequential train accidents, from 473 in 2000-01 to 40 in 2022-23.



Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge party leader Rahul Gandhi addresses a press conference and retaining his Rae Bareli Lok Sabha seat while party leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will contest from Wayanad seat, in New Delhi on Monday. Party General Secretary KC Venugopal is also seen.

## Alka Yagnik's 'Rare Condition' That Led To Hearing Loss



**New Delhi, 18 June:** Veteran Bollywood singer Alka Yagnik, who revealed that she has been diagnosed with a "rare sensory hearing loss" due to a viral attack, has suffered a type of hearing loss caused by damage to the inner ear or the nerve pathways that transmit sound from the ear to the brain. According to Dr Manish Munjal, Vice Chairman, ENT, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Delhi, sudden sensory hearing loss is a medical emergency as it can become irreversible if not aggressively treated in 48-72 hours. "The centre of the problem is the inner ear organ called Cochlea, where it happens due to damage to the hair cells," Munjal told IANS on Tuesday.The causes may range from simple viruses like Herpes, Varicella, and Mumps or sudden loud exposure to noise levels above 85 decibel (dB).Munjal also mentioned that this disorder may also result from more serious causes like painkiller overdose, chemotherapy, tumour compression, meningitis and stroke. "The need of the hour is usually to rush to an ENT specialist to get the necessary ear examination done as well as get an audiometry test. Once diagnosed, the treatment may require a cocktail of antivirals, oral and intratympanic steroids, as well as rest from noisy environments," he stated.According to the doctor, once the treatment is initiated, the chances of recovery are usually 70 per cent and above.

## Congress leader Rahul Gandhi slams PM Narendra Modi for maintaining 'silence' on Neet exam issue

**New Delhi, 18 June:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for maintaining "silence" on the NEET exam issue and asserted that his party is committed to strongly raising the voice of the youth from the streets to the Parliament for ensuring strong policies against paper leaks.

The former Congress president said the arrests made in Bihar, Gujarat and Haryana clearly show that there has been organised corruption in the examination in a planned manner and added these BJP-ruled states have become the "epicentre" of paper leaks.

"Narendra Modi, as usual, is maintaining silence on the tampering with the future of more than 24 lakh students in the NEET examination," Gandhi said in a post on X in Hindi.

"The arrests made in Bihar, Gujarat and Haryana clearly show that there has been organised corruption in the examination in a planned manner and these BJP ruled states have become the epicentre of paper leak," he claimed.

In the manifesto, the Congress had guaranteed to secure the future of the youth by making strict laws against paper leaks. "While fulfilling the responsibility of the opposition, we are committed to formulate such tough policies by strongly raising the voice of the youth from the streets to the Parliament and putting pressure on the government," he said.

Gandhi's remarks came after the Supreme Court on Tuesday said even if there was "0.001 per cent negligence" on the part of anyone in the conduct of the NEET-UG 2024 examination, it should be thoroughly dealt with.



Observing that students have to labour hard while preparing for these examinations, the apex court said the litigation pertaining to the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (Undergraduate)-2024 examination ought not be treated as adversarial.

"Even if there is 0.001 per cent negligence on the part of anyone, it should be thoroughly dealt with," a vacation bench of Justices Vikram Nath and SVN Bhatti told the advocates appearing for the Centre and the National Testing Agency (NTA).

The NTA conducts the all India pre-medical entrance test. The bench was hearing two separate petitions raising grievances, including on grace marks given to the students in the examination held on May 5. The NEET PG 2024 exam is scheduled to be held on 23 June online at various centres across the country. The NEET PG 2024 admit card will be issued on 18 June. The NEET PG 2024 result is expected to be declared on 15 July.

NEET PG 2024 exam will be held online in computer-based mode. The medium of the NEET PG 2024 exam is English. The duration of the exam is 3 hours 30 minutes. The exam paper will be divided into 3 sections. There will be sectional timing for each section. There will be a total of 200 multiple-choice questions in the NEET PG 2024 exam, carrying a total of 800 marks.

## US, India must remain at forefront of technology for larger strategic interest: Ajit Doval

**New Delhi, 18 June:** India and the US must remain at the forefront of developing critical technologies as part of a larger strategic interest, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval said on Tuesday in presence of his American counterpart Jake Sullivan.Doval's comments came a day after he and Sullivan unveiled a raft of transformative initiatives to deepen India-US cooperation in areas of artificial intelligence, semiconductor, critical minerals, advanced telecommunication and defence space.

"The US and India have got to remain at the forefront of technology in case we need to protect and defend our value systems and it is part of a larger strategic interest," Doval said. The National Security Advisor (NSA) was addressing the iCET (India-US initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology) industry roundtable hosted by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

The iCET was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden in May 2022 with an aim to forge greater collaboration between India and the US in areas of critical technologies.In his remarks, Doval highlighted the role of industry in technology and the progress of iCET since its inception, according to a CII statement.

"iCET has achieved more than we could imagine," Doval said, highlighting the progress made across the defence innovation roadmap and startups, and emphasised the importance of the semiconductor industry.In his address, Sullivan noted three important buckets for technology partnerships, the first being innovation, the second as production, and the third being deployment.

The top Biden administration official highlighted the importance of innovation and emphasised the need for government support for the private sector. There exists bipartisan support for Indian industry in the US, he said adding that building the ecosystem and supply chain is the key to production.



Sullivan said that the core of iCET is about the idea of India and US being able to support each other and to encourage greater collaboration in the technology ecosystem, jointly innovate and find solutions to challenges. Both the NSAs assured the industry that they welcome industry highlighting specific issues and due diligence will be done to resolve any barriers which hold back deeper and closer India US ties.

The Initiative for iCET represents a landmark agreement between the two countries on emerging technologies such as AI, semiconductors, biotech, and defense innovation.

Chandrajit Banerjee, the director general of CII, stated that under iCET India and US are working on sectors such as AI, biotech, critical materials and minerals, semiconductors among others to help enable deeper engagement between the two nations.

Representatives from industries spoke about their experiences of collaboration and the ways and means by which they planned to take India-US collaboration further through government facilitation.Sullivan visited Delhi from June 17 to 18, in the first trip to India by a senior Biden Administration official after the Modi government came to power for the third term.

The US National Security Adviser was accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising senior US government officials and industry leaders. Sullivan's visit to India came three days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden had a brief conversation on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Italy's Apulia region.

As the world's two oldest and largest democracies, the United States and India share a unique bond of friendship and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's visit will further deepen the partnership to create a safer and more prosperous Indo-Pacific, the White House has said.

# New Town authorities to set up disaster management units for three action areas

**Kolkata, June 18 :** The New Town authorities are setting up three disaster management units for the three action areas, an official of the New Town Kolkata Development Authority (NKDA) said.The NKDA provides civic services in New Town.

A senior NKDA official said that the decision to have three teams dedicated to each action area was taken keeping in mind that the city often gets lashed by thunderstorms."We have decided to have three teams for New Town that can be pressed into service in case of any disaster, particularly storms at a very short notice," said the official.




In Calcutta, storms often leave a trail of destruction. At least 120 trees had been uprooted in and around the city when Cyclone Remal made landfall on May 27.

The NKDA official said that each of these units will be equipped with power-cutting tools such as electric chain saws, hydraulic earthmovers, payloaders, dump trucks and trained personnel who can be deployed in case of thunderstorms and cyclones.

The official said that these teams can also be pressed into service to aid first responders such as the fire and emergency services department in case the need arises.

Each of these teams will be stationed in NKDA offices of action areas I, II and III where adequate parking space can be arranged."These teams will form the core of the disaster management unit and if need be depending on the scale of the storm more manpower can be deployed," the official said.

New Town has one advantage over the rest of the city as the authorities here don't allow any advertising panels with steel frames and the street lights as well as other street furniture are largely free from any overhead cable.

"We do not allow advertising on the Main Arterial Road. Stringent rules are in place even in the lanes off the arterial road," said an NKDA official.This is one of the reasons why lamp posts don't topple over as they don't have to bear the weight of cables wrapped around them.

West Bengal is set to become the 60th most climate risk-prone region in the world by 2050 among the more than 2,600 regions across the world that have been studied, says a global report (XDI's Gross Domestic Climate Risk) published recently.

# New Town authorities to set up disaster management units for three action areas

**Kolkata, June 18 : Kolkata, 18 June:** A traffic signal post in front of the Lake Mall on Rashbehari Avenue broke and was hanging over the road on Monday morning for about an hour after the current collector rod of a tram hit the post.



The bogies of the tram had gone past the signal post when the current collector wasdislodged from the overhead electric cables supplying power to the tram, said an officer of Kolkata Police's traffic department.

A current collector is a device at the back of a tram that goes up from the rear bogey and stays attached to the overhead cables. It draws electricity from the overhead cables.The driver failed to notice that the current collector had loosened from the overhead wires and was dangling.

"The current collector was dangling but the tram was moving ahead because of inertia. It hit the signal post, which then broke because of the impact. The signal post had also rusted, which is why it broke," said the police officer.

The incident happened around 10.30am and the broken signal post was removed from there around an hour later, said the officer.The police had first thought about temporarily restricting traffic along the stretch of Rashbehari Avenue near the mall.

However, Monday being a holiday the number of vehicles on the road was fewer and traffic restriction on the stretch was not required.All vehicles were asked to take the left lane on the Rashbehari Avenue-SP Mukherjee Road crossing-bound flank since the broken post was hanging over the right lane of the flank.

The police did not lodge any complaint against the tram's driver, said the traffic police officer."The signal post will be replaced soon. This was the secondary signal post. The primary signal post is still there and working," said the officer.

Metro had earlier written about the crumbling condition of poles along Calcutta's roads.

A thick bunch of cables are tied around most of the poles and the weight of the wires has tilted the poles in many places.

A bunch of cables was also tied around the traffic signal post in Lake Market that broke on Monday.The Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC), the custodian of the electric poles along the city's roads, recently decided not to allow any advertisements on the poles.A KMC official said the civic body would not give any fresh permission to install advertisements on electric poles as these made the structures unsafe.

The traffic signal post that broke on Monday had a rectangular advertisement board attached to it.A KMC official said the civic body is not the custodian of traffic signal posts and all advertisements stuck to traffic signal posts were installed with permission from the police only.A traffic police officer said there was no instruction yet from Kolkata Police's top brass to remove advertisements from the signal posts.

Trams should be seen as a transport of utility and not merely as a piece of heritage, an urban planner, who is also a member of a Calcutta High Court-appointed committee to preserve trams, said .

The fate of trams is being determined by bureaucrats without involving transport policy planners, said Dipankar Sinha, a former head of the town planning department of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (CMC). "Trams are not just a piece of heritage. They should be seen as a transport of utility."A group of Kolkatans — a filmmaker, a green activist, an advocate of trams and a politician — came together to speak up for preserving trams in Kolkata.

Ajay Mittal, the green activist, said Kolkata's traffic management was only focused on managing the movement of cars.

"A day will come when the road space will not be enough to accommodate cars even after removing trams. We have to move people and not only cars," Mittal told a news conference on Wednesday.The speakers cited the instances of stopping trams on Rabindra Sarani and Bentinck Street. "Stopping trams has not been able to reduce snarls on these roads. If you keep adding cars and target trams, a day will come when the roads will have no space to carry cars."In August, a division bench of the high court, headed by Chief Justice T.S. Sivagnanam, formed an advisory committee that would work to preserve trams in Kolkata.

# Kanchanjunga Express That Was Hit By Goods Train Reaches Sealdah



**Kolkata, 18 June:** The unaffected coaches of the Kanchanjunga Express, which was hit by a goods train near New Jalpaiguri, leaving nine ead and several injured, arrived at Sealdah station in Kolkata on Tuesday morning with nearly 850 passengers, according to an Eastern Railway official.

At least four rear coaches of the train were severely damaged in the collision at Rangapani, about 10 km from New Jalpaiguri station, on Monday morning."Around 800 to 850 passengers arrived at Sealdah at 3.16 am," ER spokesperson Kausik Mitra said.

The unaffected coaches began their onward journey from the accident site on Monday afternoon.The passengers were provided with medical facilities, food, and water at various stations, including Malda Town and Sealdah, he added.Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim, West Bengal Transport Minister Snehasis Chakraborty, and Divisional Railway Manager of Sealdah Division Deepak Nigam were present at Sealdah station to help passengers reach home safely, Mitra said.

Train 13174 Kanchanjunga Express from Agartala, scheduled to reach Sealdah at 7.20 pm on Monday, arrived eight hours behind schedule.The transport department provided 16 buses and 60 cars to transport passengers home, he added.

# "Scared When We Think About Travelling By Train": Survivors Of Bengal Crash

**Kolkata, 18 June :** Survivors of an double train crash that killed nine people described on Tuesday their terror when a driver missed a signal and rammed a goods train into a passenger express.

The force of the crash on Monday was so strong that one carriage was initially thrust high into the air, precariously balanced on another.Heavy goods carriages were flung off the tracks, lying high in tumbled piles.

"I did not feel like I was going to survive," said one passenger, Arti Roy, who lost her belongings when the carriages crumpled, twisted and then flipped off the rails.

The incident in West Bengal is the latest to hit India's rail network, which carries millions of passengers each day -- and the most recent reported failure of drivers missing signals.

Jahangir Alam, 35, who lives near the crash site in the Phansidewa area of Darjeeling, rushed to offer his help.He said the sight of the wrecked trains terrified him.

"These accidents that are happening are very dangerous," he said."Whenever we think about travelling by train, we feel scared inside."

Jaya Varma Sinha, chairman of India's Railway Board, said that the driver of the goods train had "disregarded the signal" and hit the back of the passenger train.

The driver and his co-driver both died in the crash.Sinha said the casualties could have been worse, but a guard wagon and two others carrying post at the back of the passenger train took the brunt of the crash.

'Horrific experience'

Officials said Tuesday that the number of dead had risen to nine after one of the around 50 injured died in hospital.

"The death toll from the accident has risen to nine, with the death of an injured passenger," Eastern Railway official Kausik Mitra told AFP.

"Around 40 injured people are still admitted to the hospital, but their condition is stable."

But the express train -- minus its final five carriages which were derailed or damaged -- was able to limp on and continue its journey.It reached Kolkata with about 500 passengers on Monday night.

"It was a horrific experience," said Antara Das, 35, told AFP. "God has saved us."Trains resumed operating on parallel tracks, with work to repair the line and clear the twisted metal debris of the carriages expected to finish later Tuesday.

As trains passed them on Tuesday morning, passengers stared out at the wreckage.India has one of the world's largest rail networks and has seen several disasters over the years, the worst in 1981 when a train derailed while crossing a bridge in Bihar, killing an estimated 800 people.

In June last year, a three-train collision killed nearly 300 people in Odisha.In that crash, a packed passenger train was mistakenly diverted onto a loop line and slammed into a stationary goods train loaded with iron ore.

Three railway employees were later charged with culpable homicide and destruction of evidence.

# Iran Slaps 1-Year Prison Term On Nobel Prize Laureate For "Propaganda"



**Tehran , June 18 :** An Iranian court has sentenced Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi to a year in prison for "propaganda against the state", the jailed activist's lawyer said on Tuesday.Mohammadi, 52, has been jailed since November 2021 over several past convictions relating to her advocacy against the obligatory hijab for women and capital punishment in Iran.

Lawyer Mostafa Nili said on social media platform X that "Mohammadi was sentenced to one year in prison for propaganda against the system."Nili said "the reasons for issuing this sentence" include calls to boycott parliamentary elections, letters to Swedish and Norwegian lawmakers and "comments about Mrs Dina Ghalibaf".

Rights groups have said that Ghalibaf, a journalist and student, had been taken into custody after accusing security forces on social media of putting her in handcuffs and sexually assaulting her during a previous arrest at a metro station.

Ghalibaf has since been released.The Iranian judiciary's Mizan Online website said on April 22 that Ghalibaf "had not been raped" and that she was being prosecuted for making a "false statement".

Mohammadi has refused to attend a trial session in Tehran earlier this month, and in March shared an audio message from prison in which she decried a "full-scale war against women" in the Islamic republic.

Iranian police in recent months have intensified enforcement of the country's Islamic dress code for women, notably making use of video surveillance.

Under rules adopted shortly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, women in Iran are required to cover their hair and dress modestly in public spaces.

