













## Kashmiris affirm faith in democratic polity

THE union territories of J&K and Ladakh, remains of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, went to the polls in five phases. According to reports, Kashmir, home to the bulk of the UT's population but the smallest in size, recorded a voter turnout that was the highest since 1996. Srinagar saw 38.49 per cent polling, Baramulla 59.1 per cent and Anantnag — its Kashmiri predominance sought to be blunted by the addition of Jammu division's Poonch-Rajouri districts — 54.84 per cent. The results demonstrate a sharp communal divide between the Muslim-majority Kashmir and Ladakh and Hindu-majority Jammu, a polarisation accentuated by the religious appeal made to voters by contenders on both sides of the Pir Panjal. The Hindutva agenda of the BJP, which took both seats in Jammu — constituencies crafted by the Delimitation Commission to buttress their religious identity — was matched by the distinct religious grounding of each of the candidates in the Valley, although the latter was free from sectarianism. In fact, Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi, the triumphant National Conference (NC) candidate from Srinagar who belongs to the first family of the Shia Muslim community in Kashmir, broke with precedent by openly apologising on behalf of his community for having failed to prevent the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley when J&K was, like now, under the administration of the Union Government in 1990-96. Is this then the beginning of a new era in the troubled region? It is well to remember that this was the first election in Jammu and Kashmir since the Modi government's revocation of the limited political autonomy that the state had enjoyed under the Constitution with the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019. The turnout in the elections in the Valley and Ladakh is indicative of the determination of Kashmiris and Ladakhis to oust the BJP government at the Centre. Although the trends from the beginning favoured former NC leader Mohammed Haneeefa, who won the Ladakh seat as an independent, this is not necessarily a resurgence of the party but a bid to rally behind it to defeat the ruling party at the Centre. The fact that the NC's star candidate, former CM Omar Abdullah, was unseated simply affirms this as the elected candidate, Engineer Rashid (who got nearly 46 per cent of the vote against Abdullah's 26 per cent) has himself been an advocate of Azadi, for which he has been in the Tihar Jail for the past five years under UAPA. His campaign got going at the last moment, led by his two sons.

What we are witness to specifically is a consolidation of the votes against the BJP, the party responsible for the abrogation. It might be recalled that earlier, both leading parties rooted in Kashmir — the NC and the PDP — had been willing to work with the BJP. The last elected government was a BJP-PDP combine. As borne out by the election campaigns of each, even the BJP's supposed allies like Sajjad Lone's People's Conference have been obliged to distance themselves from that party before making any appeal for support to the public. The BJP did not field any candidate from any seat in Kashmir. Home Minister Amit Shah was quoted as saying that it would take time for the lotus to bloom in Kashmir. But the election results show that unless the party reinvents itself for the Kashmiris and Ladakhis, this is unlikely. Of all Indian leaders whom J&K has seen as PM, Atal Bihari Vajpayee is readily the most loved.

Let alone support for the BJP, then, even association with that party has no takers in Srinagar. I was in the Valley in the first week of May, staying in homes of friends in Srinagar, including downtown, and in Sopore. Engineer Rashid's emergence as a possible challenger to Abdullah was yet to crystallise. Hostility to the BJP was palpable and universal. Candidates had more to say against the BJP on the campaign trail than against each other. Different segments of Kashmir's political firmament were united against the party ruling in New Delhi. The message that the Kashmiris have given is loud and clear. Although violence has indeed abated in the UT — and I venture to continue to hold this view despite the violent incidents that rocked Kulgam and Poonch during the election process — the reasons for this are not to be found in any sense of satisfaction among the people with the extant administration, but instead an increased alienation.

## Congress back on track in Punjab as AAP faces discontent

The Congress was the biggest gainer, winning seven seats, though the odds were against it as most of its senior leaders had defected to the BJP and other parties.

THE outcome of the 2024 Lok Sabha election in Punjab has raised many questions about the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The party won just three seats out of 13, falling well short of the clean sweep predicted by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. The verdict has rocked AAP just two years after it registered a landslide victory in the Assembly elections, winning 92 seats in the 117-member House. AAP's vote share fell drastically to 26.02 per cent from 42 per cent in 2022. This indicates a surge in frustration and disappointment of the masses with the ruling party and Mann's leadership. The party largely failed to address key issues such as the agrarian unrest, drug trade, law and order, and corruption. Endemic factionalism, organisational weaknesses, dominance of the Delhi-based top brass and ideological bankruptcy have seemingly put AAP on a perilous path in a short period of time. The victory of two independent radical candidates is a manifestation of these unresolved issues.

This benefited the Congress, which finished on top with seven LS seats, thus recovering from the rout it had suffered in the 2022 Assembly polls. The Congress' vote share (26.3 per cent) was, however, only slightly better than that of AAP this time. The verdict of the Punjab electorate in favour of the Congress was against the broad national trend. This is not a new phenomenon as the party had won eight seats in the 2019 elections amid a Modi wave in the country. In the just-concluded elections, where there was no noticeable wave, Punjab's 'exceptionalism' was very much on display. This was the only state in north India where the BJP drew a blank, even though Hindus account for around 40 per cent of the border state's population. During his recent rallies in Punjab, the Prime Minister focused on Sikh issues, such as the 1984 riots and the Kartarpur corridor. However, this narrative did not receive much attention in the state. The party recorded a vote share of 18.56 per cent; five of its 13 candidates lost their deposits. The strong opposition to BJP candidates and other leaders by farmers' organisations during campaigning sealed the party's fate. Incidentally, the BJP had won two seats out of the three it contested in the 2019 parliamentary polls in the state. A significant development in the 2024 election was the rejection of the BJP's agenda by the state's voters. The party tried to connect with Dalits and urban Hindus, but failed to a great extent. The BJP, which had been a junior ally of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) for long, went solo this time after talks with the one-time partner over seat-sharing proved inconclusive.

In recent years, the BJP has neither succeeded in broadening its traditional urban upper-caste voter base nor has been able to raise a tall state-level leader. Its strategy has been to win over Congress leaders. It does not qualify as a winnable party on its own despite having had a long-term presence in the state right from the days of its precursor, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh.

As for the SAD, it suffered yet another electoral rout,



winning only one Lok Sabha seat — its traditional bastion, Bathinda. The party had pulled out of the BJP-led NDA in 2021 over the three controversial 'pro-corporate' agriculture laws after having drawn the farmers' wrath by initially supporting the legislation.

The leadership crisis in the party and its 10-year 'misrule' in the state (2007-17) are among the factors responsible for the loss of its core support in the state. The party also significantly lost the support of its key vote bank, the Jat Sikh community. There is a question mark over the leadership of Sukhbir Badal, especially after the demise of his father, former CM Parkash Singh Badal.

It was an election where the same pressing issues — farmers' distress, drug menace, lack of jobs, large-scale migration of the youth to Western countries, industries shifting to neighbouring states, corruption, depleting water table, lack of development, and law and order — were raised by Opposition parties, but they hardly received any positive response from the state and Central governments. The election campaign was lacklustre, going by the generally low participation at poll meetings and rallies. The overall apathy was also reflected in the lower turnout, which was surprising as Punjab is known for recording a consistently higher turnout than the

national average, whether it is the Lok Sabha or Assembly elections. As compared to the national average, Punjab's turnout was about three percentage points lower this time. There was 62.8 per cent polling this time, as against 65.77 per cent in 2019 and 70.6 per cent in 2014. The field was unusually wide open — in the fray were SAD, BJP, Congress, AAP and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The entry and huge victory of two radical candidates — Amritpal Singh and Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa from Khadoor Sahib and Faridkot, respectively, — not only made these elections very interesting but also posed a tough challenge to mainstream political parties. Their wins will have far-reaching consequences for Punjab.

Though the BSP put up its candidates from all parliamentary seats in Punjab, it failed to make its presence felt despite the fact that Dalits account for one-third of the state's population.

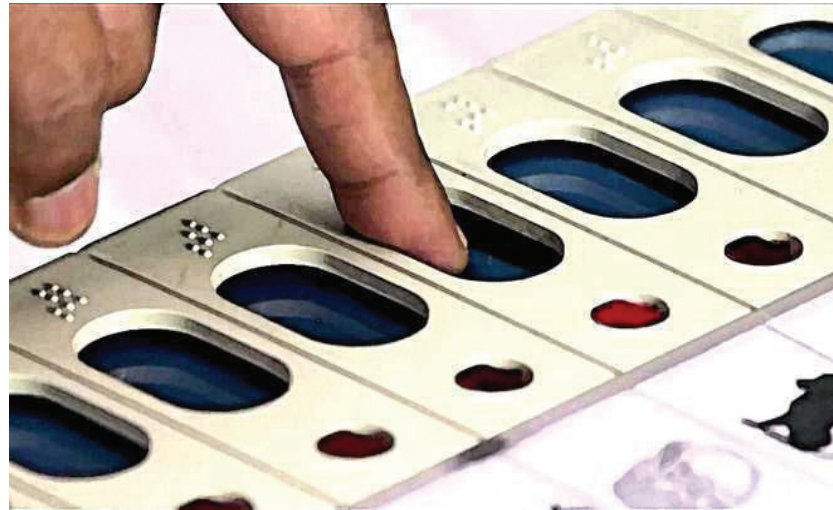
At the end of the day, the Congress was the biggest gainer, winning seven seats, though the odds were against it as most of its senior leaders had defected to the BJP and other parties. Voters have sent out the message that they are banking on the Congress to raise the state's issues in the Lok Sabha and work towards resolving them on priority.

## The UP verdict

SP, Congress ticked the right boxes to upset BJP

IN its manifesto for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP patted itself on the back for turning the 'people's dream of five centuries' into reality by building the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. The party was hopeful that the inauguration of the temple by PM Narendra Modi would bring rich electoral dividends, especially in the Hindi belt. It was a rude shock for the BJP when it lost the Faizabad parliamentary seat in Ayodhya district to the Samajwadi Party (SP). A BJP supporter candidly admitted that the grandeur of the Ram Mandir might have impressed outsiders, but residents of the town were unhappy over the inconvenience they were subjected to. The Ayodhya upset summed up the reversal of fortunes in UP as the SP-Congress combine punched well above its weight to upstage the mighty BJP.

This was no mean feat for the Opposition duo. The BJP had



become nearly invincible in the state over the past decade. The saffron party won 71 Lok Sabha seats out of 80 in Sabha.

2014 and bagged 62 five years later. The victories in the Assembly elections of 2017 and 2022 were also impressive. With CM Yogi Adityanath firmly at the helm, the party looked set to do an encore in the 2024 elections, but SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and the Gandhi siblings had other ideas.

Akhilesh has attributed the resounding success of the INDIA bloc in UP to the troika of backward classes, Dalits and minorities. The alliance fought the elections on the plank of PDA (Pichhada, Dalit and Alpsankhyak) unity. The BJP, wallowing in complacency, missed no opportunity to ridicule the SP and the Congress while going overboard with communal polarisation. This divisive ploy got a massive pushback from voters, restricting the BJP to 33 seats in the state and dashing its hopes of securing a majority on its own in the Lok

## Sustaining growth must be a priority of new govt

The long-term nature of govt jobs is the reason they are considered the goal of millions in this country.

THE management of the economy is bound to be at the top of the new government's agenda. 'It's the economy, stupid' is a catchline made famous by Bill Clinton's 1992 election campaign, and it is still relevant. The Indian economy may be in relatively good shape, with GDP growth outpacing all others globally, but this is still a developing country with sizable segments in the poor and underprivileged categories. Pulling them out of poverty and reducing the inequality that has virtually created two Indias on a single subcontinent will have to be the focus of the new set of policymakers. The concept of a viksit or developed Bharat is unexceptionable, but the elements of society that are lagging behind will have to catch up before the country can truly reach the status of a developed nation.

To reduce the inequalities that exist between the burgeoning urban middle class and the less privileged masses in rural areas, the biggest task will be to move jobs away from agriculture and towards the more vibrant industrial and services sectors. Right now, 45 per cent of jobs are dependent on agriculture, a sector that comprises only 15 per cent of the GDP. The NDA (2019-24) government had taken an initiative on this front, infusing massive public capital expenditure into infrastructure development over the past few years. But this laudable policy measure has not created as many jobs as needed, given the enormity of the country's working-age population. There are differing estimates of actual unemployment in the country. The latest Periodic Labour Force Survey shows that the unemployment rate was 3.1 per cent in 2023, the lowest in three years. On the other hand, a private sector think tank, Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, puts the unemployment rate for 2023-24 at 8 per cent. Despite the differing data, the underlying conclusion is that more jobs need to be created rapidly. The drive to set up the much-needed infrastructure through a big capex thrust now needs to be accompanied by much more investment from the private

sector, both from domestic and foreign sources.

This will have to be aided by improving the ease of doing business. Though the current regime made some headway in this direction, bureaucracy and procedural complexities still abound. Officials involved in this exercise at the Central level say the problem is with the states. To some extent, this is true. It can be seen from the fact that some states, especially in southern India, attract far more foreign direct investment than others. For instance, tech giant Apple is clearly only interested in setting up projects in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Gujarat is another state that has for long attracted investors and is now catching the attention of semi-conductor firms considering massive investments in this high-tech area.

The uneven scenario in individual states is likely to presage a pivot in the reform process from the Central to the state level. The brief economic statement that replaced the annual survey in this year's Interim Budget talks of the states' role in making future economic reforms more 'purposeful and fruitful'. It goes on to highlight the need for improving governance at the district, block and village levels, making them both citizen- and business-friendly. One must not forget that the Budget provided the first ever interest-free loan of Rs 75,000 crore for states to frame growth- and development-oriented reforms. This is clearly a bid to lure less investment-oriented states to carry out business-friendly reforms.

But it is not enough to attract investments. There is a need to ensure that there is skilled labour to use the job opportunities thrown up by new manufacturing projects. Providing an education that makes the much-talked-about youth demographic more employable is the need of the hour. This must start at the school level and continue through vocational institutions that impart



relevant technical skills. An economy known for its expertise in software and computers should be able to provide a high-quality education in ancillary areas. Excellence in learning must go beyond the renowned engineering and science institutions.

In evolving new education policies, it would be useful to involve the industry closely. This could help improve the employability of those seeking to enter the manufacturing sector. At the same time, the private sector needs to reduce the share of contract jobs so that there is greater security of employment. The long-term nature of government jobs is the reason they are considered the goal of millions in this country. It has created the myth that only government jobs are worthwhile. Some political parties have unwisely

promoted this theme during election campaigns by promising government jobs as sops for voters.

On the contrary, entrepreneurship should be given greater encouragement, for this truly yields sizable returns, especially in high-tech areas. Startups have been adopted enthusiastically by the youth in this country. In fact, India now nurtures one of the biggest global ecosystems for unicorns and decacorns. Even micro and tiny enterprises are being given support through Internet marketing platforms. This is the future, and employment opportunities need to be viewed through a different prism now rather than as the 'pukki naukri' (secure jobs) of old. The long-term agenda for any new government

will thus have to be holistic, as GDP growth already reached an encouraging 8.2 per cent in 2023-24. Sustaining this growth will mean raising private investment currently lagging behind public capex. Foreign direct investment flows will also need a boost, as the latest data shows a decline in the last fiscal. This could reflect the challenges of external headwinds, especially geopolitical tensions. Raising growth in rural areas will also need to be kept in focus, though the forecast of a normal monsoon this year means agricultural output is set to be higher than the 1.4 per cent of last year. Rural consumption is already picking up and could soon reach a broad-based recovery. The goal of more equitable growth is thus achievable but will need a great deal of hard work.

## Good news for FASTag, NCMC users! Now recharge using recurring payments mechanism via e-mandate - check RBI's new step

**NEW DELHI.** Good news for FASTag, NCMC users! RBI governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday announced that users of FASTag and National Common Mobility Card will now be able to add balance to their cards using the recurring payments mechanism through e-mandate framework. "The adoption of e-mandates for recurring payment transactions has been increasing. It is now proposed to include payments such as replenishment of balances in FASTag, National Common Mobility Card, that is NCMC, etc, which are recurring in nature, but without any fixed periodicity in the e-mandate framework," he said. "This will enable customers to automatically replenish the balances in FASTag, NCMC, etc. If the balance goes below the threshold limit set by them. This will enhance convenience in making travel and mobility related payments," he added. Shaktikanta Das also said, "The Reserve Bank has taken a number of measures over the years to deepen digital payments, while ensuring that safety and security. These measures have boosted consumer confidence. Growing incidences of digital frauds, however, highlight the need for a system wide approach to prevent and mitigate such frauds. It is therefore proposed to establish a digital payments intelligence platform for network level intelligence and real time data sharing across the digital payments ecosystem. To take this initiative forward, the Reserve Bank has constituted a committee to examine various aspects of setting up this platform.