# Biden Issues Big Immigration Relief Seeking Balance After Border Crackdown



**Washington , June 18 :** President Joe Biden announced Tuesday a new potential citizenship path for immigrants married to US nationals, balancing a recent crackdown on illegal border crossers in an attempt to thread a tricky pre-election political needle.The Biden administration has been struggling to address immigration, a divisive issue for many Americans ahead of November's presidential election.

The Democrat is seeking to be tougher on illegal migrants while contrasting himself with Donald Trump, whose attempt to win back the White House is heavily centered on portraying the country as being under assault by what he calls a migrant "invasion."

Biden's action was immediately condemned by Republicans, but hailed by immigration reform activists.The new rules will streamline the process for those who already qualify for permanent residence, by removing a requirement they leave the country as part of the application process.

The new rules would apply to those present in the country for at least 10 years and married to a US citizen before June 17, 2024 -- which the administration estimates to include half a million people.

In addition, some 50,000 stepchildren of US citizens would be eligible.Those approved would be granted work authorization and the right to stay in the United States for up to three years while they apply for the coveted green card. That would then allow them to apply later for full citizenship.

"What we are announcing are potentially streamlined processes... (to) minimize the bureaucracy, minimize the hardship that having to leave the country creates," a senior administration official told reporters ahead of the announcement.

However, "only Congress can deliver... comprehensive reform of our immigration and asylum laws," another official added.

Far-right House member Marjorie Taylor Greene said Biden "wrote a vote-buying free citizenship executive order."

Congressman Josh Brecheen of Oklamoma said: "With the stroke of a pen, President Biden is now shielding 550,000 illegal aliens from deportation. This is all in an effort to appease their family members hoping to garnish their votes for the upcoming election."

But groups campaigning for undocumented spouses of US citizens to get work permits celebrated Biden's move.

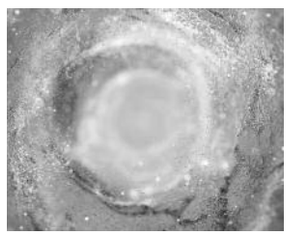
"President Biden's action to extend work permits for long-term immigrant spouses is morally right, economically sound and politically smart," said Rebecca Shi, executive director of the American Business Immigration Coalition.

"The overwhelming majority of Americans support these humane and common-sense steps, and it will directly improve the lives of more than 10 million American citizens who have an undocumented family member," she said. "Today, those families, and the advocates fighting on their behalf, can breathe a huge sigh of relief."At the same time, Biden is trying to address widespread concerns that illegal immigration has got out of control.

A previous, bipartisan immigration package pushed by Biden in Congress would have introduced the strictest policies in decades, but it fell apart when Republicans walked away from the deal -- under pressure from Trump, whose campaign depends on portraying Biden as failing on the issue.

# "Unprecedented Behaviour": Black Hole Observed 'Awakening' For The First Time

**Paris, June 18 :** Astronomers have been able to observe a supermassive black hole waking up and setting the heart of its host galaxy alight for the first time, the European Southern Observatory said on Tuesday.The galaxy 300 million light years from Earth in the Virgo constellation had been quiet for decades until late 2019, when it suddenly began to shine brighter than ever before.



The centre of the galaxy -- where a supermassive black hole is believed to be squatting -- since then has been radiating a variety of rays. "This behaviour is unprecedented," Paula Sanchez Saez, an European Southern Observatory astronomer and first author of a new study in the journal Astronomy & Astrophysics, said in a statement.

The "most tangible option" to explain this brightening is that the astronomers were watching "the activation of a massive black hole in real time", study co-author Lorena Hernandez Garcia said.Most galaxies -- including our own Milky Way -- are believed to have a supermassive black hole at their centre.These cosmic behemoths are by definition invisible -- not even light can escape the pull of their awesome power.

The only way to observe black holes is when they destroy something huge that lets off light in its death throes: such as a star that wandered too close being torn apart."These giant monsters usually are sleeping," study co-author Claudio Ricci explained.But for the galaxy SDSS1335+0728, "we were able to observe the awakening of the massive black hole, (which) suddenly started to feast on gas available in its surroundings, becoming very bright," the astrophysicist added.

Initial observations indicate the black hole has 1.5 million times more mass than the Sun, enough for it to be classified as a supermassive black hole. But it is still on the lighter side, as the true heavyweights easily exceed a billion times the Sun's mass.

The international team of astronomers is analysing data from a number of telescopes hoping to determine whether the black hole's activity is temporary -- perhaps caused by a star being ripped apart -- or whether it will continue to be active for a long time.

"This is something that could happen also to our own Sgr A*," the Milky Way's supermassive black hole, Hernandez Garcia said.But fortunately for us, our own black hole remains fast asleep.

# Austrian Pro-Tax Heiress Gives $27 Million To Social, Climate, Left-Wing Groups

**Vienna , June 18 :** An heiress who has denounced the absence of taxes on wealth and inheritance in Austria has given the bulk of her money, 25 million euros ($27 million), to 77 organisations, including social and climate groups, as well as prominent left-wing ones.

Marlene Engelhorn, 32, has spent years criticising the birth lottery by which she inherited tens of millions and does not have to give any of it to the state, and calling for change.

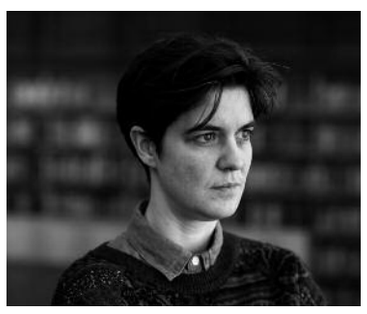
In January, she said that a panel picked by a pollster asrepresentative of the Austrian public would decide how to distribute the sum, without any intervention on her part. The list of 77 recipients was announced on Tuesday.

"A large part of my inherited wealth, which elevated me to a position of power simply by virtue of my birth, contradicting every democratic principle, has now been redistributed in accordance with democratic values," Engelhorn said in a statement.

A spokesman said the 25 million euros was "the overwhelming bulk" of her wealth, though she retains an undisclosed sum.

The panel had examined "above all the question of the effects of our uneven distribution of wealth" and debates on "democracy and participation in it, tax justice and social inequality," she said.

Engelhorn is a descendant of Friedrich Engelhorn, who founded German chemicals giant BASF in 1865. Her grandmother Gertraud Engelhorn-Vechiatto married his great-grandson. When Engelhorn-Vechiatto died in 2022, Marlene inherited a large sum.



One of the objectives the 50-person panel, aged between 16 and 85, aimed to support was "a fairer distribution of wealth, more transparency and reporting on that issue and better data on very large accumulations of wealth", one member of the panel, retail employee Elisabeth Klein, said in a statement.

In support of that aim, two of the four donations of more than a million euros went to the Momentum Institute, a left-wing think-tank, and Attac Austria, which opposes neoliberal economic policy and "deregulated financial markets".

The donations ranged from 40,000 euros - for an initiative to support data-based reporting on climate change - to 1.6 million euros for the Austrian Nature Conservation Federation.

Other issues covered included housing, integration, women's rights and fighting poverty."Now, it is up to the political actors to do justice to what this group representative of the Austrian population has embodied," Engelhorn said, calling for more debate on these issues.



# Today's Horoscope

**ARIES :** Today is the day for creativity, while you leave the logic for tomorrow, even when it comes to work. You are bent upon success at work.

**TAURUS :** You will be dying squander it away and get rid of it as fast as possible. You'll be tossing it around as if you owned a gold mine. Ganesha urges you to hold your horses and tighten.

**GEMINI :** A hectic and busy day awaits you. You need to think about how, where and in what proportion to concentrate your energies upon the numerous jobs thrust upon you.

**CANCER:** You will go out for dinner with your friends or family. It may so happen that you will take out time from your hectic schedule to prepare tasty food and invite friends and relatives.

**LEO :** If you are the one who sets the corporate mantra each morning, then know that today, your mantra will be fabulous, and will be chanted by many in your organisation.

**VIRGO :** Watch you step, warns Ganesha. Trouble is lurking just round the corner and waiting to waylay you. At work, you will find yourself in a high-spirited mood.

**LIBRA :** Today seems like a good day to take a break and go on a pleasure trip to revitalise yourself, says Ganesha. Even on the business front, it will do you a world of good to take a break.

**SCORPIO :** Today you are likely to remain the unvarying object of emotions and sentiments, predicts Ganesha. Your inkling for performing arts may draw you to take up some lessons.

**SAGITTARIUS :** Simple living and high thinking, says Ganesha, will be your mantra today. Approach your work with innovative thoughts and diplomatic words.

**CAPRICORN :**The day will have a bundle of things to offer today, some good, some not so good. At work, you are likely to overlook the most obvious things.

**AQUARIUS :** It always pays to have extra cash, and in that regard, you will be a happy person today! You may carefully update and crosscheck your financial position.

**PIECES :** A good day is in the offing, says Ganesha. You are likely to receive news you will be glad to share and celebrate with your family. A few pending deals are likely to be finalised.

# Rohit Saraf's Big Reveal - "My Most Favourite Couple Is Virat Kohli And Anushka Sharma"

**Mumbai, 18 June:** Rohit Saraf, who is now a household name courtesy his impressive performances in films and web series like The Sky Is Pink and Mismatched is gearing up for his upcoming film Ishq Vishk Rebound. In a recent interview with India Today, the actor however revealed that he is "obsessed" with celeb couple Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli. Rohit Saraf expressed his admiration for Virat and Anushka and said, "My most favourite couple is Virat and Anushka. I love them. I'm obsessed with them. I watch their videos on the Internet all the time. I watch their interviews. There's something so beautiful about it. I just love that couple so much."

Rohit added, "On screen, I love Alia Bhatt and Varun Dhawan. They are too nice. Then Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone for all their SLB (Sanjay Leela Bhansali) films."

A few weeks back, the makers dropped the full trailer on YouTube with the text, "Get ready to fall in love all over again! Check out the official trailer of 'Ishq Vishk Rebound' and get swept away by a whirlwind of emotions. Stay tuned for the ultimate romantic journey!"Last month, Rohit Saraf talked about how it feels to step into Shahid Kapoor's shoes. He told News18, "More than pressure, there's a lot of gratitude. Because I feel like this is an opportunity not many people get and I don't want to dilute that by putting that kind of pressure on myself. Sab itna aa-pass mein pressure bolte rehte hai, I feel like I should start taking pressure because in all honesty, abhi tak I wasn't taking any; it's not like a remake of the first Ishq Vishk, it's not a sequel of the first Ishq Vishk. The only thing that is common between the two films is that they belong to the same franchise. It's a new story altogether. It's a love story about Gen Z, what they go through, and it is kinda exciting."



Ishq Vishk Rebound is the second instalment of the Ishq Vishk franchise. The first instalment, Ishq Vishk, was released in 2003. The film marked the debut of Shahid Kapoor. Amrita Rao and Shenaz Treasurywala were also featured in the movie. Ishq Vishk Rebound will hit the big screens on June 21.

Actor Rohit Saraf, known for his impressive performances in films and web series like The Sky Is Pink and Mismatched, has quickly become a household name in the Indian entertainment industry. With his boy-next-door charm and versatile acting skills, Saraf has garnered a substantial fan-following. Despite his flourishing career, Saraf is not immune to the charm of other celebrities, and his admiration for Virat Kohli and Anushka Sharma's relationship is a testament to this.

In a recent interview with India Today.in, Rohit Saraf expressed his admiration for Virat and Anushka, revealing that he is "obsessed" with them as a couple. Saraf praised their strong bond: "My most favourite couple is Virat and Anushka. I love them. I'm obsessed with them. I watch their videos on the Internet all the time. I watch their interviews. There's something so beautiful about it. I just love that couple so much."Rohit added, "On screen, I love Alia Bhatt and Varun Dhawan. They are too nice. Then Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone for all their SLB (Sanjay Leela Bhansali) films."



**Fatima Sana Shaikh was photographed in Mumbai. She was seen wearing a motif shirt with a pair of denims.**

# Nawazuddin Siddiqui Says Daughter Shora Is Prepping To Be An Actor: "It's Her Passion, So What Can I Say?"

**Mumbai, 18 June:** Nawazuddin Siddiqui truly deserves the title of best dad. The actor never misses a chance to celebrate his daughter Shora Siddiqui and son Yaani Siddiqui. Currently busy promoting his upcoming film, Rautu Ka Raaz, Nawazuddin disclosed said Shora aspires to become an actor and refuses to seek his help. In an interview with Film Companion, the star shared, "My daughter is taking training right now. She herself went and got admitted to the performing art faculty, haath jod ke teacher ke saamne [with folded hands in front of her teacher] she said, 'I want to learn acting'."

Nawazuddin Siddiqui also talked about the "rigorous training" his 14-year-old daughter is undergoing to become an actress. He said, "In that department, in that school, they will be performing a play in the final year, for that they'll have to stitch their own costumes, they'll have to do the carpentry work themselves, whatever props will be used, they'll have to make it themselves, they'll also have to take care of the lighting, do all the work themselves and at last there will be a show which will be ticketed. This is the kind of rigorous training she is taking. She is doing all of this by herself."

Talking about how he and his wife, producer Aaliya Siddiqui, support their daughter's passion, Nawazuddin Siddiqui mentioned, "Now that I see that she is taking so much interest, so just as other parents, we too tell her 'Toh chalo kar lo tum,' [ok, you do it.] She is doing it independently and for the longest time, I didn't even know that she got through the performing arts faculty. I don't even know what all workshops she does, she attends quite a lot of them, she is doing the summer workshop right now. She searches them herself and tells her mother or me that she wants to do it and asks me to pay the fees."

When Nawazuddin Siddiqui was asked if he teaches acting to Shora Siddiqui, he replied, "No, ghar ki murgi dal baraabar hoti hai na, waisa hai. She watches a lot of film, watches world cinema. She is all of 14 and she watches one film every day. She had once performed one piece to show me, I asked her how she did it and she said, 'Papa, main puri taiyaari kar rahi hoon. Filmein dekhti hoon main [Papa, I am preparing, I watch a lot of films.]' So its like that, its her passion, so what can I say?'."

Nawazuddin Siddiqui and Aaliya Siddiqui got married in 2009. They are proud parents to daughter Shora Siddiqui and son Yaani Siddiqui.

# Ishq Vishk Rebound Actor Pashmina Roshan On Cousin Hrithik Roshan's Advice Ahead Of Her

**Mumbai, 18 June:** Pashmina Roshan, Rajesh Roshan's daughter and Hrithik Roshan's cousin, is all set to make her debut with Ishq Vishk Rebound. Ahead of the relase of the film, the actor shared big brother Hrithik Roshan's advice in an interview with The Free Press Journal. When asked about the guidance she has received from Hrithik Roshan and uncle Rakesh Roshan, Pashmina told The Free Press Journal, "Yes, of course I had their advice on how to improve as a performer and how to be better in life overall, but like I said, a film or a filmmaker require a certain character and not settle for anything less. The real game starts now as I am debuting this Friday. After this film, I have to find more work like a freelancer. "



Pashmina Roshan loves to share pictures with Hrithik Roshan at regular intervals on her Instagram feed. On Hrithik Roshan's birthday, Pashmina shared adorable pictures with him from one of their vacations. She wrote in the caption, "Happy birthday duggu bhaiya, You are the glue that brings our family together! Thankyou for filling our life with SO MUCH love, laughter and happiness. There are no words to describe how much I love you!"

A couple of days ago, Pashmina shared Hrithik Roshan's advice with the media during the song launch of Ishq Vishk Pyaar Vyaar in Mumbai. Pashmina Roshan said that Hrithik Roshan advised her to stay "authentic" with her performance as an actor. "Bring authenticity to what you do, give your hundred percent as an actor, and if you do these two things, you are set. This is the main advice that he keeps giving and I hope I've lived up to his expectations," Pashmina added, reported PTI. Ishq Vishk Rebound stars Rohit Saraf, Jibraan Khan, Naila Grrewal and Hrithik Roshan's cousin (Pashmina Roshan) in the lead roles. The remake has been produced by Ramesh Taurani and co-produced by Jaya Taurani under the banner Tips Films Limited and is all set to hit the theatres on June 28.