## Wizz Air plans flights to India; average one-way fare likely at 200 euros

**MUMBAI.** Hungary-based Wizz Air plans to start services connecting Indian and European cities, and the average one-way fares could be 200 euros (around Rs 18,000) for a flight, according to a top airline executive. The ultra low-cost carrier, which has been flying for more than 20 years, is in discussions with the government and regulators on starting operations to India. Wizz Air CEO Jozsef Varadi on Thursday said that one of the biggest issues faced by the Indian diaspora in Europe is that flying to India is expensive and that needs to change. The airline will start receiving A321 XLR planes from early next year and that will make it possible to fly to India which is an amazing market. XLRs can operate non-stop for eight to eight-and-a-half hours, he said. We are in discussions with the governments and the regulators on both sides of the equations in Europe and India," Varadi told PTI. According to him, the average one-way fare could be around 200 euros. The lowest fare could be sub-100 euros, he added.

Festive offer

At current exchange rates, 200 euros amounts to little over Rs 18,000. As per the airline's website, a passenger can carry cabin baggage of up to 10 kg free of cost. There will be charges for additional baggage. Subject to regulatory approvals, the airline expects to start operating to India in the next financial year. The carrier will be looking to connect six or seven points in Europe with major airports in India, he said. International traffic has been on the rise to and from India in recent times. Currently, Wizz Air flies to more than 190 airports in over 50 countries. It operates more than 750 routes. Varadi said the airline is a designated carrier from Italy, Austria and Hungary. "We are talking to the Indian side to make sure that the designation is recognised, accepted and approved," he added.

## Sailing through FTAs expected to be tougher for the coalition government

**NEW DELHI.** Implementation of free trade agreements (FTAs) with various countries that were on the cards could prove to be challenging for the coalition government, as per experts. They say the Centre may face potential disagreements from the allies and the strong Opposition may add another layer of difficulties in sailing through the FTAs. "Allies of the BJP may have disagreements over certain issues regarding the terms and conditions of the free trade agreements. Furthermore, strong Opposition may create hindrance in executing FTAs," said Arun Kumar, former professor of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). He is of the view that amid global slowdown, FTAs may not be very relevant and have not been as beneficial as expected. In addition, he said FTAs with ASEAN countries and Korea have not been advantageous for India with benefits being mostly one-sided. "These are complex agreements with long-term consequences. Modi's new government may take time to settle down before pushing through such complex international agreements," Kumar said. India had a trade deficit with South Korea at \$0.238 trillion. As per Delhi-based think-tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), India's merchandise trade deficit grew by 302.9% with ASEAN and 164.1% with South Korea. This comparison is based on data from pre-FTA period (2007-09) and 2020-22. India had entered trade pacts with these countries in 2010-11. Exports to these countries rose at a lower rate than imports. "The government is reviewing the FTAs which have not yielded gains for the country. FTAs, which have already been signed, will remain intact and going forward only those trade pacts will be considered which will be beneficial for India, irrespective of the fact whether it's a coalition government or not," a top government official said on the condition of anonymity. On the FTA front, there are no changes. Trade pact with Oman may be delayed by a few months as the new government may take some time to understand it...the fate of UK trade pact is linked to UK elections. Besides this, trade deal with EU is just midway. It is nowhere near conclusion.

# India will need \$190-\$215 bn investment for renewable energy capacity target

## Renewable energy and transmission projects will be the driving force behind power sector investments," remarked Moody's.

**NEW DELHI.** Domestic power sector is poised to experience substantial investment, primarily propelled by renewable energy and electricity transmission projects, stated Moody's Ratings on Tuesday. The report said the sector will need \$190 billion to \$215 billion investment for achieving renewable energy capacity target by 2030. India aims to achieve 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030, with

an annual capacity addition of nearly 44 GW. "Renewable energy and transmission projects will be the driving force behind power sector investments," remarked Moody's. Despite the emphasis on renewables, coal will continue to play a significant role in meeting baseload power requirements, as per the report. Moody's forecasts that India will add between 40 GW and 50 GW of coal-based capacity over the next five to six years to cater to an anticipated annual power demand growth of 5%-6%. "Even with these additions, the utilization rate for coal-based capacity is expected to remain high at approximately 65%-70%," Moody's observed. However, the substantial investments in renewables



could lead to increased financial leverage for companies in this sector. Moody's emphasized that robust policy support has enabled India to raise the share of renewable energy in its power capacity mix to around 43 percent in the

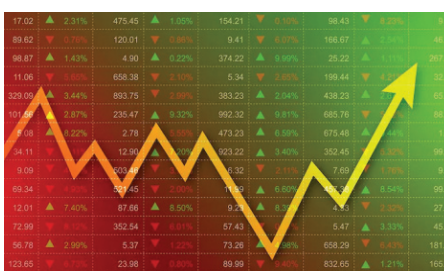
fiscal year 2023-2024. The report underscores that sustained policy backing will facilitate India's significant strides towards its 2030 transition targets and its 2070 net-zero targets. The report also noted that strong policy support has helped India increase the share of renewable energy in its power capacity mix to around 43 percent in fiscal 2023-2024. "The Central Electricity Regulatory Commission's tariff regulations for 2024-2029 have provided clarity for regulated power companies regarding their returns and cost pass-through mechanisms. This regulatory consistency helps power companies transition toward cleaner energy while maintaining profitability," the report said.

## RBI raises GDP forecast, Sensex zooms 600 points

**New Delhi** Benchmark stock market indices saw a jump after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) kept the lending rates unchanged at 6.5% for an eighth straight time.

The S&P BSE Sensex jumped over 600 points after the announcement, while NSE Nifty50 also jumped over 150 points. The Sensex gained 0.64%, reaching 75,624 points, while the Nifty rose by 0.67% to reach 22,968.9 points. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das has announced an increase in the projected real GDP growth for the financial year 2024-25, setting it at 7.2%, up from the previous estimate of 7%. Anil Rego, Founder and Fund Manager at Right Horizons said that the Monetary Policy Committee has maintained the status quo on the repo rate as inflation moderates in a resilient growing economy balancing inflation and growth. "Going forward with the uncertainty around election outcomes behind us the focus would be on budget. The domestic strengths and policy focus has put the economy on a healthy growth trajectory and the rate cuts expected in later half of FY25 is likely to aid the equity markets," said Rego. India's annual consumer price inflation fell slightly to 4.83% in April from 4.85% in March 2024, marking an 11-month low. During the same period,

the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) saw a year-on-year increase of 1.26%. The inflation rate remains within the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) target range of 2-6%. The country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) experienced strong growth in the fiscal year 2024,



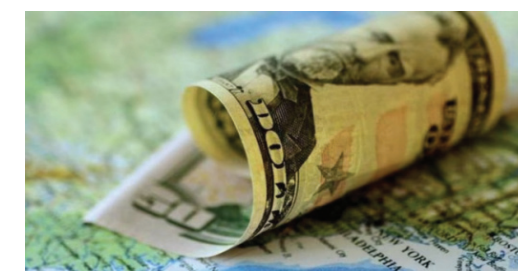
rising by 8.2%, which surpassed expectations. The GDP growth for the last quarter was recorded at 7.8%, largely driven by significant expansion in the manufacturing sector. "The policy tone was confident on domestic dynamics, with upgrade in FY25 growth and but no change in inflation trends despite near-term food-led risks. While the RBI took recognition of fluidity of global narratives, the governor insisted that their policy reaction function is driven primarily by domestic dynamics," said Madhavi Arora, Lead Economist, Emkay

Global, Mumbai. "However, we note that swift policy turns/pivots in the last two years have been purely influenced by global factors. This suggests that when needed, the aim of financial stability may even precede inflation management," Arora added. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) plans to continue its focus on withdrawing its accommodative policy. Additionally, a normal south-west monsoon is anticipated, which is expected to enhance kharif crop production and improve water storage levels in reservoirs. The RBI keeps the inflation forecast for FY25 steady at 4.5%. Shaktikanta Das affirmed the RBI's dedication to restoring inflation to the target of 4% over the long term. Rates and stance was in line with market expectations, but the split in voting patterns clearly shows the increasing probability towards a pivot in the policies ahead. "However, we believe the robust growth will give enough opportunity for the MPC to remain on a wait and watch mode until better clarity comes from monsoons and quality of expenditure from the Budget. We see room for stance change in the August policy with a plausible easing from the October meeting," she added.