# 20 Years Of Lakshya: Hrithik Roshan Says Playing Karan Shergill "Came Naturally" To Him



**Mumbai, 18 June:** For all the Hrithik Roshan fans, we have an amazing update. The actor's film Lakshya completes 20 years today. On this special occasion, Hrithik announced the movie's return to the big screen starting June 21. In a video shared on Instagram, Hrithik can be heard saying, "I am here to talk about Lakshya. 20 years ago, this film that we had done. I was really young. I was hardly an actor. And Farhan (Farhan Akhtar, director and producer of Lakshya) was a friend, who has suddenly become this incredible mind. I saw his first film. I was like, 'How has this person made this film? How? Where did he get the courage or the knowledge or the information or the…How?'"

Hrithik Roshan continued, "And he (Farhan Akhtar) had written this beautiful, beautiful script and more than the story, more than the big cause it was the character of Karan Shergill that was me. I don't know what made Farhan cast me. Perhaps, the director's mind could see through and understand a person's countenance and know that this human has been through certain things that are going to make him the perfect cast for this film."

Talking about how he related with his character Karan Shergill, Hrithik Roshan added, "I genuinely do feel at that particular point of time, I, definitely hands down, was the perfect human, not the actor, but the perfect human to be cast, in this film Lakshya. Because I have been through all those experiences in very, very similar ways. Karan Shergill was me. I did not need to do much. The naivety, the spontaneity, the anger, being on that cusp of maturity, learning the ways, being completely confused and dumbfounded as to what I am going to do in my life, not having any avenues that looked hopeful. I went through that crossroad so greatly and so intensely in my life that it just came naturally to me."

The caption attached to the clip read, "Here's to Friends, Film making, Fun & in a blink it's #20yearsOfLakshya Back in theatres, 21st June onwards."

Responding to the post, Farhan Akhtar wrote, "Hrithikkkk.. you embodied Karan Shergill .. all of him.. his flaws, his strength, his insecurities, his confidence, his ego and his vulnerability. You are right. You were him and he was you. Congratulations on 20. Big big hug." Lakshya's producer Ritesh Sidhwani said, "Karan Shergill, there's no one like you. Happy 20 years of Lakshya, my friend." Director Zoya Akhtar posted a red heart, Many others followed suit.

Lakshya narrates the story of Karan Shergill who decides to join the Indian Army but backs out when he learns about the difficulties in a soldier's life. In addition to Hrithik Roshan, the film features Preity Zinta, Amitabh Bachchan, and Boman Irani.

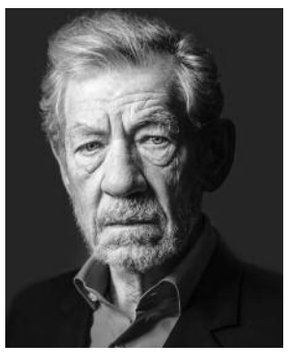
# The Lord Of The Rings Actor Ian Mckellen Hospitalised After Falling Off Stage During Performance

**Mumbai, 18 June:** Veteran Hollywood star Ian McKellen was hospitalised after falling off stage during a performance at the Noel Coward Theatre in London's West End.McKellen reportedly lost his footing during a battle scene, reports BBC.com.

The audience had to evacuate from the theater, and the evening show was cancelled.A representative for the theater shared that McKellen will "make a speedy and full recovery" and that the 85-year-old actor is "in good spirits," reports Variety.com."Thank you to our audience and the general public for their well wishes following Ian's fall during this evening's performance of Player Kings," reads the statement.

"Following a scan, the brilliant NHS team has assured us that he will make a speedy and full recovery, and Ian is in good spirits. The production has made the decision to cancel the performance on Tuesday, June 18, so Ian can rest."

"Those affected will be



contacted by their point of purchase as soon as possible tomorrow. Thank you to doctors Rachel and Lee, who were in the audience, and to all the venue staff for their support."

McKellen plays John Falstaff in Player Kings, which is a production of William Shakespeare's Henry IV, Parts One and Two.It began its 12-week run on the West End in April. After navigating a fight scene involving two other characters, McKellen apparently fell off the front of the stage.According to the BBC, "As the house lights came up, the actor cried out, and staff rushed to help."An audience member speaking to the BBC described the incident as "very shocking," adding, "As far as I saw, he was conscious because he was asking for assistance."

McKellen is a frequent Shakespeare actor, with stage roles including Macbeth, King Lear, Richard II, Coriolanus, Iago, and Richard III. He also played 'Hamlet' this year in a film adaptation directed by Sean Mathias.McKellen is also famous for his roles as Gandalf in Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings trilogy and Magneto in the X-Men movies.

# Javed Akhtar's Message To Kartik Aaryan After Watching Chandu Champion: "A Delightful Surprise In A Dramatic Role"

**Mumbai, 18 June:** Javed Akhtar is the latest celebrity fan of Kartik Aaryan's Chandu Champion, which released in theatres last week. On Tuesday, Javed Akhtar joined the list of celebrities who loved the film, including his wife Shabana Azmi and cricketer Kapil Dev. The lyricist shared his review of the film on Tuesday on his X handle. He wrote, "Watched Chandu Champion. Who would have believed it if it not would have been a 100% true story .particularly enjoyed the 2nd half. Another feather in Kabir khan's cap . Kartik is a delightful surprise in a dramatic role . Vijay Raaz is brilliant. Cinematographer Sudeep Chatterji' s



work is mind blowing. My hats off to the editor."

A day before, Shabana Azmi shared a picture in which she can be seen kissing Kartik Aaryan on his cheek. She wrote in the caption, "I was deeply moved by Kabir Khan's film Chandu Champion and I loved Kartik Aaryan's portrayal. He played it with an almost child determination with an extremely winsome smile which prevented him from projecting it as arrogance. Vijay Raaz as the coach is v effective. It's a real life story and I say Salaam kabir for making it his lifetime so he got to watch it with his family.Here am I with Kaartilk at a special screening organised by #Excel Entertainment."

# Payal Kapadia's Cannes-Winning All We Imagine As Light Selected For Munich Film Festival

**Mumbai, 18 June:** Filmmaker Payal Kapadia's Cannes-winning title All We Imagine As Light is set to be screened at the 2024 Munich International Film Festival. The film is a part of the 14-film lineup for the CineMasters Competition, the main section of the film gala, which is considered the second largest film festival in Germany after the Berlin Film Festival.Other titles that will be showcased at the festival include Kinds of Kindness, 100 Yards, Caught By The Tides, Woman Of..., Memory and Substance.

All We Imagine As Light, Kapadia's feature directorial debut, was the first Indian film in 30 years and first ever by an Indian female director to be showcased in main competition of the Cannes Film Festival, last being Shaji N Karun's Swaham (1994).At the 77th edition of the recently-concluded film gala, the film had won the Grand Prix award, the second-most prestigious prize of the festival.Kinds of Kindness, directed by Yorgos Lanthimos, had won the best actor trophy for Jesse Plemons at the Cannes.

All We Imagine As Light, a Malayalam-Hindi feature, is about Prabha, a nurse, who receives an unexpected gift from her long estranged husband that throws her life into disarray. Her younger roommate, Anu, tries in vain to find a private spot in the big city to be alone with her boyfriend. One day the two nurses go on a road trip to a beach town where the mystical forest becomes a space for their dreams to manifest, according to the plotline. All We Imagine As Light is an Indo-French co-production between petit chaos from France and Chalk and Cheese Films from India.

# Kapil Dev's Roaring Shout Out To Kartik Aaryan For Chandu Champion: "What An Incredible Performance"

**Mumbai, 18 June:** Kapil Dev is the latest celebrity to join the Chandu Champion fan club. The former star cricketer shared an appreciation post for the Team Chandu Champion after watching the film. Kapil Dev shared the film's poster along with an adorable selfie with Kartik Aaryan. Kapil Dev shared a picture with director Kabir Khan on his Instagram feed as well. Sharing his joy and excitement about the film, Kapil Dev wrote, "Chandu champion! Definitely a film you cannot miss. I really enjoy watching and appreciate sport films. But this goes beyond being just a sports film. It is so much more. While watching it I have laughed, cried, felt pride and cried some more."

For director Kabir Khan, Kapil Dev's words were, "Hats off to Kabirkhankk. You have done it again. Made yet another spectacular film." Complimenting Kartik Aaryan for his stellar performance, Kapil Dev wrote, "What an incredible performance by kartikaaryan, your effort and talent is shining. Congratulations to the whole cast and crew and thank you for giving us this film to watch. You are all champions!" Take a look at the post here:

Re-sharing the post, Kartik Aaryan wrote, "Coming from the Champion of Grit and Resilience, this means the world to us sir!!! Thank you Sir." Take a look:

For the unversed, Kabir Khan's last film 83, featuring Ranveer Singh in the lead role, was also a sports drama. The film was based on the 1983 Cricket World Cup in which Kapil Dev led Team India and won the cup. Ranveer Singh played Kapil Dev in the film. Kapil Dev and Kabir Khan jointly promoted the film before it hit the theatres.

Meanwhile, Kartik Aaryan has been receiving praise for the film. A day ago, Shabana Azmi wrote, "I was deeply moved by Kabir Khan's film



Chandu Champion and I loved Kartik Aaryan's portrayal. He played it with an almost child determination with an extremely winsome smile which prevented him from projecting it as arrogance. Vijay Raaz as the coach is v effective. It's a real life story and I say Salaam kabir for making it his lifetime so he got to watch it with his family.Here am I with Kaartilk at a special screening organised by #Excel Entertainment."

Kartik Aaryan re-shared the post on his Instagram feed and he wrote, "Mujhe Meri Eidi Mil Gayi (I have received my Eidi) Every word you said feels like a medal for me."

In his review for, film critic Saibal Chatterjee wrote, "Kartik Aaryan sheds his free-spirited gadabout cloak and gets into the skin of a character that makes a slew of demands on the actor. Aaryan gives the physically exacting role all he has and pulls off a career-best performance."

Shabana Azmi was bowled over by Kartik Aaryan's stellar performance in Kabir Khan's directorial Chandu Champion. The film veteran shared an appreciation post on her Instagram feed. Shabana Azmi shared a picture in which she can be seen kissing Kartik Aaryan on his cheek. She wrote in the

## Editorial

# Woeful scenario

Delhi, India's bustling capital, is no stranger to water crises. With its burgeoning population and growing demands, the city continues to face a chronic shortage of water, and the problem is only exacerbated by political tensions, infrastructural decay, and environmental challenges. On June 16, Delhi's minister Atishi implored the central government to intervene, urging the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to negotiate with its Haryana counterpart to secure more water for the national capital. In this plea lies a rightful assertion that the Central government is duty-bound to extend a helping hand to the national capital in this time of crisis. Furthermore, in a letter to Delhi Police Commissioner, Atishi highlighted incidents of suspected foul play, where large bolts were found cut, causing significant water leaks. This sabotage, according to her, resulted in the loss of 20 million gallons per day (MGD) and a subsequent 25 per cent water shortage in South Delhi. The minister didn't shy away from indicating a deeper political conspiracy, alleging that BJP workers might be behind the pipe cuts. The BJP, on the contrary, has protested against the water shortages, accusing the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government of mismanagement. In a show of frustration with the water supply situation, BJP workers held a 'Matka Phod' protest in Najafgarh. These political theatrics, however, do little to address the root causes of Delhi's water woes. In fact, the mutual mudslinging is only eclipsing the broader issues in public forums. It must be noted that Delhi's water crisis is not merely a result of political negligence but also stems from deep-rooted structural and environmental challenges. The city primarily relies on external sources for its freshwater supply, including rivers and canals from neighbouring states like Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Needless to say, this reliance is increasingly unsustainable due to growing demand and limited resources. The Delhi Jal Board (DJB) supplies water to over 20 million residents through an extensive but aging network of pipelines. An estimated 58 per cent of Delhi's water supply is classified as non-revenue water (NRW), largely due to leakages and theft, far exceeding global standards. At the same time, groundwater plays a crucial role in Delhi's water supply, yet the city's groundwater levels are rapidly declining due to over-extraction and pollution. The pollution in Yamuna river, which happens to be a key source of water, is heavily polluted and mostly unusable. The Master Plan of Delhi (MPD) 2041 acknowledges these challenges and emphasises the need for sustainable water management practices. In the long run, rainwater harvesting appears to be a logical strategy in addressing the water crisis. By capturing and storing rainwater, Delhi can reduce its reliance on external sources and mitigate the effects of water shortages. Additionally, improving wastewater treatment processes can enhance the availability of reusable water for non-potable purposes, thus conserving freshwater supplies. Furthermore, the city administration must toil hard to tackle the dominance of 'tanker mafia' who, by diverting water meant for legitimate distribution through illicit supply, create a dark zone of inequitable access and corruption. Stringent law enforcement in this regard is the need of the hour. Most importantly, addressing infrastructure leakages is critical. Upgrading Delhi's water infrastructure, ensuring regular maintenance, and deploying advanced leak detection technologies can significantly reduce water losses. These measures, coupled with efficient water resource management, can enhance the city's overall water supply and distribution efficiency in the future. Delhi's water crisis is a multifaceted challenge that requires immediate attention and coordinated efforts from all stakeholders. Political bickering and blame games only serve to distract from the pressing need for sustainable solutions. By focusing on infrastructure improvement, efficient resource management, and innovative water conservation practices, Delhi can certainly navigate its way out of this crisis.

# Agonising conflict



Is there any space left in the war-torn cemeteries (read graveyard) of the Gaza Strip as the relentless influx of bodies continues to overwhelm them? Perhaps, no! At the recently concluded G7 summit in Italy (June 13-14, 2024), President Joe Biden of the United States of America has signalled for a proposed and probable truce in the Gaza Strip that could possibly end the tragedy and mayhem that began on October 7, 2023, with Hamas' attack on Israel leading to a huge loss of life and bringing the human populace in crises. President Biden said, "Hamas has… to move on". He said it remains to be seen whether a deal comes "to fruition" and reiterated his continued dedication to encouraging both parties to agree on the three-phase deal he publicly proposed late last month. The three-part plan would include – the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all populated areas of Gaza and the release of several hostages being held inside the enclave since the Hamas-led attack began. The first phase of the plan would also see a complete six-week truce. For months, negotiators from the US, Egypt, and Qatar have been working to mediate a ceasefire in the conflict and secure the release of hostages taken from Israel in October, with very little success. As of now, over 100 hostages are still believed to be held captive in Gaza. It was on October 7, 2023, that approximately 3,000 militants breached the Gaza–Israel barrier, targeting Israeli civilian communities and military bases. At the same time, several thousand rockets were fired into Israel. The continuing violence, for almost nine months now, has led to irreparable damage in all quarters – health, hygiene, mental and physical wellness, the safety of women and children (which has been gravely compromised), loss of education, destruction of basic amenities and the list can go on.

What war brings Throughout history, war has inflicted extensive damage on various facets of society, resulting in devastating and enduring consequences. The physical destruction of infrastructure is one of the most visible impacts, as buildings, roads, and essential services, such as water and electricity, are often rendered inoperable. Of late, targeting hospitals has become a dangerous precedent. War exacerbates the disruption of daily life, displacing populations, and necessitating extensive time and resources for reconstruction. The economic toll of war is also profound, with resources diverted from productive uses to sustain military operations, leading to long-term economic stagnation or decline. Social cohesion is severely compromised, as communities fracture and trust erodes, complicating post-conflict reconciliation and rebuilding efforts.

Women and children are particularly vulnerable in wartime, facing myriad threats to their safety and well-being. Women often become targets of sexual violence and exploitation, used as weapons of war to terrorise and destabilise communities. The breakdown of law and order increases the risk of gender-based violence. Additionally, women frequently bear the brunt of post-conflict economic hardship, often supporting their families alone and encountering significant obstacles in accessing employment and social services. Children endure disproportionate suffering during wartime, facing physical and psychological trauma with lifelong repercussions. Disrupted education, due to damaged schools and unsafe conditions, deprives them of essential developmental opportunities and normalcy. Exposure to violence and loss of caregivers result in severe emotional distress, manifesting as anxiety, depression, and (PostTraumatic Stress Disorder) PTSD. Additionally, children face risks of recruitment as soldiers, forced labour, and trafficking, exacerbating their vulnerability and perpetuating cycles of violence and poverty.

The proliferation of refugee camps worldwide is a direct result of escalating conflicts, persecution, and socio-economic instabilities. For example, the Zaatari camp in Jordan, established for Syrian refugees, remains home to 80,000 people, underscoring the severity of the Syrian conflict. Similarly, the Kutupalong camp in Bangladesh accommodates over 9,31,000 Rohingya refugees fleeing ethnic violence in Myanmar. Initially intended as temporary solutions, these camps often become semipermanent due to prolonged crises, leading to overcrowding, insufficient healthcare, and limited access to education and employment. Also, the Dadaab camp in Kenya, hosting almost 3,02,805 Somali refugees and asylum seekers as of October 2023, exemplifies these challenges with its persistent overcrowding and sanitation issues. Furthermore, refugees face prolonged waiting periods for resettlement or asylum, often extending for years, and are subjected to systematic deprivation of basic human rights. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, for example, face severe restrictions on employment, property ownership, and access to social services, perpetuating their marginalisation and vulnerability. These refugees endure a state of limbo, experiencing social exclusion and economic deprivation, undermining their dignity and exacerbating their vulnerability. The Gaza conundrum Till June 4, according to the Reuters, more than 36,000 casualties were reported in the ongoing Israeli military campaign in Gaza, devastating much of the region, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The conflict, focused on the city of Rafah since early May, has displaced approximately 1.9 million people out of a population of 2.3 million, forcing many into makeshift shelters amidst severely degraded living conditions. The existing shelters are cramped and the sanitary conditions are disastrous. These displaced individuals lack basic amenities such as clean water and proper sanitation, compounding the humanitarian crisis. Earlier, on May 26, an Israeli airstrike resulted in a tragic fire at a tent camp in Rafah, claiming the lives of 45 people and drawing international condemnation. While Israel stated its target was Hamas operatives, it expressed 'regret' – (as part of such collateral damages) – over civilian casualties. Humanitarian aid to Gaza has significantly dwindled since the conflict escalated, exacerbating concerns raised by the United Nations about the risk of famine in the region. The closure of the Rafah crossing and limited access via Kerem Shalom has further restricted the flow of essential supplies, with critical shortages reported in healthcare and food distribution. With city hospitals being targeted, the situation is not soon to improve. According to the WHO, just 14 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are still functioning and the Rafah operation has blocked patient transfers and all but cut off medical supplies into the enclave. Aid agencies are also raising concerns about increasing health hazards caused by sewage overflow and inadequate toilet access.

In response, some families are constructing makeshift latrines, while in other regions, sewage is reportedly flowing through the streets, according to aid workers. Life for civilians in Gaza is dire, characterised by constant displacement, fear, and deprivation. Many construct makeshift tents from plastic bags and wood, subsisting on one meal per day, if fortunate. The conflict that began in October 2023, left many with only one set of clothing. As per reports, approximately 300,000 people in the north alone face severe shortages of food, water, and necessities, exacerbated by mounting settler violence, resulting in a deep human rights and humanitarian crisis. According to a June 8, 2024 report by the Red Cross, "the death toll in Gaza currently stands at 36, 171, and 502 in the West Bank and 81,420 people have been injured in Gaza and 5,100 in the West Bank" with threat of famine looming large. With the current position of human life of civilians in Gaza, which is miserable, and the world leaders including the UN failing equally miserably, life in Gaza is like a ticking bomb… waiting for their turn in scattered graveyards. The strange fact is, if anyone's really concerned.

# Streamlining FDI, boosting R&D, manufacturing key to achieve $5 billion defence export: Study




Factors like streamlining foreign direct investment (FDI) as well as augmenting Research & Development (R&D) and manufacturing capabilities can help the country realise its $5 billion defence export target by 2024-25, says a study. Nexgen Exhibitions, organizers of International Police Expo, one of Asia's premier homeland security and defence expos, have released the findings of a comprehensive survey aimed at streamlining Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and bolstering Defence Research & Development (R&D) and manufacturing capabilities, as per a statement. According to the statement, this initiative aims to propel India towards its ambitious $5 billion defence exports target by 2024-25. The survey, conducted across 15 cities in India, saw participation from over 130 national and international arms, ammunition, and security equipment manufacturers, exporters, and startups. The key highlights of the survey, underscored the need for streamlined FDI inflows, elevated technology integration with AI and other futuristic technologies, and a robust skill development ecosystem to create a large pool of industry-ready professionals. By enhancing R&D and manufacturing capabilities, India's homeland security and defence sector is poised to emerge as a global manufacturing hub, it stated. Additionally, it stated that increasing procurement categories is a significant step towards boosting domestic defence manufacturing. Currently, India exports defence equipment to over 75 countries, demonstrating its growing footprint in the global defence market. The homeland security sector is crucial for maintaining internal stability and protecting national interests. Integrating advanced technologies and data analytics is paramount for effective threat detection, surveillance, and response. By leveraging AI and machine learning, security agencies can predict and mitigate risks more efficiently. Moreover, it said that developing a robust disaster management mechanism ensures preparedness and swift response to emergencies, enhancing public safety and national resilience. Scheduled for July 4-5, 2024 in New Delhi, the International Police Expo will see participation from over 25 countries, including the UK, USA, Israel, Poland, Croatia, UAE, Germany, Canada, Singapore, Brazil, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. These countries will showcase their latest innovations and technologies, providing a platform for international collaboration and exchange of best practices.

# Echoes in vicinity



Perhaps never before in the history of Indian parliamentary democracy have South Asian countries evinced so much interest and excitement as with the just concluded 2024 elections. By the time this opinion piece goes to print, the Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Sri Lanka President Ranil Wickremesinghe will have attended the oath-taking ceremony of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his cabinet in New Delhi on June 9. Their presence proves the steadfastly reinforced ties between India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Bangladesh, in particular, merits special mention as Prime Minister Hasina has proven time and again her strong commitment to cementing relations with India notwithstanding minor ups and downs in bilateral bonhomie despite occasional attempts to impair them by vested quarters. Besides Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, Heads of States of Mauritius, Nepal, Bhutan, and a few more countries were expected to attend the event. Of all the countries in geographical proximity, Pakistan has reacted strongly with an outpouring of editorials in the mainstream media and animated TV debates. An editorial in a prominent Pakistani daily immediately after the election results were declared opined that if Prime Minister Modi retained power, he would attend the June 15 Ukraine peace conference scheduled in Switzerland. In the same vein, it reckoned that if the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance bloc (I.N.D.I.A.) got at the helm of the government, it could see the possibility of ameliorating relations with Pakistan, which at the moment are at an all-time low. A sense of cautious optimism was being speculated in the Pakistani press, which shows the extent of interest they are exhibiting, and that is not altogether surprising. Continuing with Pakistani reactions, Zahid Hussain, a well-known columnist, in his analytical write-up says that Prime Minister Modi's victory, even if diluted, is certainly not a good omen for Pakistan. Relations between the two countries hit a new low under the two previous Modi governments. It is not surprising that the Indian Prime Minister had upped the ante against Pakistan on the election trail. Zahid opines that anti-Pakistan rhetoric has been one of the key factors behind his previous victories. This might appear a bit far-fetched; nevertheless, that's what is being perceived in Pakistan in the aftermath of the Indian elections. Also, there is a streak of nervousness in Pakistan about the possibility of the "annexation" of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) by India under Modi in his third term. It describes such Indian "designs" as provocative and suspects the Indian ruling party's bellicosity. In the same vein, it also admits that political instability and an economic crisis in Pakistan have provided the hardliners with an opportunity to step up pressure on Pakistan. It is also apprehended by some that a third term under Prime Minister Modi has the potential for disastrous consequences for Pakistan. Many of these articulations are not only figments of imagination but also indications of a sense of insecurity prevailing among the general Pakistani mindset.

Meanwhile, a bunch of Pakistani diplomats and security experts assess that given the historical context, where tension with Pakistan has often been leveraged to garner domestic support during unstable political periods, the prospect of a military crisis in the region cannot be ruled out. Again, this seems an exaggeration and stems from a clear sense of insecurity. Abdul Basit, a hawk and former Pakistani High Commissioner to India, has advised the political leadership to tread matters with utmost caution lest it ends up further weakening its Kashmir policy. From these, it is becoming increasingly clear that the election results in India have aroused curiosity, confusion, and uncertainty, especially in the minds of Pakistani watchers, which prima facie look baseless and bereft of any sound reasoning.

'Daily News', a widely read Sri Lankan newspaper, in its editorial on June 6, states that the victory of Narendra Modi is an indication that the Indian Prime Minister had not grown stale with the Indian electorate, who looked to a leader that can take the country forward and place it on the world map to compete on equal terms with the superpowers. According to its editorial, the Prime Minister's victory was anticipated largely due to his charisma and economic policies, which had benefited the Indian middle class. One piece of assessment in 'Daily News' also says that the manner in which Prime Minister Modi is dealing with the Kashmir problem and his tough stance against Pakistan and China related to border and security issues may have translated into votes. As regards reactions in Bangladesh, Mahfuz Anam, the editor and publisher of 'The Daily Star', says the verdict of India's election greatly tempered Modi's shine and energised the opposition. However, Mahfuz Anam feels that by all accounts, Modi's victory is very impressive. Interestingly, the column goes on to say that when democracy is on the slide in many countries and elections as events are suffering from many distortions, especially instigated by the ruling party, for India's election to have come through with credibility and overall acceptance is an achievement that must be praised and celebrated by democracy-loving people everywhere. Around 969 million people, 70 per cent of a population of 1.4 billion, were eligible to vote. According to figures from the Election Commission of India, 642 million voters voted, of whom 312 million were women, making for the highest participation by women voters in the country's history. These are no mean compliments by a prominent Bangladeshi journalist articulated through a widely read English newspaper. Mahfuz Anam, while congratulating India's new leadership, has called for celebrating the victory of democracy of its giant neighbour, with whom Bangladesh has forged a partnership for mutual benefits. It was the might of the verdict of the Indian voters that resonated throughout the world, the region, and also, hopefully, within Bangladesh, where their own voters aspire for the same power.

India's election proved once again that, if allowed free expression, the public will always strengthen democracy.

More reactions from various quarters are expected as the new government settles into office.

# MF industry adds 81 lakh new investor accounts in April-May

New Delhi, 18 June: The mutual fund industry has added over 81 lakh investors' accounts in the first two months of FY25, mainly due to consistent marketing efforts, celebrity endorsements and dedicated work of the distribution network. Additionally, changing perceptions about fixed deposits, which no longer offer competitive returns compared to mutual funds, and the rise in income levels and accessibility to financial markets have also contributed to the rise in new investors, Trivesh D, COO of stock trading platform Tradejini, said. Going ahead, the outlook for mutual fund folios remains strong, supported by the ongoing bull run in the stock market, solid risk management practices, continuous investor education, and consistent marketing efforts, he added."As India's per capita income grows, investors will look to save money in asset classes, which have the potential to beat inflation and create wealth. As the penetration of mutual funds increases, this will translate into a higher folio



base at the industry level," Abhishek Tiwari, CBO, PGIM India Mutual Fund, said.According to the latest data with the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI), mutual fund folios of the industry stood at 18.6 crore in May-end, a surge of 4.6 per cent from 17.78 crore registered at the end of March. This suggests an addition of over 81 lakh folios. In May, the industry saw an addition of 45 lakh folios compared to 36.11 lakh folios added in April. In 2023, the average monthly addition of folios was 22.3 lakh, making the latest figure more than double this average.This impressive growth was fuelled by consistent marketing efforts, celebrity endorsements, dedicated work of the distribution network, robust returns given by equities and ease of investing, experts said. Folios are numbers designated to individual investor accounts. An investor can have multiple folios. Interestingly, the majority of the new investors are taking the route of digital channels to enter into the mutual fund space. Over the last few years, the surge in mutual fund folios has been led by Gen-Y and Gen-Z investors. Millennials, also known as Gen Y, are typically defined as those born between 1981 and 1996. Generation Z, or GenZ, are those born between 1997 and 2012. Overall, the total number of unique PAN and PAN-exempt KYC reference numbers stood at 4.59 crore as of May 2024. "Investors tend to hold multiple folios, and thus we should look at increasing the total unique number of unique investors in the industry. We believe the growth will come from increasing foot soldiers of distributors and advisers in hinterlands, increased adoption of technology and smartphones and an overall increase in awareness about mutual funds," he added. Of the total 81 lakh folios, equity-oriented mutual fund schemes experienced an addition of 61.25 lakh units during the period under review. This has taken the number of such folios to a new high of 12.89 crore, representing 69 per cent of the total.

# FM to hold pre-budget meet with industry chambers on June 20

New Delhi, 18 June: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is likely to hold pre-budget consultations with industry chambers on June 20, sources said. The budget for 2024-25 fiscal is likely to be presented in Parliament in the second half of July. Industry sources said the pre-budget consultation with Sitharaman would be preceded by a meeting with Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra on June 18. The 2024-25 Budget is likely to lay out Modi 3.0 government's economic agenda. The finance minister will have to look at measures to boost growth without hurting inflation as well as look for resources to meet the coalition government's compulsion.

The economic agenda would include steps to fast-rack reforms to make India a $5-trillion economy in near future and turn the country into a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047. The Indian economy is projected to grow 7.2 per cent in the current fiscal on the back of improving rural demand and moderating inflation, as per RBI estimates.



The Modi 3.0 government inherits a strong economy with fiscal prudence in place. Icing on the cake is a bonanza from RBI which has announced the highest-ever dividend of Rs 2.11 lakh crore for FY24. The key policy priorities for the third term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government would include dealing with stress in the agriculture sector, job creation, sustaining capex momentum and pushing revenue growth to stay on the fiscal consolidation path. Rating agency S&P has already given a thumbs up to economic policies followed by the Modi regime in the past 10 years by upgrading the sovereign rating outlook to positive.

It also hinted at a possible rating upgrade in next 1-2 years provided the government sticks to its fiscal deficit roadmap. While tax revenues seem to be buoyant, non-tax revenue remains a challenge as strategic disinvestment has almost been a non-starter with no big-ticket strategic sale, except Air India.

# PwC India expects upswing in small and mid-size merger & acquisition transactions




New Delhi, 18 June: PwC India anticipates an upswing in the India markets, especially in small to mid-size M&A (merger and acquisition) transactions and growth fundings driven by increasing investors' confidence. The year 2023 witnessed the emergence of a nuanced M&A landscape, with investors showing interests in diverse strategies and larger-scale ventures, even amid an overall decrease in PE investment, said Sanjeev Krishan, Chairperson, PwC in India. While PE deals were higher in volume, strategic deals dominated the top deals -- and domestic deals with group-level consolidations were a prominent theme. The first quarter of 2024 marked a resurgence in deal value and volume.According to a PwC report, top 10 deals of 2023 included JV buyouts, strategic investments, PE buyouts, and stock mergers, and contributed to 21 per cent of the total deal value. While PE deals were higher in volume overall, strategic deals dominated the top deals with domestic deals and group-level consolidations as a significant theme. "On a sectoral basis, traditional sectors including retail and consumer and healthcare and pharmaceuticals are in the lead. We anticipate an upswing in the India markets, especially in small to mid-size M&A transactions and growth fundings," Krishan said. He was responding to a query on the changing landscape of M&A in India. The optimism around M&A, he said, is based on three key factors -- the improving financial markets indicate an increase in investor and CEO confidence; deal-making has reached an inflection point with pent-up buyer demand and a build-up in seller assets; and accelerating global megatrends have created a need for firms to reinvent their business models, which can be accelerated through M&A. According to Krishan, sectors like e-commerce, healthcare and biotechnology, renewable energy, EVs and EV infrastructure, infrastructure, banking, financial services and insurance, IT services, and technology (including AI & semiconductors) show exciting prospects. "Going forward, we could expect a shift towards growth funding and a possible venture capital revival. We could also see an increase in controlling stake deals, and a rise in portfolio exits through capital markets and IPOs," he said. In keeping with the transformation trend, the same might be visible with PE operating models as well — increased buyouts, platforms and bolt-ons, as well an increased focus on sustainability and ESG integration, he added.