## Amid market crash & recovery, FPIs pull out Rs 18,109 crore so far in June

**Mumbai** After investing Rs 6,850 crore on June 3 — after the exit poll results were announced — foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) were big sellers in the stock market in the next four days amid the fall and rise in stocks in the wake of the unexpected poll outcome. Foreign investors have taken out Rs 18,109 crore from the cash market (excluding IPO investments) in the month of June so far, according to exchange data. On the other hand, domestic institutional investors (DIIs) have net purchased Rs 6,864 crore of equities so far in June. Net FPI outflows were at record high of Rs 12,436 crore on June 4, the day Lok Sabha election results were announced and the Sensex crashed by 6 per cent. On June 5, while the Sensex recovered by 3.2 per cent per cent, FPIs sold 5,656 crore and turned sellers again on June 6 with Rs 6,867 crore of outflows.

In the recent past, FPIs have pulled out money from India because of the expensive valuation and were investing in China and also due to



## Unchanged repo rate to keep housing demand high

**NEW DELHI.** The Reserve Bank of India's decision to keep the repo rate unchanged has largely been welcomed by the real estate industry as they believe it provides stability in home loan interest rates at a time when buyers' and developers' confidence in the market is strong. However, the industry anticipates a rate cut shortly as India's consumer inflation is steadily approaching the RBI mark of 4%.

"With the mandate of a stable government now manifest in an unchanged monetary policy, the housing sector's overall growth momentum will continue," said Anuj Puri, Chairman - ANAROCK Group

Puri explained that mid-range and premium property segments together account for more than 55% of the current supply. Together, they recorded approx. 76,555 units sold in Q1 2024 - nearly 60% of the total sales. He said that the buyers of this segment are sensitive to volatile interest rates, and upward hikes would cause many of them to defer home purchases. This

policy continuity supports sustained demand in these two segments. The affordable housing sector is the most cost-sensitive. While PMAY Urban has sanctioned 118.64 lakh homes against a demand of 112.24 lakh homes, affordable housing (homes priced under Rs 40 lakhs) sales in Q1 2024 recorded 26,545 units - a mere 20% of the total sales. "However, as we have seen, unchanged home loan rates alone are insufficient to induce new vibrancy in the affordable segment. It is hoped that the government will soon introduce further incentives to support it," added Puri. The Reserve Bank of India in its latest Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has kept the repo rate unchanged at 6.5% for the eighth consecutive time. This is the first time the MPC met after the results of the general elections were declared. As the repo rate remains unchanged, all external benchmark lending rates that are linked to the repo rate will not rise. This means that equated monthly instalments (EMIs) for consumers will

not increase. Pradeep Aggarwal, Founder & Chairman, Signature Global (India) Ltd, said, "Economists predict that if inflation continues to decline, rate cuts of 25-50 basis points could be expected in the second half of the fiscal year. Such a reduction in interest rates could significantly boost the real estate sector, which is already benefiting from strong end-user demand. We anticipate this robust demand trend to remain healthy over the coming years, particularly in cities like Gurugram, which are experiencing substantial infrastructure development." Retail inflation came down to a fresh 11-month low of 4.83% in April 2024, steadily approaching RBI's target of 4%. Samir Jasuja, CEO and MD of PropEquity, said that with overall inflation falling within the RBI range, a policy rate cut may not be very far away. Real estate prices have gone up substantially and a future rate cut will give much higher purchasing power to the customer which is the need of the hour.

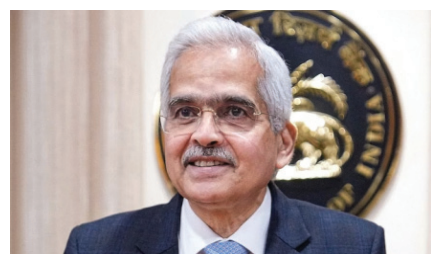
election related uncertainties, analysts said. As the election results are out and with the formation of a new government under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition, analysts expect FPIs to again start investing in India. According to Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC securities Ltd, events like the passage of a vote of confidence, the announcement of the council of ministers and their portfolio allocation, and policy announcements (including the Union Budget) could lead to an increase in the confidence of foreigners. "The valuation of Indian equities may look better in case Nifty EPS (earnings per share) is upgraded based on the revived momentum of the economy post the new government settling down to business," Jasani said. Indications of a rate cut by the US Federal Reserve or the RBI could also lead to heightened interest in Indian equities. If monsoon arrives on time and makes a good beginning across the country in terms of spread and intensity, FPIs may rework the earnings estimates of corporates and start investing, he said. Meanwhile, on Thursday, the 30-share Sensex rose 692.27 points, or 0.93 per cent, to close at 75,074.51.

# RBI MPC meeting: From GDP growth to inflation, here are the key takeaways

**NEW DELHI.** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) kept the key repo rate unchanged to 6.5% on Friday, as it remains focused on "withdrawal of accommodation". This was the eighth time the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to keep the key rates unchanged. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) plans to continue its focus on withdrawing its accommodative policy. Additionally, a normal south-west monsoon is anticipated, which is expected to enhance kharif crop production and improve water storage levels in reservoirs. Repo rate - The six-member committee of the RBI decided to maintain the repo rate at its current level. Among the committee members, four voted in favor of keeping the rate unchanged, while two members voted against the decision. The Standing Deposit Facility (SDF) rate stays put at 6.25%, while the Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) rate remains steady at 6.75%. "It decided by a 4 to 2 majority to keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent. Consequently, the standing deposit facility (SDF) rate remains at 6.25 per

cent and the marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and the Bank Rate at 6.75 per cent," said RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das. He further added that the MPC also decided by a majority of 4 out of 6 members to remain focused on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation progressively aligns to the target, while supporting growth. GDP forecast for FY25 at 7.2% - RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das has announced an increase in the projected real GDP growth for the financial year 2024-25, setting it at 7.2%, up from the previous estimate of 7%. "GDP growth that we are now projecting for the current financial year 2024-25 is 7.2% with Q1 at 7.3%, Q2 at 7.2%, Q3 at 7.3%, and Q4 at 7.2%. The risks are evenly balanced," said the RBI Governor. Inflation forecast - The RBI kept the inflation forecast for FY25 steady at 4.5%. Shaktikanta Das affirmed the RBI's dedication to restoring inflation to the target of 4% over the long term. "Assuming a normal monsoon, CPI inflation for 2024-25 is projected at 4.5 per cent with Q1 at 4.9 per cent; Q2 at 3.8 per cent; Q3 at 4.6 per cent; and Q4 at 4.5 per cent. The risks are evenly balanced,"

said Shaktikanta Das. Revision of bulk deposit limits for banks - The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is considering revising the definition of bulk deposits for Scheduled Commercial Banks (excluding Regional Rural Banks), Small



Finance Banks, and Local Area Banks. Currently set at Rs 2 crore, the proposed new limit for SCBs and SFBs would be Rs 3 crore, while for Local Area Banks, it would be Rs 1 crore, aligning with the RRBs. Guidelines on this will be issued soon. Rationalisation of export and import regulations - RBI plans to streamline export and import regulations under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999, to offer

more operational flexibility to Authorised Dealer banks. This aims to simplify procedures, reflecting changes in global trade dynamics. Draft regulations will be available for feedback on the RBI website by June 2024 before finalisation.

Digital payments intelligence platform - To enhance security in digital payments, RBI is proposing the establishment of a Digital Payments Intelligence Platform.

This platform aims to reduce payment frauds by enabling real-time data sharing across payment systems. A committee, led by AP Hota, former MD & CEO of NPCI, has been formed to provide recommendations within two months on setting up this infrastructure. Inclusion of recurring payments in the e-mandate framework - RBI is considering including recurring payments like Fastag and NCMC balances replenishment in the e-mandate framework. This will introduce an automatic replenishment facility triggered when balances fall below a set threshold. Additionally, the requirement for pre-debit notification 24 hours before the actual debit may be exempted for such payments.



# After Congress' Stock Market Charge, BJP's "5th Largest Economy" Rebuttal

**New Delhi:** The BJP on Thursday hit back at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi who had alleged a connection between "BJP, exit pollsters and dubious foreign investors". It also accused the Congress leader of "conspiring to mislead market investors".

Addressing a press conference, Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said that the Congress leader "has still not overcome the opposition's defeat" in the Lok Sabha elections. Several opposition parties had come together to form the INDIA bloc to take on the BJP-led NDA in the Lok Sabha polls. Rahul Gandhi had alleged that there was a loss of lakhs of crores to retail investors due to "fake exit polls" and demanded a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe into the "biggest stock market scam."