# Air India confirms incident of presence of blade-like metal in passenger's food

Mumbai, 18 June: A blade-like metal piece was found in the food of a passenger onboard an Air India Bengaluru-San Francisco flight last week for which the airline has apologised.Confirming the presence of a "foreign object" in the food, the airline on Monday said that it came from the vegetable processing machine used at the facilities of its catering partner TajSATS. The passenger, in a post on X, claimed that he got a feel of the blade-like object only after chewing the grub for a few seconds but luckily no harm was done. "Air India food can cut like a knife. Hiding in its roasted sweet potato and fig chaat was a metal piece that looked like a blade. I got a feel of it only after chewing the grub for a few seconds. Thankfully, no harm was done," the passenger, Mathures Paul, who is a journalist by profession, said.Paul blamed Air India's catering service, adding, "but the incident doesn't help the image I have of Air India...what if the metal piece was in the food served to a child?"This is the second incident involving the food served on the airline's long-haul flights in the recent past. Significantly, both Air India and TajSATS are part of the steel-to-software conglomerate, Tata Group. "Air India confirms that a foreign object was found in the meal of a guest aboard one of our flights. After investigation, it has been identified as coming from the vegetable processing machine used at the facilities of our catering partner," Air India Chief Customer Experience Officer Rajesh Dogra said in a statement.The airline had initiated a probe after the passenger posted on X that there was a blade-like metal object in the meal. The airline has worked with its catering partner to strengthen measures to prevent any recurrence, including more frequent checking of the processor, especially after chopping any hard vegetables, Dogra said. "Air India has engaged with the affected customer and deeply apologises for this experience," he added. A TajSATS spokesperson said, "We have strengthened our processes of comprehensive inspection and preventive maintenance of all our production equipment."

# 'SBI expects 14-15% credit growth in current fiscal'

New Delhi, 18 June: Given the current economic growth rate, State Bank of India (SBI) is expecting 14-15 per cent loan growth during the fiscal year 2024-25, the bank's chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara said. "Normally the way we look at it is that the GDP growth rate plus inflation and 2-3 per cent over that. That gives us the number around 14 per cent or so," Khara said. "Hence, 14-15 per cent credit growth depends upon the opportunities available for lending, and it meets our risk appetite. We will be happy to grow at this pace," he said. As far as deposits are concerned, he said, it grew by 11 per cent last year. "And we have some elbow room available in terms of excess SLR and which ensures that we don't have any pressure on us to raise the deposit rates for supporting our loan-to-deposit ratio," he said. The bank has an excess Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) between Rs 3.5 lakh crore and Rs 4 lakh crore. "Incidentally, I may add here that our loan-to-deposit ratio is around 68-69 per cent only. That leaves enough room for us to lend without having pressure on the deposit interest rates. Nevertheless, he said, "We always give importance to deposits. That is the reason why we increased the interest rate for the short-term deposits recently because we felt that there's room for improvement...we should improve our deposit growth rate to some extent during this year. And our effort would be that we should at least grow around 12-13 per cent this year."Last month, SBI hiked the fixed deposit rate on select short-term maturity up to 75 basis points. For retail term deposits of 46-179 days, the rate increased by 75 basis points to 5.50 per cent against the earlier 4.75 per cent. Asked about the Net Interest Margin (NIM) outlook for the current financial year, Khara expressed hope and said it would be around the same level recorded in FY24 or could be 2-3 basis points movement here or there. The domestic NIM of the bank stood at 3.43 per cent for FY24 down by 15 basis points (bps) while the whole bank NIM stood at 3.28 per cent lower by 9 bps year-on-year basis.The rise in both rupee liquidity and dollar liquidity cost due to tight monetary policy pursued by central banks across the globe was a major factor affecting NIM during FY24. As far as Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) are concerned, Khara said, "We should have a downward trajectory both for net and gross. However, it is very difficult to make any projections as it is also a function of the macroeconomy. The bank is trying to insulate its book for macro stress nevertheless it's difficult to give any kind of guidance on NPAs. "Our guidance as far as our credit cost is concerned, we have kept it at 0.50 per cent but our effort is to keep it at the level of 0.29 per cent," he added. Gross NPA of SBI declined to 2.24 per cent, an improvement of 54 bps compared to previous FY23 while the net NPA stood at 0.57 per cent, an improvement of 10 bps YoY. The credit cost also fell by 3 bps to 0.29 per cent at the end of FY24.

# 'Global trends & foreign investors' move to drive markets this week'

New Delhi, 18 June: With the absence of any major immediate domestic trigger in sight, investors would focus on global trends and trading activity of foreign investors for further cues in a holiday-shortened week ahead, analysts said. Movement of global oil benchmark Brent crude and rupee-dollar trend would also guide the market. "This week is a truncated one with no major triggers expected. However, we anticipate sector-specific movements amid budget-related buzz. Key factors to watch will be progress of monsoon and institutional flows," said Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd. On the global front, data from China, movement in the dollar index, and US bond yields will be crucial, he added. "This week, shortened by a holiday on Monday, will see participants looking to global markets, particularly the US, for cues in the absence of major events," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 299.41 points or 0.39 per cent, while the Nifty advanced 175.45 points or 0.75 per cent. The BSE Sensex hit its all-time high of 77,145.46 on June 13, while the Nifty reached its lifetime peak of 23,490.40 on June 14. "We expect market uptrend to continue this week supported by positive macro trends, expectation of sustained government spending and policy continuity, healthy monsoon and strong earnings," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd.

# Gold, silver import surges 210% in 2023-24 from UAE, need duty revision in FTA: Report

New Delhi, 18 June: India's gold and silver imports from its free trade agreement (FTA) partner UAE have skyrocketed 210 per cent to $10.7 billion in 2023-24 and there is a need to potentially revise the concessional customs duty rates under the pact to mitigate the arbitrage driving this surge, a report said on Monday. Economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) in a report said this sharp rise in gold and silver imports is primarily driven by import duty concessions granted by India to the UAE under the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).India allows 7 per cent tariffs or customs duty concessions on import of unlimited quantities of silver and a 1 per cent concession on 160 metric tonnes of gold. CEPA was signed in February 2022 and implemented in May 2022. Additionally, India facilitates gold and silver imports by allowing private firms to import from the UAE through the India International Bullion Exchange (IIBX) in Gift City. Previously, only authorised agencies could handle such imports, the report said. "While India's total imports from the UAE fell 9.8 per cent from $53.2 billion in FY23 to $48 billion in FY24, imports of gold and silver skyrocketed 210 per cent, from $3.5 billion to $10.7 billion," it said. "Import of all remaining products fell 25 per cent, from $49.7 billion in FY23 to $37.3 billion in FY24," it said. GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said the current import of gold and silver from the UAE is unsustainable as the UAE does not mine gold or silver or add sufficient value to imports. "High import duties in India on gold, silver, and jewellery at 15 per cent are at the root of the problem. Consider lowering tariffs to 5 per cent. This will cut large-scale smuggling and other misuse," Srivastava said.Trade in gold, silver, and diamonds has been prone to misuse due to their low volume but high value and high import duties in India. Low tariff imports of gold, silver only benefit few importers who keep all profits arising through tariff arbitrage and never pass it to consumers, he said. Srivastava suggested the government implement certain measures to help India balance its trade policies, protect domestic revenue, and ensure fair competition in the import of precious metals and jewellery. It suggested reassessing and potentially revising the concessional duty rates under CEPA to mitigate the arbitrage driving the surge in imports of gold and silver. "At least, implement yearly import quotas (tariff rate quotas) for silver, similar to those for gold, to control the volume of imports and prevent revenue loss," it said, adding that India should rigorously verify the claimed value addition by Dubai-based refiners in gold and silver imports to ensure compliance with CEPA rules of origin. It also asked to tighten regulations around the India International Bullion Exchange (IIBX) at Gift City to control the volume and nature of precious metal imports and the exchange should not allow country-based exemptions. As increased imports contribute to a higher current account deficit and since gold and silver act more like financial instruments than regular trade items, India should avoid including them in any FTA. "India has granted tariff concessions for these items in many FTAs and under the DFTP (duty-free tariff preference) scheme, so a comprehensive review is needed. India announced the scheme for LDCs (least developed countries) in 2008. Under this, India provides duty free/preferential market access on about 98.2 per cent of India's tariff lines (or product categories).

# Govt headhunter finds no one suitable for HPCL top post

New Delhi, 18 June: The government headhunter PESB has rejected all candidates it interviewed for the top job at Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), the third instance in as many years that the board has not found any suitable candidate for the role in a state oil firm. The Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB) on June 14 interviewed eight candidates, including a director on the HPCL board and managing director of Indraprastha Gas Ltd (IGL), but rejected them all. "The Board did not recommend any candidate for the post of chairman and managing director (CMD) HPCL and advised the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas to choose an appropriate course of further action for selection, including the Search-Cum-Selection Committee (SCSC) or as deemed appropriate with the approval of the competent authority," the PESB panel said in a notification. The HPCL CMD post will fall vacant on September 1, 2024, when the incumbent Pushp Kumar Joshi retires on attaining a superannuation age of 60 years. The PESB had previously not found anyone suitable for the top job at the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and ONGC. This led to the incumbent in IOC getting an additional year in office even after attaining superannuation age and a retired executive being given charge in ONGC. PESB, on June 3, 2021, interviewed nine candidates, including two serving IAS officers, to head India's largest oil and gas producer, ONGC. But it found neither senior bureaucrats Avinash Joshi and Niraj Verma nor Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) director-finance Pomila Jaspal and ONGC director for technology and field services Om Prakash Singh suitable.The ministry thereafter constituted a search-cum-selection panel and named Arun Kumar Singh, who had retired after attaining 60 years of age from Bharat Petroleum Corporation, to head ONGC. Singh wasn't eligible to apply in the first place, but the eligibility rule was changed to allow consideration of persons who have attained 60 years of age. He was given a three-year term that ends in December 2025. In the case of IOC, PESB, in May last year, did not make any recommendation for a replacement of Shrikant Madhav Vaidya, who was to retire after attaining 60 years of age in August 2023.




The panel interviewed 10 candidates, including Chennai Petroleum Corporation Ltd managing director Arvind Kumar. This was followed by a rare move.

Vaidya, who took over as the chairman of IOC on July 1, 2020, was "re-employment on a contract basis" for one year "beyond the date of his superannuation i.e. with effect from September 1, 2023, till August 31, 2024", according to an official order dated August 4, 2023.

This month, the oil ministry invited applications for the new chairman of the IOC.

The selection will be done by a three-member search-cum-selection committee headed by the PESB chairperson and includes the oil secretary and former HPCL chairman MK Surana as members. Applications have been sought from engineers, chartered accountants and cost accountants with postgraduate management degrees from leading institutions and having at least five years experience in leadership roles by July 3.

The age eligibility cut-off has been set at no more than 58 years for internal candidates and 57 years for outsiders, with 60 years as retirement age, according to the advertisement.

# Post-poll violence: No reservation if central forces' stay in Bengal extended, Home Ministry to HC

**Kolkata, 18 June:** The Union Home Ministry on Tuesday informed the Calcutta High Court that it has no reservation if the deployment of central forces in West Bengal is extended if the situation demands in the light of allegations of post-poll violence in the state.

The court directed the Centre and the West Bengal government to assess the situation following the charges of post-poll violence as made by petitioners and disclose all relevant facts relating to these on the next date of hearing on June 21.

During the hearing, Additional Solicitor General Asok Chakrabarti, representing the Union Home Ministry, submitted before the court that it has no reservations about extending deployment of central forces in the state if the situation demands.

The counsel for Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari, one of the petitioners in two PILs, submitted that a report by the West Bengal government states that till June 12, a total of 107 FIRs have been lodged and that 18 of these are not related to post-poll violence, claiming that thus it admits that post-poll violence was indeed occurring in the state.

The seven-phase Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal concluded on June 1 and results were declared on June 4.

A division bench presided by Justice Harish Tandon directed that the matter be listed for hearing again on June 21, till which date the central forces have already been directed by the court to stay put in Bengal.



It was alleged by Adhikari and lawyer Priyanka Tibrewal in their separate PILs that people belonging to a particular political party were being subjected to atrocities following the conclusion of the Lok Sabha election process.

The division bench, also comprising Justice Hiranmay Bhattacharyya, said that its main concern is the safety and security of the citizens as serious allegations have been made by the petitioners in the PILs.

Appearing for the state, Advocate General Kishore Dutta said that the state government was doing its job in maintaining law and order. Petitioner-lawyer Priyanka Tibrewal claimed that she has a list of 250 people who were ousted from their homes for their political beliefs and were staying in a dharamshala in Kolkata.

She sought to submit a supplementary affidavit in this regard before the court on the next date of hearing.

# West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee visits BJP MP Ananta Maharaj in Cooch Behar

**Cooch Behar, 18 June:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee met BJP Rajya Sabha MP 'Ananta Maharaj' alias Nagen Roy, a leader of the Rajbongshi community, at his Cooch Behar residence on Tuesday afternoon.



Roy welcomed Banerjee at the Chakchaka Palace with a traditional scarf and 'guwa paan' or betel leaf.The meeting, which was seen as politically significant, lasted for around 35 minutes. Before visiting Roy's residence, Banerjee offered prayers at the Madan Mohan temple in the district headquarters town.

Banerjee arrived in Cooch Behar on Monday evening after visiting the North Bengal Medical College and Hospital in Siliguri where she met victims of the Kanchanjunga Express tragedy.

The TMC wrested the Cooch Behar Lok Sabha seat from the BJP, defeating incumbent MP Nisith Pramanik by nearly 40,000 votes. The election results gave rise to fervent speculations on whether fresh political equations were in the making given Roy's influence over a significant section of Rajbanshi community members of the region.

While the state BJP has so far not responded to the development, which is likely to add to the party's discomfiture, Roy himself was cryptic about the meeting."Let's see what happens in future," he told reporters after the meeting.

# Train services restored at Kanchanjungha Express accident site in West Bengal's Rangapani



**Kolkata, 18 June:** Train services in both the up and down lines at Rangapani near West Bengal's New Jalpaiguri station were restored on Tuesday following repair work on a war footing, a senior official said.

Train operations on the route were hampered following an accident there on Monday morning when a goods train rammed Agartala-Sealdah Kanchanjunga Express from behind.

Train services in the down line were restored on Monday night, and in the up line, diesel locomotive-run train services were restarted on Tuesday morning, divisional railway manager of Katihar S Kumar said.

He said that electric locomotives in the up line would recommence within an hour.While visiting the accident site on Monday evening, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that since it is the main line connecting Northeast with the rest of the country, the focus was to restore services on the route at the earliest.

Railway authorities set up enquiry and assistance booths at Sealdah and Howrah stations in the wake of the Kanchenjunga Express crash.



**Water level at the Rabindra Sarobar appears to be replenished after the rainfall brought by cyclone Remal. The water levels went down in the peak of summer between April-May.**

# Himanta Biswa Sarma writes to Mamata Banerjee on IIT-Kharagpur student Faizan Ahmed's death, says hand over the case to CBI

**Kolkata, 18 June:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma wrote to West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, demanding that the case related to the death of IIT-Kharagpur student Faizan Ahmed be handed over to the CBI for investigation following the findings of the latest forensic report.

According to the second forensic report, conducted at the direction of the Calcutta High Court, there was a gunshot wound on the upper left side of Ahmed's neck and a stab wound on the right side of his neck, Sarma said in his letter, which was made available to the press on Tuesday.

In view of the "shocking findings of the latest forensic report, it is imperative that the perpetrators of the horrific crime as well as any other person involved in concealing the crime are brought to book", he said.This would ensure "justice to the deceased and closure to the grief stricken parents", he said.

"Kindly hand over the case to the CBI for a transparent and fair investigation of the crime," he added.Sarma had written to Banerjee in October 2022, requesting a thorough investigation into the unnatural death of the student.

Ahmed, 23, was found dead in his hostel room on October 14, 2022, and his death was claimed by the IIT-Kharagpur authorities to be a case of suicide. However, his parents claimed that they had observed injury marks on his body.

His mother had moved the Calcutta High Court in May 2023, seeking the formation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the death.The court then ordered the exhumation of his remains and a second post-mortem examination to "bring out the truth behind his death".Ahmed, a resident of Tinsukia in Assam, was a third-year mechanical engineering student at IIT-Kharagpur.

# IIT Kharagpur student Faizan Ahmed's family backs Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma's call for CBI probe into death

**Kolkata, 18 June:** The family members of IIT Kharagpur student Faizan Ahmed, who was found dead on campus under suspicious circumstances nearly 18 months ago, have supported Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's call for a CBI probe into the case.

Sarma on Tuesday wrote to his Bengal counterpart Mamata Banerjee, suggesting that the probe be handed over to the CBI to unearth the truth behind the mysterious death of Faizan.

Faizan's mother, Rehana Ahmed, told The Telegraph Online shortly after news of Sarma's letter broke that she hoped Mamata Banerjee would accept the Assam chief minister's suggestion.