Mr Goyal said in the past 10 years of PM Modi's government, the market capitalization of Indian stocks crossed \$5 trillion. "Rahul Gandhi has still not overcome the loss in the Lok Sabha

Elections. Now, he is conspiring to mislead the market investors. Today, India has become the fifth-largest economy," he said. The Union minister alleged that Mr Gandhi wants to instil "fear in the minds of both the domestic and global investors, so that they do not invest". "We all know equity markets react to various estimates and predictions during any elections, or for that matter any forecasts by banks and institutions. Ups and downs are normal even during a non-event," he said. In May this year, market caps of both BSE and NSE-listed companies touched \$5 trillion. Market capitalisation or market cap is the total value of a company's stock, derived at by multiplying the stock price by the number of its outstanding shares. Indian stocks market entered the league of top five stock markets globally, Mr Goyal said, adding that m-cap of PSU companies has risen four-fold over the past years. Indian investors, particularly the retail investors, have benefitted from the rise in stock indices

over the years, he said. "Retail investors are not just bystanders today, but are participating in it," he said. FPI holdings in India were 21 per cent during UPA days and it has dipped to now 16 per cent, he said. At the same time, Indians investing in stock markets have gone up.

"India is considered a well-regulated market, and SEBI has received several appreciations worldwide," Mr Goyal added. He said India was referred to as "among fragile 5" during the rule of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance and that the country was now the fifth biggest economy. The term Fragile 5 was coined by a Morgan Stanley analyst in 2013, which referred to a set of five emerging countries, including India, whose economy was not doing well back then. The other four countries were Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, and Turkey.

The size of the mutual fund industry was only ? 10 lakh crore in 2014, today it has increased more than 5 times to ? 56 lakh



crore. Through mutual funds, Indian investors especially small investors are taking advantage of this growing market today and these small retail investors have ensured that India's ownership today has instantly become more than the ownership of institutional investors," Mr Goyal said. "In April and May, when the market was rising, foreigners sold in the market and Indian investors took advantage of it and bought it. The benefit of this rise in the last

two months has been received by Indian investors," he said, referring to the latest outflows by foreign investors. In April and May, FPIs were net sellers in Indian stock markets, data showed. "When the results came on June 4, when the market fell, foreign investors sold at a low price and Indian investors bought it with the belief that the Modi government was coming and we would take advantage of it. So foreigners bought at a high price and sold at a low price. Indian investors sold at a high price and bought at a low price. So in a way, Indian investors earned even in this period. No one suffered a loss," Mr Goyal said, adding that the retail investors benefited during the period. In his remarks, Mr Gandhi demanded a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe, terming it the "biggest stock market scam." Addressing a press conference, the Congress leader said that after 'fake' exit polls, stock markets rose, and then crashed on June 4.

## UP girl tries to snatch pistol from man whose advances she rejected, gets shot

**New Delhi:** A 20-year-old girl was shot by a man in Uttar Pradesh's Jhansi after she repeatedly rejected his advances and refused to talk to him. CCTV footage showed the girl trying to snatch the pistol from the accused, Rohit, before she was shot on June 6. The accused had been harassing the girl, a second-year BA student at Mahila Degree College, for the last five to six months and was madly in love with her. He had been pressuring the victim to talk to him, to which she repeatedly refused.

When the girl was returning home from her college after giving an exam, the accused confronted her again and tried to talk to her. When the victim refused again, Rohit took out a pistol and pointed it at her. In the CCTV, the victim was seen attempting to snatch the pistol from the accused before he overpowered her and shot her. She is presently out of danger. Before the incident, Rohit and his friends had created chaos in the street and brandished arms and swords outside her house. A video of the same went viral on social media.

The victim's mother said Rohit used to follow her daughter and look at her with bad intentions. She said she had complained to his family members, and he had agreed not to follow and harass his daughter. However, after some time, Rohit started to follow her daughter, her mother added. Superintendent of Police (SP) Gyanendra Kumar said the police took note of the matter and a search to find and arrest the accused began. "A case was registered based on the complaint of the victim. We will take strict action against the accused," the SP added.

## Akali Dal's Harsimrat Badal defends Punjabis amid Kangana Ranaut 'slap' row

**New Delhi:** Hours after a major row erupted when Bollywood actor and BJP-MP elect Kangana Ranaut on Thursday alleged that she was slapped by a woman CISF at Chandigarh airport, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal urged the Centre to contain elements who refer to Punjabis as "terrorists" and "fan communal divisions". "I urge Union government to focus on farmer grievances & fulfill the promises made. No one should be allowed to label Punjabis as atankwadi (terrorist) or ugarwadi (militant) and fan communal divisions," Badal said in a post on X. She further maintained that the Punjabis were the "foremost patriots" and have been "serving the nation on the borders and as food providers", demanding that



they "deserved better", the three-time MP from Punjab's Bathinda, who defeated Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate Gurmeet Singh Khuddian by nearly 50,000 votes in the recently-concluded Lok Sabha election, added.

A political slugfest erupted on Thursday after Kangana Ranaut alleged that a CISF security official at Chandigarh Airport slapped her while she was travelling to Delhi. According to Ranaut, when she was proceeding to the boarding point after the security check, the CISF woman official, Kulwinder Kaur, posted at the frisking area, allegedly argued with her and slapped her. Kangana's controversial statement about women in Punjab during the farmers' agitation is believed to be the provocation.

## Amid Delhi water crisis, Atishi claims Haryana reduced water flow to capital

**New Delhi:** Delhi Water Minister Atishi on Friday accused the Haryana government of conspiring against the people of Delhi and reducing water flow to the national capital in the last three days. Her remarks came a day after the Supreme Court directed the Haryana government to release 137 cusecs of surplus water to the national capital, and asked Haryana to facilitate its flow. The top court also said there should be no politics over water. Delhi has been grappling with a water crisis this summer.

"Conspiracy by Haryana exposed! Hon'ble Supreme Court is trying to resolve Delhi's water crisis, but Haryana is conspiring against the people of Delhi. While the case was being heard in Supreme Court, Haryana has been steadily reducing the water being released to Delhi in



the last 3 days...." Atishi said on X.

The minister will visit the Wazirabad barrage at 11 am to assess the water situation. Atishi had earlier said that the water demand has increased because of the heatwave but the water level in Yamuna has decreased, further resulting in low water production. "Last year, there was 674.5 ft of water in the Wazirabad pond... Despite so many requests, only 671 ft of water has been released... All water treatment plants are being affected due to low levels of water in the Wazirabad barrage... We

have requested Haryana and UP government to release more water..." Atishi was quoted by news agency ANI as saying.

Last week, the Delhi government moved the Supreme Court seeking additional supply of water from neighbouring states like Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. The Delhi government, in its plea, told the Supreme Court that the water demand in the city has risen significantly due to heatwave conditions, and urged other states, including Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, to release extra water for a month. The Delhi government also announced a slew of emergency measures, including a ban on the usage of potable water for car washing and its use at construction sites. It also enforced a fine of Rs 2,000 "on anyone found wasting water".

## Ajit Pawar 'shocked' by wife Sunetra's defeat to cousin Supriya Sule in Baramati

**New Delhi:** Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Thursday said he was "shocked" by his wife Sunetra Pawar's defeat to his cousin Supriya Sule, the daughter of NCP founder Sharad Pawar. He also said he took responsibility for his faction's poor performance in the Lok Sabha polls. Ajit Pawar's NCP won just one seat (Raigad) while it lost the prestige battle in Baramati, where sitting MP Supriya Sule, who is from the Sharad Pawar faction, retained the constituency, defeating Sunetra Pawar.

Addressing a press conference after the meeting of his party MLAs, Pawar said that all party MLAs were present at the meeting and rejected speculation that some were planning to defect to the faction led by Sharad Pawar. We did not



reach the expected results. We are not happy with the results in Maharashtra. I feel it is my responsibility for the result. I have to accept the public result. I take the entire responsibility for the result. All MLAs are with us," he said. Speaking about Baramati, where Supriya Sule defeated Sunetra Pawar by a margin of over one lakh votes, the Deputy Chief Minister said, "I am very

shocked by the result in Baramati. I don't understand it. How did the people not support me? I am very shocked. Leave other constituencies, but I did not expect this in Baramati." Asked about whether he would once again join hands with NCP founder Sharad Pawar, he tersely said he accepted responsibility for the poll debacle, adding "there is no need to bring family matters in public". Asserting there would be detailed introspection of the party's poll performance, Ajit Pawar said some of the reasons included Muslims moving away from the ruling alliance, the Opposition's allegations of change in the Constitution, which alienated the Dalits and backward classes, as well as the Maratha quota protest.

## Probe Agency NIA Searches Premises Linked To Gangster Goldy Brar In Punjab

**The places searched by the NIA included Mohali, Patiala, Hoshiarpur and Fatehgarh Sahib in Punjab.**

**New Delhi:** A day after chargesheeting Goldy Brar in the Karni Sena chief murder case, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday searched nine locations in Punjab at the premises of associates of designated terrorist Goldy Brar in another case linked to Chandigarh-related extortion and firing and appealed for information about the terrorist and his gang.

The raids were conducted at the premises of those associated with foreign-based designated individual terrorist Goldy Brar

and his aides, said the NIA. The places searched by the NIA included Mohali, Patiala, Hoshiarpur and Fatehgarh Sahib in Punjab.

The NIA has also released telephone numbers for the public to share information about the terrorist and his associates or to reveal any threat calls they may have received from the gang. "The information can be shared on landline number 0172-2682901 or mobile number 7743002947 (For Telegram/WhatsApp). The identity of the informer will be kept a secret," reads an announcement released by the NIA. The fresh crackdown was part of NIA's investigations into the case (RC-03/2024/NIA/DLI), pertaining to the demand for extortion money and the firing of gunshots at the residence of one victim in Chandigarh. The case was originally



registered by the local police on January 20, 2024, and the NIA took over the probe on March 18.

"Today's searches covered the districts of Mohali, Patiala, Hoshiarpur and Fatehgarh Sahib, as part of NIA's sustained crackdown on individual terrorists engaged in criminal-terrorist activities in India. Incriminating material including digital devices have been

seized," said the NIA in a statement. Investigations so far have revealed that Goldy Brar, along with one Goldy of Rajpura (Punjab), had hatched a criminal conspiracy to generate funds by demanding extortion money from businessmen of Punjab, Chandigarh and surrounding areas, the anti-terror agency said. "They were also providing arms and ammunition to members of terrorist gangs formed by Brar. They were additionally involved in smuggling and sale of narcotics and channelisation of the proceeds from these sales." As per NIA investigations, Goldy Brar and his associates based abroad were "continuously recruiting vulnerable youth into their gangs, using them for identification of extortion targets, firing in front of houses of those targets who refuse to pay the extortion money, and inducing them in sale and purchase of narcotics and weapon smuggling."

## London postgraduate Iqra Hasan continues family legacy by winning Kairana seat

**New Delhi:** From Western Uttar Pradesh to Purvanchal, the BJP suffered losses in the Lok Sabha polls, securing only 33 compared to the 62 seats it got in the 2019 polls. In Western Uttar Pradesh's Kairana Lok Sabha seat, Samajwadi Party's debutante candidate Iqra Hasan defeated BJP's Pradeep Chaudhary by a margin of over 69,000 votes. Hasan got 5,28,013 (48.9 per cent) votes compared to her nearest rival, Chaudhary, who polled 4,58,897 (42.5 per cent) votes, according to Election Commission data.

An alumnus of the London School of Oriental and African Studies, Iqra Hasan took a plunge into politics after her mother, Tabassum Hasan, and brother Nahid Hasan, a three-time MLA, were booked by the Uttar Pradesh Police. When Nahid fought the 2022 UP Assembly polls from jail, Iqra was the one managing his campaign in the towns and villages. In these Lok Sabha polls, she received votes from all segments of society as people admired her for her simplicity.

Iqra Hasan has been active in the politics of the Kairana region for the last nine years. She is the daughter of former MP Tabassum Hasan and Nahid Hasan is her elder brother. Granddaughter of former MP Chaudhary Akhtar Hasan and daughter of former MPs Munawwar Hasan and Tabassum, she hit the media headlines in 2019 when she took part in the anti-CAA protest in London.

In 2022, when the then MLA Nahid Hasan was in jail before the 2022 Assembly elections after surrendering in court in a gangster case, Iqra Hasan looked after his political work. In politics, Akhtar Hasan, the head of the Hasan family, contested and won the election of councillor in the municipal elections. After that, he became chairman and then MP from the Kairana Lok Sabha seat. He also introduced his son Munawwar Hasan into politics, who left his mark as a big leader of Western UP. After his death, his wife, Tabassum Begum, entered politics and was a two-time MP from the Kairana Lok Sabha seat. Tabassum's son, Nahid Hasan, is currently the MLA from Kairana Assembly. Now Iqra Hasan is the second woman from the family who has become a lawmaker after her mother. Earlier in 2016, she had lost the election of Zila Panchayat by five thousand votes. "Dozens of false cases were filed against my brother and my mother by the ruling party. I entered politics while my brother was in jail by campaigning in the assembly elections and winning the love of the people. I made my brother win and hoisted my flag by defeating the BJP party on the Lok Sabha seat. Going from Uttar Pradesh to London to study, my mother's biggest support in this and father's blessings and now will work for the rights of our people" she said while speaking to India Today TV.

## NEWS BOX

## US reacts as China objects to Narendra Modi's exchange with Taiwan President

**Washington** Amid China's protest over the exchange of greetings between Narendra Modi and Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te, the US State Department said such congratulatory messages between two foreign leaders are a part of diplomatic business. "I would say that such congratulatory messages are the normal course of diplomatic business," State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters on Thursday at his daily news conference. He was responding to a question on China protesting over Modi's comment that he looked forward to having closer ties with Taiwan after his victory in the just concluded Lok Sabha elections. Earlier on Wednesday, Modi's remarks came in response to a congratulatory message from Taiwan President Lai Ching-te on his election victory.

Lai, elected as Taiwan's President last month, in a message posted on X said: "My sincere congratulations to Prime Minister @narendramodi on his election victory. We look forward to enhancing the fast-growing #Taiwan-#India partnership, expanding our collaboration on trade, technology & other sectors to contribute to peace & prosperity in the #IndoPacific." In his reply posted on X, Modi said: "Thank you @ChingteLai for your warm message. I look forward to closer ties as we work towards mutually beneficial economic and technological partnership." China views Taiwan as a rebel province that must be reunified with the mainland, even by force. n Thursday, China objected to the exchange between the Indian and Taiwanese leader, insisting that New Delhi should resist Taiwan authorities' "political calculations".

Addressing a media briefing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said China opposes "all forms of official interactions between the Taiwan authorities and countries having diplomatic relations with China. There is but one China in the world. Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China".

## Biden campaign's surprise recruit to pursue anti-Trump Republicans

**Washington.** US President Joe Biden is making a pitch for his re-election to Republicans who do not support their party's standard-bearer, Donald Trump, in November's election, a Biden campaign official said on Thursday.

The Democratic president's campaign has hired a national Republican engagement director: Austin Weatherford, who was chief of staff to former Republican congressman Adam Kinzinger, an outspoken critic of Trump, the official said. Weatherford has been hired "to head up outreach efforts to independents and moderate Republicans who know what a danger Donald Trump is to the country if re-elected for a second term", the official said. Biden and Trump are in a tighter rematch for the White House than in 2020, according to Reuters/Ipsos polling. Biden's support among voters without a four-year degree is down 10 percentage points from the same period in 2020, the analysis found.

Most national opinion polls are showing a tied race. Trump has often dismissed members of his party who do not fall in line behind him as "RINOs", for Republicans in Name Only, for party members he sees as disloyal. The Trump campaign did not return a request for comment. Both Biden and Trump campaigns scrambled to woo supporters of former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, who dropped out of the Republican primary race in March. Haley did not endorse Trump at the time but has since said she would vote for him. The Biden campaign has held meetings with Haley voters and is placing a "seven-figure ad buy" targeting such voters, the Biden campaign official said. There's little precedent for large numbers of Republicans to back a Democrat in a presidential election. Trump, meanwhile, is fundraising in liberal San Francisco, hoping to attract venture capital money from those turned off by Biden's liberal policies. The Republican Party has coalesced around Trump this election season, after his repeated lies about having won the 2020 election against Biden, and the January 6, 2021, riot at the US Capitol led by his followers. Kinzinger and fellow US Representative Liz Cheney were the only two Republicans who joined the House of Representatives on the January 6 select committee that investigated the January 6 attack. Both were later censured by the party.