"I would have a chance at getting justice, if Mamata Banerjee accepts our CM's demand. IIT Kharagpur has turned into a zone of death. I just want to know who killed my son and why. Mujhe aur kuchh nahin chahiye [I don't want anything else]. I just want to look at my son's killer and ask why he killed my son," she said.

Rashid Ahmed, Faizan's uncle, also told The Telegraph Online the family would like a CBI probe."We feel the chief minister [of Assam] is right. The SIT [special investigation team] that was constituted to find the truth about Faizan's death has achieved little in all these months,"

"It will be better if the case is handed over to the CBI," Ahmed said.He said the family will consult their legal counsel on this matter.

Faizan, a mechanical engineering student at IIT Kharagpur, was found dead on October 14, 2022.Dissatisfied with the initial findings of the Midnapore Police and the IIT Kharagpur's claims that Faizan had died by suicide, the family had moved Calcutta High Court.

A second post-mortem exam, conducted on the high court's order, had revealed Faizan had wounds similar to a gunshot and stabbing in his neck, which had not been recorded previously.The press statement issued by the Assam chief minister's office on Tuesday pointed to the fresh findings.

"There was a gunshot wound on the upper left side of Ahmed's neck and a stab wound on the right side of his neck," the CM's press department statement in Assamese said. "After the shocking findings of the latest forensic report, it is imperative that the perpetrators of the horrific crime as well as any other person involved in concealing the crime are brought to book.

"This would ensure justice to the deceased and closure to the grief-stricken parents," the statement added.

When the fresh autopsy findings were revealed in court, Faizan's mother, Rehana, had told The Telegraph Online: "From where do students get guns, swords and knives inside the campus of a premier institute like the IIT?"

In the 2006 murder of Tapasi Malik in Hooghly's Singur, the then Bengal government headed by Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had initially ordered a CID probe, but later agreed to a CBI probe as demanded by then principal Opposition leader Mamata Banerjee.

In the Rizwanur Rahman case of 2007, the Calcutta High Court had ruled the investigation carried out by the city police as illegal and ordered a CBI probe into the case.

"It is unlikely the state government will agree to a CBI probe. In that case if the family moves the court, the court can order a CBI probe," said advocate Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya.

# BJP central team visiting Bengal faces protests from party workers in Diamond Harbour

**Kolkata, 18 June:** A BJP central team visiting West Bengal on Tuesday faced protests from its own party workers, who claimed that senior leaders did not show empathy when they were displaced from their homes because of alleged post-poll violence in the state, party sources said.

The incident occurred at Amtala area in Diamond Harbour, the Lok Sabha constituency of TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee who is considered number two in the party hierarchy.The TMC claimed that the incident indicated that the leaders were disconnected from party workers.

The four-member team, led by former Tripura chief minister Biplab Deb, has been touring West Bengal to assess the situation following alleged violence by Trinamool Congress workers against BJP workers after the Lok Sabha elections.



The team's convoy was stopped at Amtala by disgruntled party workers at Amtala in South 24 Parganas district, who aired their grievances to the visiting leaders, BJP sources said.

Later in the day, the team visited Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district and spoke to local people of the area where TMC leaders were accused of sexual assault and land grabs.

Speaking to reporters at Sandeshkhali, BJP central team member Brij Lal said that the team is fully aware of the issues faced by the party workers.

"There is no law and order in West Bengal. This is what the team has gathered after visiting various places in the state during the last three days," he said.Lal said that the team will submit its report to the BJP's top leadership.

"We will move court if required to restore law and order in West Bengal," he said.The team aims to meet party workers allegedly displaced from their homes due to alleged post-poll violence across West Bengal.

On Monday, the team visited Coochbehar in the northern part of the state.

Besides Deb and Lal, senior BJP leaders Ravi Shankar Prasad and Kavita Patidar are members of the team.Earlier, Deb had said that post-poll violence has become habitual for the Trinamool Congress following election results."The sooner TMC changes this stance of attacking opposition parties, the better it will be for the party," Deb said.

Senior Trinamool Congress leader Shantanu Sen claimed that the protests by BJP workers revealed that the leaders were disconnected from them.He suggested that complaints of post-poll violence against the TMC by the BJP are nothing but a sham.

# Kanchanjunga Express collision: Railway connectivity to North-east restored after disruption

**Malda, 18 June:Malda, 18 June:** The railway connectivity between the Northeast and the rest of the country was partially disrupted following the collision of the Agartala-Sealdah Kanchenjunga Express and a goods train near the Rangapani station on Monday morning.

Several trains on either side of the accident spot in Darjeeling district were halted at different stations. The Padatik Express bound for New Alipurduar from Sealdah was almost 3km from the accident spot.The railway officials informed that 24 trains were diverted via Alubabari, Siliguri Junction and New Jalpaiguri (NJP). Three trains were cancelled. A rescue train

was arranged by the railways from NJP to Sealdah to take passengers safely. Another relief train reached the spot from Alipurduar Junction while the first onearrived at the accident site from NJP. NBSTC also sent 10 buses to the spot to ferry the passengers of the Kanchenjunga Express to their destination."Additional buses will ply from Siliguri to Calcutta," said Partha Pratim Roy, the chairman of the NBSTC.

The railway traffic through the Up-track (through which the trains from Calcuttamove towards NJP and the Northeast) was restored at 5.40pm.Scores of passengers were waiting to board trains bound for NJP and Calcutta atdifferent stations in north Bengal when the railway traffic was thrown off the tracks after the collision.

# Change in plan to turn up for daughter's birthday claims Calcutta man's life in train accident

## Kanchanjungha Express passengers ordeal end as train reaches Sealdah eight hours behind schedule

**Siliguri, 18 June:** A 31-year-old man had changed his plan to return from Siliguri to his Kolkata home early to celebrate his daughter's 11th birthday on Monday. All preparations had been in place, but destiny had some other plans in store.Instead of her father Subhojit Mali, came the news of his death in the train accident at Rangapani near New Jalpaiguri railway station in the northern part of the state.Mali had spoken to his daughter over a video call before boarding the Kanchanjunga Express when he had promised her to get a birthday cake and take the entire family - his elderly parents, wife and two children - out to celebrate.

Calling his daughter 'Maa' (mother), Mali during their last conversation told her daughter Sristi, "I will be back home at any cost... Do not worry." Like his other family members, Srishti, a Class V student at a school in south Kolkata, is unable to accept that her father will never return home alive.

Subhajit, a resident of Jamir Line in Kolkata's Ballygunge area, had gone to Siliguri on Friday for some office work."He was supposed to return after a few days, but he took the train on Monday because of his daughter's birthday," the deceased's cousin Priya Pradhan told PTI."One of his colleagues, Suryasekhar Panda, who worked in the same organisation, also went to Siliguri. Yesterday morning, after the accident, he called from someone else's phone number at home and gave the news," she said.

Subhajit, who also has a 1.5-year-old son, used to frequent the northern states of the country, as a part of his job, Pradhan added."He used to take equipment of cars there. He has been in this job for the last five years... He used to return home by road, but this time he took a train as he was in a hurry to come back because of Sristi's birthday," she said.Mali's elderly father was inconsolable.

"I do not know what to say! God should have taken me instead of my son... Who will look after his children now?" he said.He urged Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to "do something" for his daughter-in-law.

"I will not take any money from anyone, but I will request our CM to see if something can be done for my daughter-in-law. Maybe she can get a job in some state government department," he told PTI.

Local Trinamul Congress councillor Sudarshana Mukhopadhyay remembered Subho, as Mali was popularly called in the locality, as a man with a friendly demeanour, who risked his life to help people including COVID-19 patients during the lockdown period.



"Subho was a cheerful young man who was always there to help others. He even bought PPE kits with his own money and accompanied COVID patients to hospitals," Mukhopadhyay recollected.

Mali is one those who lost their lives after a goods train rammed into the stationary Sealdah-bound Kanchanjunga Express near Rangapani, 30 km from the New Jalpaiguri station in Siliguri, on Monday morning.

So far, the toll in the accident is 10, a senior doctor of the North Bengal Medical College said on Tuesday.The toll in the train accident in West Bengal's Darjeeling district rose to 10, an official said on Tuesday.

While eight bodies were brought to the state-run North Bengal Medical College and Hospital (NBMCH) after the accident on Monday morning, two persons died during treatment, he said.

Among the deceased was a six-year-old girl who was admitted to the hospital in a "critical condition", doctor Sandip Sengupta, NBMCH's dean of student affairs, told PTI-Video.

"The girl had fractures in her legs and a liver-spleen injury. She died while undergoing treatment," he said.

Thirty-seven people were admitted to the hospital on Monday following the accident, he said, adding that two of them went home after primary treatment.

"Three persons are in the trauma care unit. They underwent surgery. Few patients have fractures. Most of them have superficial injuries. Our challenge is to send them home in good health. Our team is working tirelessly," Sengupta said.A goods train rammed into the stationary Sealdah-bound Kanchanjunga Express near Rangapani, 30 km from the New Jalpaiguri station in Siliguri, on Monday morning.

The ordeal of the passengers of the ill-fated Kanchanjunga Express, which was hit by a goods train near New Jalpaiguri leaving nine people dead and several others injured, ended early Tuesday morning when the undamaged coaches of the train reached its destination Sealdah station, an Eastern Railway official said.

At least four coaches in the rear of the train were severely damaged in the collision at Rangapani, about 10 kilometres from New Jalpaiguri station, on a rain-soaked Monday morning in north Bengal.

Calcutta Mayor Firhad Hakim, West Bengal Transport minister Snehasis Chakraborty and Divisional Railway Manager of Sealdah division Deepak Nigam were present at the station to ensure smooth dispersal of the passengers and onward movement to their homes, an official said.

The 13174 Kanchanjunga Express from Tripura capital Agartala, scheduled to reach Sealdah at 7.20 pm on Monday, arrived at its destination eight hours behind schedule at 3.16 am, the ER official said.The hapless passengers, who went through the ordeal and horror of the accident, were provided with medical facilities, food and water at various stations, including Malda town and also at Sealdah during the journey, he said.

The state's transport department provided buses and small vehicles to the passengers at Sealdah station to ensure that they reach their homes smoothly, a state government official said.

# Cong accuses Govt of 'destroying' rlys, seeks Vaishnaw's resignation

**New Delhi, 18 June :** Accusing the Union government of "destroying" Indian Railways, the Congress on Tuesday demanded Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw's resignation in the wake of the Kanchanjunga Express accident and said that he has no moral right to remain in the position.



The Opposition party also took a swipe at Vaishnaw for reaching the accident site riding pillion on a motorcycle, asking whether he is a rail minister or a "reel minister". Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said whenever there is a train accident, Modi government's Railway Minister reaches the spot under the glare of cameras and behaves as if everything is fine. "Narendra Modi ji, tell us who should be held accountable, the Railway Minister or you," the Congress chief asked. Kharge posed seven questions to the government and demanded answers. After a major accident like Balasore, why was not even a single kilometer of the much-hyped "Kavach" anti-train collision system added, he asked.

"Why are nearly 3 lakh posts vacant in the Railways, why were they not filled in the last 10 years? According to the NCRB (2022) report, 1,00,000 people have died in rail accidents between 2017 and 2021 alone! Who will take responsibility for this," the Congress chief questioned. The Railway Board itself has admitted that the long working hours of loco pilots due to acute shortage of manpower are the main reason for the increasing number of accidents, he said and asked why were the posts not filled. "In its 323rd report, the Parliamentary Standing Committee had criticised the Railways for the 'neglect' shown by the Railway Board towards the recommendations of the Commission of Railway Safety (CRS). It was underlined that the CRS investigates only 8-10 per cent of accidents, why was the CRS not strengthened," Kharge asked.

According to the CAG, why was 75% funding reduced in the 'Rashtriya Rail Suraksha Kosh' (RRSK), while Rs 20,000 crore was to be made available every year, he asked. Why is this money being used by railway officials on unnecessary expenses and comfort facilities, Kharge further asked. "Why has travelling by train in the common Sleeper Class become very expensive? Why has the number of Sleeper Coaches been reduced? The Railway Minister recently said to use police force against the people 'overcrowding' rail coaches. But does he not know that 2.7 crore people had to cancel their tickets last year due to abysmal shortage of seats -- a direct result of Modi government's policy to reduce coaches," the Congress president said.

Did the Modi government merge the railway budget with the general budget in 2017-18 to avoid any kind of accountability, he questioned. "Self-glorification will not undo the criminal negligence perpetrated by the Modi government on the Indian Railways! Accountability needs to be fixed at the top," Kharge said in his post on X. Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here, Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate said the Railways is perhaps the most preferred mode of transport as far as the middle class, lower middle class and the poor are concerned simply because it is the most economical means of transportation. She showed pictures of the Balasore train accident last June and of Monday's accident, and asked what had changed between this period.

Shrinate said that as many as 1,117 railway accidents had taken place since 2014-23, which means an accident every three days. These accidents have resulted in loss of life and property, she added. "Who is going to take the moral responsibility for this? We have seen the railway ministers in the past own up moral responsibility and resign from their position of power. But here we have a minister who does not miss an opportunity even in the time of plight and tragedy to make reels. He is not the rail minister, he is the reels minister of India," Shrinate said. "Even when he (Vaishnaw) went to Darjeeling and went to the accident site, he rode pillion on the bike without a helmet so that he is better captured in the video. Is that what's your priority," Shrinate asked.

The Congress leadersaid the "Kavach protection" that the government had touted had failed the country. "What explains the 3,12,000 vacancies in the Indian railways. What explains the 21 per cent vacant positions for loco pilots," she asked. On whether the Congress demands Vaishnaw's resignation, Shrinate said: "Without a doubt. A government that is sensitive and accountable will fix accountability for every minister and every department. What explains 1,117 rail accidents in nine years from 2014 to 2023. Who is accountable for that?"

"What did Ashwini Vaishnaw do to not just modernise but make the railways secure from June last year in Balasore to June this year? Unless you will not fix responsibility, unless you will not fix accountability, how should people trust governance, how should people know they will be safe while travelling in railways," Shrinate said. "Absolutely, without a doubt, without blinking an eyelid, Ashwini Vaishnaw has no moral authority to remain in the position that he continues to enjoy," she said.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath meeting with Member of Parliament from Bareilly Lok Sabha constituency Chhatrapal Singh Gangwar, in Lucknow on Tuesday.

# US, India must remain at forefront of technology: NSA Doval

**New Delhi, 18 June:** India and the US must remain at the forefront of developing critical technologies as part of a larger strategic interest, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval said on Tuesday in presence of his American counterpart Jake Sullivan.

Doval's comments came a day after he and Sullivan unveiled a raft of transformative initiatives to deepen India-US cooperation in areas of artificial intelligence, semiconductor, critical minerals, advanced telecommunication and defence space. "The US and India have got to remain at the forefront of technology in case we need to protect and defend our value systems and it is part of a larger strategic interest," Doval said. The National Security Advisor (NSA) was addressing the iCET (India-US initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology) industry roundtable hosted by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). The iCET was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden in May 2022 with an aim to forge greater collaboration between India and the US in areas of critical technologies. In his remarks, Doval highlighted the role of industry in technology and the progress of iCET since its inception, according to a CII statement. "iCET has achieved more than we could imagine," Doval said, highlighting the progress made across the defence innovation roadmap and startups, and emphasised the importance of the semiconductor industry.

In his address, Sullivan noted three important buckets for technology partnerships, the first being innovation, the second as production, and the third being deployment. The top Biden administration official highlighted the importance of innovation and emphasised the need for government support for the private sector. There exists bipartisan support for Indian industry in the US, he said adding that building the ecosystem and supply chain is the key to production. Sullivan said that the core of iCET is about the idea of India and US being able to support each other and to encourage greater collaboration in the technology ecosystem, jointly innovate and find solutions to challenges. Both the NSAs assured the industry that they welcome industry highlighting specific issues and due diligence will be done to resolve any barriers which hold back deeper and closer India US ties. The Initiative for iCET represents a landmark agreement between the two countries on emerging technologies such as AI, semiconductors, biotech, and defense innovation. Chandrajit Banerjee, the director general of CII, stated that under iCET India and US are working on sectors such as AI, biotech, critical materials and minerals, semiconductors among others to help enable deeper engagement between the two nations.

# Renukaswamy murder case: Police doing a good job, no need for CBI probe, says Karnataka Home Minister

**Chitradurga, 18 June:** Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Tuesday said there was no need to hand over the Renukaswamy murder case to the CBI as the police were doing a good job in their investigation without succumbing to any pressure.

Parameshwara and a State BJP delegation led by its President B Y Vijayendra met the parents and wife of Renukaswamy, whose body was found in Bengaluru on June nine, separately and consoled them. Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda indicated that Renukaswamy was murdered in a "horrific, brutal and barbaric" manner. Speaking to reporters here, Parameshwara said 17 people, including Kannada actor Darshan and his friend Pavithra Gowda, have been arrested in connection with the case. According to police sources, Renukaswamy, a fan of Darshan, had allegedly sent some obscene messages to Gowda on social media, which infuriated the 47-year-old actor. “I came here to console the family. This is a painful incident not only for the family but also for all of us. So far, 17 people have been arrested. They are being interrogated thoroughly,” Parameshwara said.

“Our policemen have done a good job. They did not succumb to any pressure while doing their job. Hence, there is no need to hand over the case to the CBI,” the Minister said in response to a question on the possibility of handing it over to the premier investigation agency. He said Renukaswamy’s family members have demanded justice and a Government job. The victim got married only a year ago and his wife is pregnant. "I will discuss with the Chief Minister (Siddaramaiah) (regarding demand for job)," Parameshwara said. Earlier, the BJP delegation urged the government to provide compensation to Renukaswamy's family and a government job to his wife. They sought



a fair probe into his murder and demanded that the guilty be punished. From the party Rs two lakh was given to the family of Renukaswamy. "Renukaswamy's murder is inhuman and no one in the civilised society can support it. Everyone has to condemn this incident in the strongest terms. This heinous murder is being discussed not only in the state but nationally. Looking at his parents and wife, it hurts and we are unable to understand how to console them and instill courage in them," Vijayendra said.

Speaking to reporters here after meeting the family members, he urged the state government and the Chief Minister to instill courage in the family, give compensation and a government job to Renukaswamy's wife. "Investigation is going on, it is known to everyone as to who all are involved, but the investigation has to be done properly, without budging under any pressure. The investigation has to happen without losing track, and the guilty and the murderers should be punished," he added. Addressing a press conference in Bengaluru, Dayananda said: "It is a heinous crime committed in a horrific manner and we have to ensure that the accused in the case are punished and we have to deliver justice to the victim's family and our officers and staff are working in this direction."

"With regard to the investigation of the murder case (Renukaswamy murder) registered in Kamakshipalya police station, wherein an individual has been killed in a very brutal and barbaric way, so far the police have arrested 17 persons and all the 17 persons have been taken into police custody and their interrogation is being done," he said. Meanwhile, as part of the ongoing probe into the case, police took accused Nagaraj and Lakshman to a hotel in the district headquarters town of Mysuru, from where Darshan was picked up on June 11, for sport inspection. According to sources, police gathered information and also CCTV camera footage from the hotel.

# Cops involved in drug trade will be dismissed, smugglers' property attached: Punjab CM

**Chandigarh , 18 June:** Any police official found involved in drug trade would be dismissed from service and the property of traffickers attached, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said on Tuesday while announcing tough steps to break the "nexus" between low-rank police officials and smugglers.Mann also announced the transfer of police officials at lower levels on a mass scale across the state and added that 10,000 police personnel would be recruited to strengthen the department. Interacting with reporters after a meeting with the senior superintendents of police (SSPs) here, Mann said the police department would see reforms soon. During the just-concluded Lok Sabha elections, a huge quantity of drugs and cash were seized in Punjab, the Chief Minister said.

"We got clues from where those came and what their destinations were. We have the details," he said. Mann said the day the model code of conduct for the Lok Sabha polls ended, he called the director general of police and told him to take further action against the drug menace. The Chief Minister said police officers have been asked to transform the war against drugs into a mass movement. There have been allegations that officials have been working at the same police station for over 10 years, he said, adding that somewhere or the other "favouritism" is going on.Suggesting there was a "nexus" between lower rank police officials and drug peddlers, the Chief Minister asked the state police chief to transfer officials posted at police stations immediately. "If any police official is found involved in the sale of drugs, it will be seen as a sin and strict action will be taken. He will be dismissed. Later, he will be questioned to find out how long this was going on," Mann said. The Chief Minister further said if any drug smuggler is caught, then his property will be attached. "It will be done within a week of him getting caught."

Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav said more than 10,000 personnel from the constable level have been transferred. "A massive administrative reshuffle was being undertaken," he said. The Punjab police chief said a station house officer (SHO) has the power to freeze the property of a drug smuggler under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. "In the last two years, we have frozen property worth Rs 200 crore in 459 cases," he said.Yadav said directions have been issued to identify the point of sale of drugs in "mohallas" and villages. The special task force and intelligence wing have prepared a list of 9,000 street-level peddlers in the state and immediate action will be taken against them, he said.

# Priyanka's presence in Parliament is going to be a huge asset to Cong: Tharoor

**Thiruvananthapuram , 18 June:** Priyanka Gandhi's presence in the Lok Sabha would strengthen the Opposition benches and Wayanad would have a very strong person to represent them in Parliament, Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram Shashi Tharoor said on Tuesday.

Tharoor, speaking to news agency PTI on the sidelines of his 'thanksgiving' campaign in Neyyattinkara Assembly constituency, said Priyanka has been a very effective orator during the election campaigns and he was happy that she decided to enter electoral politics from Kerala. "I think Rahulji absolutely had to keep Rae Bareli, it is a very important signal to the people of Uttar Pradesh and of North India in general. "At the same time, he did not want to feel that he was abandoning the people of Wayanad and it is better to entrust it to his own sister. So I think it is a wonderful decision," Tharoor said as he travelled through the constituency in an open vehicle, thanking the voters.

The Congress MP said the same was his preference for the last few weeks, when it was clear that Rahul had to choose one or the other. "I certainly can mention that this was my own preference for some weeks now when it became clear that he had to choose one or the other and I thought it was the right choice and I applaud it wholeheartedly," Tharoor said. He said Priyanka could have been a wonderful candidate in Varanasi as well, especially looking at how good the Congress candidate did against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "I think right now, by winning in Wayanad, which she should do comfortably I believe, she is going to bring a very strong voice to the Parliament. We have all seen her speaking during the election campaign. She is one of the most impressive speakers and campaigners we have got and to have her in the Lok Sabha would be a huge asset to the party," Tharoor said.

The Congress MP said it is unfortunate to single out one family and accuse them of 'parivarvaad', when this system is ingrained in our culture. He said according to reports, 15 BJP MPs are from political families and it would be an underestimation as many more would be coming from political families. "In our culture, dentists want their children to be dentists, artists want their children to be artists and it is there in politics as well," Tharoor said. Replying to a question on whether he had given a complaint to AICC, expressing his disappointment over how the Thiruvananthapuram district Congress leaders performed during his election campaign, Tharoor denied it. "No...no. I have not complained to anyone. We all have done our part, the party workers did their part and we have a victory to speak about," Tharoor said.

# Over 300 in apartment complex in Kerala seek treatment for food poisoning

**Kochi, 18 June:** Over 300 people, including children, living in an apartment complex in Kakkanad near here sought treatment for food poisoning in the last couple of days, prompting municipal and health authorities to inspect the water sources used by the residents of the flats.

Kerala Health Minister Veena George on Tuesday said that she was informed a day ago by some residents of the apartment complex in Thrikkakara municipality that over the last few days, several hundred people have fallen sick there. "I immediately ordered an inspection of the area by health officials and a medical team from Ernakulam visited the apartment complex and examined all their water sources. They also spoke to residents and took a list of the people who fell sick and sought treatment in private hospitals," she said.

The minister said that it appears to be a serious issue as there have been instances of water contamination in the recent past in the city and thousands of families are living in the apartment complex. The Directorate of Health Services has been asked to take steps in accordance with the public health protection laws, she said. "Though flat residents told me that over 700 people fell ill, as per official reports received from the health department, around 340 people sought treatment and five are hospitalised presently," the minister said.She also said the



people sought treatment in different private hospitals and therefore, the cases were not reported.

"However, those taking care of the day-to-day running of the apartment complex had the responsibility of informing the health authorities about the issue. Therefore, there has been a violation of the norms and the officials have been asked to take appropriate action against that as well," George said. The municipal authorities said the results of one round of tests of the water samples taken from the complex on Monday were not available yet, the apartments' association claimed that water contamination may not be the reason for the food poisoning cases.

A member of the association told reporters on Tuesday that hundreds of families order food from outside or go out to eat, use public facilities and therefore, could have picked up the infection from somewhere else. At the same time, he also said that all water sources in the apartment complex were being tested, water tankers were being used to meet the residents' needs and the testing will continue till it is clear that there is no contamination.

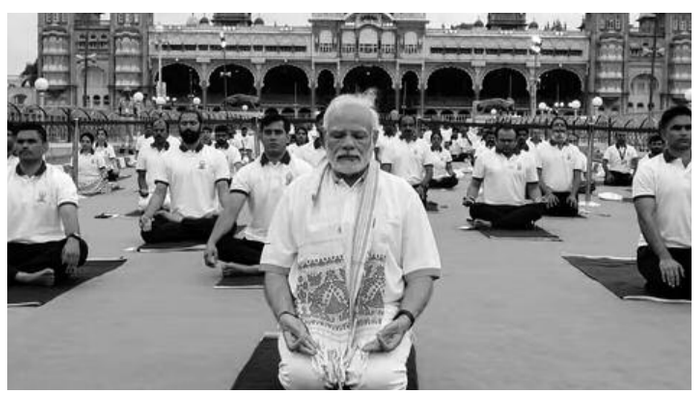
"Whatever has happened, has been rectified. There is no need to panic. I would request all of you (media) to help us by reducing the level of anxiety that is there," he further said.

# PM to lead yoga day celebrations from Srinagar on June 21

**New Delhi, 18 June:** The main International Day of Yoga celebrations this year will be held at the Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Centre (SKICC) in Srinagar on June 21 with Prime Minister Narendra Modi leading the event there, AYUSH Minister Prataprao Jadhav said on Tuesday.

Jadhav, the Minister of State for Ayush (independent charge), said this year's theme 'Yoga for Self and Society' highlights yoga's dual role in fostering individual and societal wellbeing. It underlines promoting connection between the inner-self and the outer world going beyond one's own wellbeing, Jadhav said. "Yoga nurtures physical, mental, and spiritual growth while promoting societal harmony. The enthusiastic participation of millions in recent years reflects the profound impact of yoga on communities," the Minister said. He also announced that PM has written to each gram pradhan, encouraging grassroots participation and the spread of yoga in rural areas. Jadhav launched a 'Common Yoga Protocol Book in Braille' script to support visually impaired people to learn and practice yoga with convenience.

The Minister also launched Professor Ayushman comic on yoga. This book will help children to learn and practice yoga with interest and entertainment. The United Nations General Assembly, heeding to a call by Prime Minister Modi, had made a declaration in December 2014 to observe June 21 every year as IDY. The IDY resolution of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in December 2014 came at the initiative of the PM Modi and was passed unanimously. Since 2015, the IDY has evolved into a mass movement



around the world, Jadhav said. Ayush secretary Vaidya Rajesh Kotecha said that IDY is not only a celebration but also a concerted effort to bring about a behavioural change so that people adopt yoga in their lives so that they can get the benefits of yoga.

The Minister further highlighted the 'Whole of Government' approach to the IDY celebrations, emphasising the coordinated efforts across various government departments and the active participation of state governments to ensure an inclusive and widespread observance each year. Along with state governments, union territories are actively participating in the IDY 2024. The National Ayush Mission team across the nation is also actively engaged in organising IDY events, he said. This year, the IDY will witness several events including the 'Yoga for Space'. With support of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), a unique initiative called 'Yoga for Space' is being organised wherein all ISRO scientists/officers will perform Common Yoga Protocol (CYP) on IDY.

The Gaganyaan project team will also be participating in IDY 2024. The Ayush Ministry has already launched a video contest through MyGov Portal and MyBharat portal to raise awareness about yoga and to inspire people to prepare for and become active participants in the observation of IDY 2024. Families have to record up to one-minute harmonious yoga demonstration short video as a part of the contest. To promote technology and start-ups in the field of yoga, the ministry has organised Yoga Tech Challenge on MyGov portal and MyBharat portal which aims to identify and promote those start-ups or individuals who have developed yoga related tools.

Last year, the global celebration of IDY was led by Modi at the United Nations headquarters in New York, USA, while the national celebration was led by Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar at Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh. The IDY celebration is done by a harmonious 45 minutes yoga demonstration called Common Yoga Protocol (CYP). Videos of CYP demonstrations are available on YouTube in 22 Indian languages, six UN languages and nine other foreign languages.

Declaration No. 16/2023 Dated 24.4.2023



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## India's Greatest Bowling Attack? Former India Cricketer Has His Say

**New Delhi, 18 June:** India's all-round performance in the ongoing T20 World Cup is earning them praise from all quarters with former India spinner Piyush Chawla calling the current bowling line-up "one of all-time great" as they prepare for the Super Eight challenge. Chawla asserted that India's bowling attack has transformed in recent years to become top-notch in the world. The veteran bowler credited the pace quartet of Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Arshdeep Singh and Hardik Pandya along with spinners Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal and Axar Patel for making it a great bowling unit.

Indian bowlers have stepped up to the occasion in the T20 World Cup so far in the low-scoring encounters including the mega clash against Pakistan. "Over the past few years, India's bowling attack has truly transformed. We now have one of the most complete and formidable bowling units in the world that has provided balance to the side allowing the batsmen with more freedom to play their natural game. In the game against Pakistan, our batting collapsed and it was our bowlers who got them over the line.

"There have been many such occasions where our bowlers stepped up and contributed more than our batters. With the lethal pace quad of Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammad Siraj, Hardik Pandya, Arshdeep Singh and top-notch spinners like Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal and Axar Patel this is surely one of all time great bowling attack of India." said Chawla on the 'Caught & Bold' show on Disney Hotstar. With three wins and a washout against Canada, India topped Group A with seven points and will face Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Australia in the Super Eight. In their first Super Eight clash, Men in Blue will take on Afghanistan in Barbados on Thursday, June 20.

# Gautam Gambhir Has Competition, BCCI Impressed By Rival Candidate

## Gautam Gambhir's 'Demands' To BCCI For Becoming India Coach - Report

**New Delhi, 18 June:** After several reports claimed that Gautam Gambhir, a World Cup-winning Indian cricket team great, had all but sealed the post for the next coach of Rohit Sharma and Co. a new report is saying otherwise. Another candidate has emerged, who has been interviewed by the BCCI too on Tuesday. Gambhir, known to a straight talker, had his first round of interview with the BCCI's Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) on Tuesday and is the front-runner to bag the top job. But he is yet to be officially named the India coach. If he is appointed, he will succeed legend Rahul Dravid at the helm. The tenure of the next Indian cricket team coach starts from July 1, 2024 and will run until December 31, 2027.<



Former India cricketer Gautam Gambhir is set to appear for an interview for the men's cricket team head coach position in Mumbai with BCCI secretary Jay Shah and other officials, say sources. "Gauti (Gautam Gambhir) will be travelling today to Mumbai around 12 pm for the interview at BCCI Headquarters. It is almost confirmed that he is going to be the next head coach as the BCCI has agreed to the terms he presented for the head coach. The new head coach of the men's cricket team will soon be revealed. The meeting is scheduled between 2-4 pm," source privy to BCCI told IANS.

Gambhir put up a few demands in front of the BCCI for the head coach position such as full command on the team, separate teams for white-ball and red-ball, which IANS understands that the BCCI has already accepted and is keen to appoint him for the role. The BCCI officially invited applications for the India head coach's post with May 27 set as the deadline.

As per the job description, the new India men's head coach would be for all three formats from July 2024 till December 2027. Dravid's original contract as India's head coach began after the 2021 T20 World Cup in November and had come to an end with the 2023 ODI World Cup at home and was extended till this year's T20I spectacle.During a recent event, Gambhir suggested that, "there is no bigger honour than coaching the national team".

"I would love to coach the Indian team. There is no bigger honour than coaching your national team. You are representing 140 crore Indians and those across the globe as well," the 42-year-old had said. Gambhir was part of India's T20 World Cup winning team in 2007 and the 2011 ODI World Cup side.