## Trump ally ordered to report to prison by July 1 for defying US Capitol riot probe

**Washington DC** Steve Bannon, a former top adviser to Donald Trump, must report to prison by July 1 to serve a four-month sentence for contempt of Congress, a federal judge said on Thursday (local time). The decision means Bannon, a right-wing media firebrand who maintains influence in Trump's orbit, will likely be behind bars for a critical stretch of the US presidential campaign as former President Trump faces Democratic President Joe Biden in the November 5 election. The order by US District Judge Carl Nichols in Washington came after a federal appeals court last month rejected Bannon's bid to overturn his conviction for spurning a subpoena from a congressional panel that investigated the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol. Bannon told reporters outside the courthouse he would ask the US Supreme Court to intervene, casting his prosecution as politically motivated. "All this is about one thing: shutting down the MAGA movement," Bannon said, referring to Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign slogan. Bannon was convicted in 2022 of two misdemeanour counts of contempt of Congress for refusing to turn over documents or testify to the Democratic-led House of Representatives committee. Bannon will be the second former top official from Trump's White House to go to prison for refusing to cooperate with the committee. Peter Navarro, a former trade adviser, is currently serving a four-month term.

Bannon was allowed to avoid serving the sentence during his appeal. Prosecutors moved to end that reprieve after a three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit rebuffed Bannon's challenge to his conviction.

## 4 Indian medical students drown in river near Russia's St Petersburg

**The Indian mission in Russia is working with local authorities to recover the bodies of the drowned students and repatriate them to India as soon as possible.**

**World** Four Indian students drowned in a river near St Petersburg in Russia, officials said on Friday, with authorities recovering one body and searching for the remaining three, officials said. One girl student, who also fell into the river, was rescued and is receiving medical treatment. Jalgaon District Collector Ayush Prasad confirmed the deaths to news agency ANI. The Indian Embassy in Russia and the Consulate in St Petersburg are working with local authorities to



recover the bodies and repatriate them to India as soon as possible. "We are working to send the bodies to the relatives as soon as possible," the Indian Embassy said in a statement. "Proper treatment is also being provided to the

student whose life was saved." The Consulate in St Petersburg elaborated that they are collaborating with authorities in Veliky Novgorod, where the students were studying medicine at Veliky Novgorod State University. "The

bereaved families have been contacted and assured of all possible help," the Consulate said. "Proper medical, including psychological treatment, is being provided to the girl student who was saved." Officials have not yet released details on the cause of the drowning or the identity of the victims. Russia has become a popular destination for Indian students seeking medical degrees. It has a long history of excellence in medical education, offering rigorous programs and practical training. Tuition fees and living expenses in Russia are significantly lower than those in private Indian colleges or other countries with similar standards. The admission process is generally easier, with some universities not requiring the NEET entrance exam, a major hurdle in India. Degrees from accredited Russian medical universities are recognised globally, allowing graduates to practice medicine in many countries after passing licensing exams.

## Books, kitchen, TV: Pak government submits details on Imran Khan's prison life

**The Pakistan government released pictures of the jail room of former prime minister Imran Khan, showing a bedroom with a study table, a kitchen and books, including Nelson Mandela's autobiography, to counter claims of mistreatment inside prison.**

**Islamabad.** Pakistan's government submitted to the Supreme Court on Thursday details of the living conditions of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, seeking to rebuff his claim of mistreatment and of being held in solitary confinement without access to lawyers. The government submission seen by Reuters included photographs of the cell that showed a collection of books, including Nelson Mandela's autobiography "Long Walk to Freedom", apparently intended to highlight Khan's freedom to read what he wished in jail. The submission also contained a list of family and friends, lawyers and party members who have seen Khan since he was jailed in August last year on corruption charges. Khan, 71, is also fighting dozens of other cases that he and his party say are politically motivated to thwart his return to power. The government asked the court in its submission to appoint a



judicial officer to verify the facts. Khan complained to the court last week that he was being kept in solitary confinement without access to his lawyers. In an appearance before the court via video link later on Thursday, Khan asked Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa to have his cell conditions inspected. Isa said he would appoint a commission to pay a surprise visit to the prison cell. Khan's party stood by its claim that he had been mistreated and added that the pictures included were of the cell where Khan

was being kept in solitary confinement. "It is a contradiction to the claim that a former prime minister is entitled to an A-class cell with an air-conditioned room and a helper to attend to the errands," his party said in response to the submission. The pictures in the government submission showed a messy bedroom with a study table, a chair, a single bed, a cooler, a washbasin next to a washroom in the corner, with a flat TV screen hung on a wall. It shows shirts thrown on the back of the chair and trousers, pants and a towel hung on a wall. Another picture shows a long walkway with barracks on both sides, describing it as an "exclusive gallery for walking twice a day". Another shows what it says is a separate kitchen with condiments, one more showed a collection of books on Islam, history and politics, and other pictures show a room with an exercise bike and fitness equipment.

## European Union elections begin; war, immigration drive right-wing momentum

**World** One of the world's largest democratic exercises is currently underway as the European Union, a bloc of 450 million citizens, heads to the polls from Thursday to Sunday to elect 720 members of the European Parliament.

Voters in the 27 nations of the EU will play a crucial role in shaping the priorities and political direction of the bloc for the next five years. The election is expected to see a significant rightward shift in power, with far-right parties poised to make substantial gains. The 720-seat European Parliament coincides with the EU's 27 national governments on laws governing the bloc's single market, its long-term budget, fiscal rules, and climate change laws. The new parliament will also decide on the EU's next seven-year budget as countries like Ukraine press for membership. Here's what you need



to know about the European Union elections: The European Parliament elections will determine how the EU confronts major external challenges such as a more aggressive Russia, increased industrial competition from China and the United States, climate change, and immigration. Election campaigns in many countries, including Germany, have focused on security and defence issues amid Russia's war against Ukraine. Economic and social policy remains the top issue for voters in most countries, with migration policy

playing a lesser role. The Netherlands, which elects 31 of the 720 members of the European Parliament, was the first country to vote. An exit poll indicated a centre-left alliance led by former European Commissioner Frans Timmermans edging out far-right leader Geert Wilders, with eight seats to PVV's seven. The Dutch vote reflects a broader EU challenge: the growing popularity of nationalist and populist parties that aim to weaken the 27-nation bloc from within. Far-right parties are expected to increase their vote share to 21-25% across the EU, though not enough for a decisive majority.

French President Emmanuel Macron warned of the EU being blocked by a significant far-right presence in the European Parliament. France votes on June 9.

## At least 30 killed after Israeli strikes on UN-run school in Gaza

**At least 30 people were killed after Israel launched targeted strikes at a UN-run school in central Gaza's Nuseirat camp. The Palestinian news agency Wafa said thousands of displaced Palestinians were sheltering at al-Sardi school, which is linked to the UN Agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), when it came under attack.**

**Cairo/ Jerusalem** Israel hit a Gaza school on Thursday with what it described as a targeted airstrike on up to 30 Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters inside, and a Hamas official said 40 people were killed, including women and children sheltering at the UN site. Video footage showed Palestinians hauling away bodies and scores of injured in a hospital after the attack, which took place at a sensitive moment in mediated talks on a ceasefire that would involve releasing hostages held by Hamas and some of the Palestinians held in Israeli jails. At the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah, a Palestinian boy, Imad al-Maqadmeh, lay on the floor, his swollen face badly bruised and bleeding. He said he lost his father in the strike. What did we do? There are no armed people in the school. The ones there are children, playing. We play together... Why did they bomb us? he said in the video obtained by Reuters. In images of the dead laid out at the hospital surrounded by wailing mourners, bodies were mostly wrapped in shrouds or

carpets, making it impossible to determine their identities from the video. The US issued a joint statement with other countries calling on Israel and Hamas to compromise to finalise a deal after eight months of war in the Gaza Strip. Qatar's foreign ministry spokesperson Majed Al-Ansari said Hamas had not yet responded to the latest ceasefire proposal and was still studying it, adding that Qatar, Egypt and the US mediation efforts are still ongoing. Hamas sources said there was nothing new to respond to, adding the Israeli proposal was old and the group rejected it because it did not speak of an end to the war or a complete pullout from Gaza. Ismail Al-Thawabta, the director of the Hamas-run government media office, rejected Israel's assertion that the UN school in Nuseirat, in central Gaza, had hidden a Hamas command post. "The occupation uses ... false fabricated stories to justify the brutal crime it conducted against dozens of displaced people," Thawabta told Reuters. Israel's military said its



fighter jets had carried out a "precise strike", and circulated satellite photos highlighting two parts of a building where it said the fighters were based. "We're very confident in the intelligence," military spokesperson Lt Col Peter Lerner said, accusing Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters of deliberately using UN facilities as operational bases. He said 20 to 30 fighters were located in the compound, and many of them had been killed. "I'm not aware of any civilian casualties and I'd be very, very cautious of accepting anything that Hamas puts out," he said. Later Israel's chief military

spokesperson Daniel Hagari said the military had so far identified nine of 30 Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters targeted in the pre-dawn strike. As people at the school cleared rubble from bloodstained classrooms, survivor Huda Abu Dhaher described waking up to the sound of rockets. "People's remains were scattered inside the yard and outside. The gas canister exploded," she told Reuters. "My nephew was martyred (killed), he lost his leg and arm, he was a 10-year-old." Washington said it expected Israel to be fully transparent in making information about the strike public. "As a general matter, and as we've said before, Israel has a right to go after Hamas. But we've also been clear that Israel must take every precaution possible and do more to protect civilians," a White House National Security Council spokesperson said. Late on Thursday, Hamas media said an Israeli airstrike on the house of the mayor of Al-Nuseirat camp in central Gaza Strip killed the mayor, Eyad Al-Mghari, and some members of his family.