"Neither I nor the BCCI have approached any former Australian cricketer with a coaching offer. The reports circulating in certain media sections are completely incorrect. Finding the right coach for our national team is a meticulous and thorough process. We are focused on identifying individuals who possess a deep understanding of the Indian cricket structure and have risen through the ranks. It's crucial that our coach has an in-depth knowledge of our domestic cricket framework to truly elevate Team India to the next level," Shah had said.

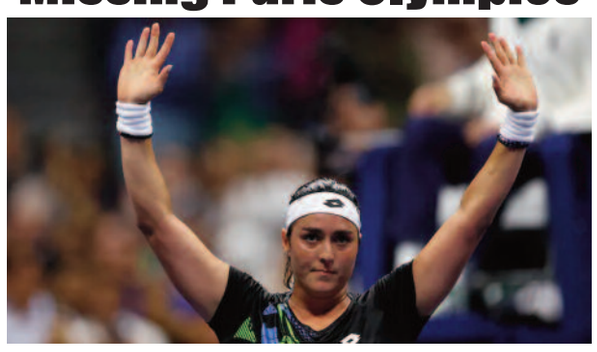
Some more interesting updates are coming. If the news18 report is true, then an overseas will also be interviewed for the Indian cricket coach's post on Wednesday. However, BCCI secretary Jay Shah had clearly mentioned that the next India head coach will be someone, who understands Indian cricket from the grassroot level. The report further stated that WV Raman's presentation was very thorough and liked by the CAC. "Gambhir had a virtual interview but Raman's presentation was very impressive and detailed.

The CAC is likely to interview an overseas candidate tomorrow. Gambhir has the edge but Raman's presentation was very thorough," the report quoted a BCCI official. Gautam Gambhir is known as someone who is not afraid of calling a spade, 'a spade'. He has time and again said that in his team there is no 'senior or junior'. Everyone is treated equally.



Patrick Pentz (Bottom) of Austria makes a save during the UEFA Euro 2024 Group D match between Austria and France in Dusseldorf, Germany.

## Ons Jabeur 'Avoids Risk' Missing Paris Olympics



**Paris, 18 June:** Three-time Grand Slam runner up Ons Jabeur said on Monday she will sit out this summer's Paris Olympics to avoid further injury to her knee. Tunisian Jabeur, 29, will miss the Games, between July 27-August 4. The competition being played Roland-Garros, meaning a switch back to clay immediately after the grass season and before the hard-court run up to the U.S. Open. Last year Jabeur underwent surgery on her right knee. Jabeur reached the final at Wimbledon in 2022 and 2023 and at the US Open in 2022.

"After consulting with my medical team regarding attending to the Olympics in Paris, we have decided that the quick change of surface and the body's adaptation required would put my knee at risk and jeapordize the rest of my season," Jabeur said on her social media accounts.

"Unfortunately I will not be able to participate in the 2024 Olympics," she added.She competed at the Olympics in London in 2012, in Rio in 2016 and in Tokyo five years later.Wimbledon starts on July 1 with the US Open beginning on August 26. Earlier in the day, world number three Aryna Sabalenka said she would also miss the Olympics to protect her fitness.

## France Need Own Goal To Edge Austria In Euro 2024 Opener

**Berlin, 18 June:** Maximilian Woeber's own goal was enough to give France a winning start to their Euro 2024 campaign on Monday as they edged Austria 1-0 in their opening game but Kylian Mbappe came off late on with a bloodied nose.

Woeber diverted Mbappe's cutback into his own net seven minutes before half-time in Duesseldorf to allow the French, one of the leading contenders to win the tournament, to come through a stiff test. Austria have been much-improved under Ralf Rangnick and their pressing game often made life uncomfortable for the 2022 World Cup runners-up, who saw Mbappe leave the field near the end after being hurt in a collision. He had earlier failed to convert a glorious chance that would have allowed France to win by a wider margin.

While Les Bleus were not at their best, they will be relieved to have emerged victorious from the game after a build-up overshadowed by talk of politics rather than football.

Mbappe and other French players had spent much of their time before the media in recent days answering questions about upcoming elections in the country which could see the far-right National Rally become the biggest party.

Any slip-up here would have led to suggestions their minds had not been fully focused on the competition, as France aim to become European champions for the third time, and first since 2000.

Instead, the result leaves Didier Deschamps' team level on three points in Group D with the Netherlands, who defeated Poland 2-1 in Hamburg on Sunday.France and the Netherlands meet next in Leipzig on Friday, while Austria face Poland earlier the same day in Berlin.

Austria had enjoyed some impressive results coming into the tournament on a seven-game unbeaten run and their team is on familiar ground during these Euros -- their coach Rangnick is from Germany and eight of their starting line-up played in the German Bundesliga last season.The French, however, are arguably the most talented team at the tournament, led by their captain Mbappe.He endured a miserable time at his only previous Euros three years ago, failing to score and missing the decisive penalty in a shoot-out defeat by Switzerland in the last 16.The new Real Madrid signing will wonder how he did not score in this game, with his first big opportunity arriving inside eight minutes.

Antoine Griezmann and Theo Hernandez combined to release Mbappe, who cut in from the left as he loves to do and shaped to curl a shot into the far corner before instead aiming for the near post.However, Austria goalkeeper Patrick Pentz was able to make the save. The Austrians settled into the contest and passed up a wonderful chance of their own to go ahead on 36 minutes.

Skipper Marcel Sabitzer touched down a Michael Gregoritsch cross from the left for Christoph Baumgartner, but he was foiled by goalkeeper Mike Maignan.That proved crucial as France went ahead two minutes later. Ousmane Dembele gave the ball to Mbappe on the right, and he produced a stepover to get to the byline before his cutback was nodded into the far corner of his own net by the unfortunate Woeber.

## Match Fixing At T20 World Cup? Player Approached Mysteriously, ICC Does This



**New York, 18 June:** The spectre of corruption in cricket continues to challenge the game's administrators but one potential approach from a former Kenya international to a Uganda player in the ongoing T20 World Cup was dealt swiftly by the sleuths of ICC's anti-corruption unit. PTI has learned that the incident took place during the league stage matches in Guyana where a former Kenya pacer tried to contact a Ugandan team member multiple times from different numbers. Following ICC's strict anti-corruption protocol, the Ugandan player reported the approach to the ACU officials on site.The development prompted the officials to raise a red flag against the former Kenya player by informing all the associate teams about him. "It is not a surprise that this person targeted a player from the Ugandan national team. Associate nations, as compared to the big teams, are soft targets for corruption but in this case the player who was approached did the needful by informing the ICC at the earliest," a source told PTI.

Failure to report a corrupt approach is an offence under the ICC's anti-corruption code. The other offences include match-fixing, betting on the game, misuse of inside information and failing to co-operate with an investigation. Uganda ended their T20 World Cup campaign with a memorable win over Papua New Guinea and losses to Afghanistan, New Zealand and the West Indies in Trinidad on Friday. Uganda, first-timers in the competition alongside Canada and co-hosts USA, played three of their four league games in Guyana. "Players are approached all the time, more so from smaller nations. In bigger events like T20 World Cup, there is more scrutiny and if an approach is conveyed to the ICC ACU, then due protocol is followed and a proper investigation is conducted," said another source. With effect from June 1, the ICC tweaked its anti-corruption code to empower the governing body and its member boards to "to proactively and thoroughly investigate incidents of corruption in the ongoing effort to protect the integrity of the game." "The anti-corruption code covers all cricket (whether international or domestic) played under the auspices of the ICC and its Members and applies to all Participants; player, coach, trainer, manager, selector, team owner or official, doctor, physiotherapist, match referee, pitch curator, player agent, umpires, as well as ICC and NCF Officials.

Participants are bound by the Code for 2 years after they have last participated in any form of official cricket. "The maximum possible sanction for the most serious breaches of the Anti-Corruption Code is a life ban from all involvement in the game. In some countries, there is also the possibility of criminal sanctions," reads an extract from ICC anti-corruption code for participants.All the international players are regularly briefed about a potential threat and are well-versed with the anti-corruption code.

## From 'Maggi Man' To Hitman: Rohit Sharma's Tough Transformation Journey Revealed

**New York, 18 June:** It has been a tough journey for Indian cricket team Rohit Sharma when it comes to his international career. The star batter made waves with his performances in the domestic circuit and was even part of the India squad that won the T20 World Cup 2007 title. However, his performances dipped over time and he was ultimately dropped for the 2011 ODI World Cup. That was a major setback for Rohit but he worked hard and established himself as one of the premier batters in the world right now. One of the biggest challenges for Rohit was to work on his fitness as he was often criticised for his weight. In a recent interaction, Kolkata Knight Riders assistant coach Abhishek Nayar revealed what motivated Rohit to work on his fitness and completely turn around his career.

"When Rohit was not picked for the 2011 World Cup, I always told him 'let's work hard'. Because he had gained a bit of weight at that time. A visual, an ad was aired, which showed Rohit and Yuvraj [Singh] standing, and there was a circle marked around Rohit's tummy with an arrow pointing towards it. I will never forget it. We were at home, watching TV. And looking at that visual, Rohit said I have to change this (perception)," Nayar told YouTuber and podcaster Ranveer Allahabadia on his show TRS Clips. "A few days later, the World Cup team was announced, but he wasn't part of the squad. At that point, Rohit Sharma became the Hitman. Because everything changed – his approach and how he wanted to go about his career.

He was the first guy, and that was my first journey with someone who transitioned into a successful cricketer and changed a lot of opinions," added Nayar. "People used to say a lot of things about him. Two-minute Maggiman and stuff like that. There were a lot of things said about Rohit Sharma. That changed everything.

## "Leaving Out Top Quality Is Difficult": Stephen Fleming On India's Decision To Drop Star Batter



**New York, 18 June:** Former New Zealand cricketer Stephen Fleming opened up on Team India leaving Yashasvi Jaiswal on the bench in the ongoing T20 World Cup 2024, and said that the Men in Blue had to make a hard call while making such a decision. Jaiswal is yet to make his debut in the ongoing T20 World Cup 2024 as the Men in Blue team management decided to go with Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli opening for the team. The 22-year-old made his T20I debut in 2023 against West Indies, following that he scored 502 runs after playing in 17 matches and 16 innings. In the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024, Jaiswal scored 435 runs after playing 15 matches for the Rajasthan Royals (RR). Speaking exclusively to the 'ESPNCricinfo Timeout show', Fleming said that leaving out 'top quality' players is always difficult for a team. He also showered praise on the Men in Blue and said that they have spinners who can dominate in the West Indies. "They had to make some hard calls. While Jaiswal was a great player, having a plan and you stay to it when you've got great players sitting on the sidelines is always very difficult because it's tempting to keep looking where the grass is greener, but I like the job they've done, they've got through. This is a team that in some ways is picked for the finals in my view, it's a team that has spinners that can dominate, it has players that can dominate spin and we've seen spin in the West Indies play quite a big part, not so much in New York," Fleming was quoted by ESPNcricinfo as saying. India will be aiming to do well against Afghanistan (June 20), Bangladesh (June 22) and Australia (24) and register big wins in order to qualify for the semifinals and end India's drought for an ICC trophy since 2013's Champions Trophy and also win their first T20 WC since 2007's inaugural edition in South Africa.The Men in Blue have displayed a stupendous performance in the group stage of the marquee event and finished at the top of the Group A table with seven points. Squad: Rohit Sharma (C), Hardik Pandya, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit

## Mitchell Starc Criticises T20 World Cup Schedule Structure, Says "Questions Need To Be..."

**New York, 18 June:** The T20 World Cup 2024 is headed towards its knockout stage and all eight teams have been confirmed for the Super 8 stage. Australia topped Group B with four wins out of four matches but they were still seeded 'B2" when it comes to the Super 8 due to the tournament's pre-seeding. The Super 8 opponents are somewhat pre-decided in the T20 World Cup 2024 due to the seedings and as a result, the standings after the league stage has no bearing on the fixtures. That is why Australia were 'B2' despite finishing top in their group. Australia fast bowler Mitchell Starc was not pleased with the pre-seeding in the competition and he expressed his frustration at the structure while saying that he is "not a fan". "I think there's a question to be asked about pre-seeding. I'm not sure I'm a fan of that," Starc said in a press conference following Australia's win against Scotland in their final group match. Due to the fact that the seeding system will determine Super 8 fixtures, it is possible that as many as three group winners can end up in the same Super 8 pool.

## Smriti Mandhana Rises To Third Spot In Women's ODI Batting Rankings



**New Delhi, 18 June:** India vice-captain Smriti Mandhana jumped two places to move to the third spot on the ICC Women's ODI batting rankings released here on Tuesday. The India left-handed opener struck a match-winning 117, her maiden century at home, to lead India's 143-run win over South Africa in a three-match series.

Mandhana, who has 715 points is behind Sri Lanka's Chamari Athapaththu, who lost her number one ranking to England's Natalie Sciver-Brunt. The English all-rounder regained her number one spot by scoring a superb 124 not out against Pakistan last month.

Senior India all-rounder Deepti Sharma climbed up three spots to 20th, while Pooja Vastrakar was up by three places to 38th. Vastarkar was the big mover up the ODI charts for all-rounders, with the 24-year-old gaining four places to improve to 18th.

South Africa veteran Marizanne Kapp remains the No.1 ranked ODI all-rounder.In the ODI bowling list, Deepti gained one place to move to fourth after tidy figures of 2/10 in the series opener. England spinner Sophie Ecclestone maintained a healthy lead at the top of the rankings for ODI bowlers.

# Romania Sink Error-Prone Ukraine To End Long Drought At Euros

**Berlin, 18 June:** Romania won at a major international tournament for the first time in 24 years on Monday as they beat Ukraine 3-0 at Euro 2024, helped by two errors from goalkeeper Andriy Lunin. Captain Nicolae Stanciu's magnificent long-range strike gave Romania, backed by the vast majority of the Munich crowd, a first-half lead in their Group E opener.

Razvan Marin's shot from distance then skipped under Lunin as Romania turned the screw with two more goals before the hour, Denis Dragus tapping home the third. It was a disastrous start to the campaign for Ukraine, who must quickly regroup with games to follow against Slovakia and Belgium.

Ukraine players emerged onto the pitch with Ukrainian flags draped over their shoulders in the country's first game at a major tournament since the Russian invasion in February 2022.They missed out on qualifying for the World Cup two years ago but secured a fourth successive appearance at the Euros, despite the backdrop of the largest European conflict since World War II.

Three years ago Ukraine reached the quarter-finals under Andriy Shevchenko. But a lot has changed since for a country ravaged by war, with his former striker partner Serhiy Rebrov now in charge.Rebrov confided that simply taking part in Germany, where more than a million Ukrainians have found refuge, is an important step for the nation.

He said he had received countless messages from people back home, including those fighting on the front line, and that it was up to his team to "show the spirit" of Ukraine in troubled times.Romania advanced through qualifying unbeaten but had not won in four games this year ahead of their return to the big stage after missing out on Euro 2020.

Their last and only previous win at the tournament came when they reached the quarter-finals of



Euro 2000. Ukraine probed early on a warm afternoon at the Allianz Arena without success and paid the price for inviting pressure on themselves that led to a misplaced clearance from Lunin.

The Real Madrid stopper played the ball straight to Dennis Man, who slid a pass across for Stanciu to rifle a sensational 20-yard strike into the top corner.

Lunin was immediately consoled by Oleksandr Zinchenko, but he was nearly beaten again minutes later by Stanciu, this time directly from a corner.After a deflected Man effort fizzed just wide, Stanciu's inswinging corner glanced off the bar with the backpedalling Ukraine 'keeper flapping at thin air.

Worse was to come for Lunin as following a swift Romanian counter-attack, Marin fired a crisp low strike from 25 yards that appeared to deceive him for pace eight minutes into the second half.

Dragus effectively wrapped up the victory shortly after when he prodded in as Man knocked the ball across the six-yard box following a well-worked short corner.

Romania goalkeeper Florin Nita saved well from Georgiy Sudakov late on before substitute Roman Yaremchuk's lob grazed the bar on its way over, encapsulating what was a day to forget for Ukraine.

Printed, Published & Owned by Avik Kumar Naskar, Address: 94, Phears Lane, 4th Floor, Kolkata-700012, Printed at Kalika Press Pvt. Ltd. 25, D.L. Roy Street Kolkata-700006, Declaration No. 16/2023 Dated 24.4.2023, Phone No.: (033) 22370488, E-mail : indianinfoexchange@gmail.com, Editor : Avik Kumar Naskar