## NEWS BOX

## China World Cup hopes left on knife edge after draw with Thailand

BEIJING. Chinese football fans and pundits were left with a familiar sinking feeling on Friday after a disappointing home draw with Thailand left their country's World Cup hopes on a knife edge.

Victory on Thursday in front of a sell-out 47,000 crowd in Shenyang would have sent China into the final qualifying round for the 2026 World Cup. Instead, they were the inferior side for long periods and missed a



penalty, before Zhang Yuning rescued a point with 11 minutes left in a deflating 1-1 draw. President Xi Jinping once said that he wanted China to win the World Cup, but they have only reached the tournament once when they lost all three games and failed to score a goal in 2002. "There is no blessed land or miracle in Chinese football," state-run outlet The Paper said following the Thailand stalemate. Fans vented their frustrations on social media site Weibo, with one writing: "There is no strategy, no coordination! It is a mess!" Going into their last group game on Tuesday, China are second behind already qualified South Korea with eight points in hand. Thailand are third with five points.

The top two reach the next qualifying stage.

However, China faces a daunting trip to Son Heung-min's South Korea while Thailand hosts basement side Singapore. Thailand will go through if China lose against the best team in the group and Thai's win while also making up the goal difference against the worst team. The country's long-suffering fans were no more optimistic, even if their team is still in the driving seat in second place and can guarantee progression with a draw in Seoul.

## T20 World Cup, India vs Pakistan: Surface tension in New York

NEW YORK. In all the euphoria of cricket coming to America, there now appears to be a cloud of doubt hanging over the most crucial component of the sport, the pitch. In two back-to-back games at the Nassau International Cricket Ground in New York - the venue for the high-profile India-Pakistan game on Sunday - teams have been bowled out for less than 100 and the chases haven't been easy.

T20 WORLD CUP: SCHEDULE | POINTS TABLE

Sri Lanka were dismissed for 77 and it took South Africa 16.4 overs to get over the line. The Indian top-order also struggled to chase 97 against Ireland on Wednesday. While the Irish looked like fish out of water while batting, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant too had to struggle before India opened their account.

What's more crucial is the fact that the winner of the toss is calling the shots. In addition to the up-and-down nature of the pitch, the 10:30 am starts have meant the white ball is moving around so much that batting is looking really hard at the moment.

"Yes, the toss is crucial and fortunately we won the toss today (against Ireland). It allowed us to control the game," batting coach Vikram Rathour said. But it didn't take too long for the discussion to veer towards the India-Pakistan match and when he was asked what would be a par score batting first, Rathour merely said: "Whatever we can get".

Former India spinner Harbhajan Singh, who is doing commentary here, too sounded concerned. "The worrying bit is one delivery is shooting up, one is keeping a bit down. Anything can happen on a track like this," Harbhajan told TOI.

The one man who had to deal fire with fire was skipper Rohit. Despite a shaky start, he held on to score 52 before being hit by a ball that rose up to hit his shoulder. The captain retired hurt, though he later clarified that "it's just a little sore" and there's no concern about his participation in the Pakistan game.

"It's just a little sore (the arm). Quite unsure of what to expect from the pitch. Not aware on what it is to play like on a pitch that's five months old," Rohit said. "I don't think the wicket settled down even when we batted second. There was enough for the bowlers."

Rohit has played enough cricket to know that the decibels will increase manifold when it's Pakistan and any adverse result will add to the noise. "I don't know what to expect from the pitch to be honest, but we will prepare as if the conditions are going to be like this," the skipper said. Rathour, on the other hand, is banking on the quality of India's batting lineup to deal with whatever challenges that come their way.

## De Bruyne, Lukaku still the keys for rebuilding Belgium

**De Bruyne said at the time Belgium were "too old" and new boss Domenico Tedesco, just 38, is leading an overhaul of the team while still relying on a smaller core of elder statesmen.**

PARIS. A woeful 2022 World Cup campaign marred by infighting marked the end of the road for much of Belgium's venerated golden generation, but two integral figures, Kevin De Bruyne and Romelu Lukaku, remain in a squad comprising plenty of fresh faces. After the high of a third-place finish at the 2018 World Cup in Russia, Belgium failed to live up to expectations in Qatar with an ageing side, and Eden Hazard's retirement accompanied the departure of coach Roberto Martinez before others followed suit in the

months to come. De Bruyne said at the time Belgium were "too old" and new boss Domenico Tedesco, just 38, is leading an overhaul of the team while still relying on a smaller core of elder statesmen. Belgium cruised through Group F unbeaten with Lukaku blasting in 14 goals to set a new European Championship qualifying record and taking him to 83 at international level, seventh most in men's history just behind Hungarian great Ferenc Puskas (84). Under Tedesco, Belgium are unbeaten in 13 matches but few of those fixtures have come against Europe's heavyweights. His reward was a two-year contract extension in March that runs until the 2026 World Cup, but this summer's tournament will offer a better indication of the strength of a nation that held the top FIFA ranking uninterrupted between 2018 and 2022 yet underachieved on the biggest stage. The 37-year-old Jan Vertonghen, Belgium's record caps holder with 154, provides invaluable experience at the back but Thibaut Courtois is absent after missing much of the season for Real Madrid. The 32-year-old ruptured the cruciate ligament in his left knee last August and then suffered a meniscus injury in March.



Courtois 'not ready'

Despite recently returning to action and starting the Champions League final win over Borussia Dortmund, Courtois had already ruled himself out of the Euros in December. He had been on frosty terms with Tedesco since being overlooked as captain last year following an injury to De Bruyne. "He was very honest with me," said Tedesco. "He knows his body. It is one thing to play three or four matches, but another to play the Euros." Tedesco added: "He is not ready for the Euros, and we have to play with those who are able to." Matz Sels, who made a winter transfer deadline-day move to Nottingham Forest, appears likely to deputise for Courtois and Leicester's Wout Faes formed a solid pairing in central

defence with Vertonghen during the qualifiers. The versatile Axel Witsel, 35, has been coaxed out of international retirement, but Toby Alderweireld is gone from the team at the last World Cup. Youri Tielemans, Amadou Onana and Orel Mangala are among the midfield options for a team crossing its fingers that De Bruyne arrives in Germany fully fit. The Manchester City playmaker scored on his 100th cap in Wednesday's 2-0 win over Montenegro, his first appearance

for Belgium since March 2023. He sat out all but one of the Euro qualifiers with a troublesome hamstring that cost him the first half of the season.

Since his return De Bruyne has looked as good as ever though and will reprise the role of Belgium's creator-in-chief at his sixth major tournament.

With Hazard and Dries Mertens no longer involved, and Michy Batshuayi omitted, the likes of Loïs Openda, Charles De Ketelaere and Jeremy Doku must shoulder more of the responsibility in attack. Leandro Trossard is coming off a fine first full season with Arsenal and the presence of 21-year-old PSV winger Johan Bakayoko offers Belgium another youthful option going forward.

## Sunil Chhetri rues missing out on win in farewell game: Wish we got 3 points

NEW DELHI. Sunil Chhetri has lamented the fact that India couldn't get the win against Kuwait in his farewell game on June 6, Thursday. India and Kuwait squared off in a high-stakes match in the FIFA World Cup qualifier at the Salt Lake stadium in Kolkata, as Chhetri bowed out from the national team. A win would have more or less guaranteed India's progression to the third round of the World Cup qualifiers. However, both teams ended up playing out a goalless draw in front of a packed crowd in Kolkata. The draw means that India will need to beat Qatar in their next game to seal qualification. A loss



could mean Kuwait can take the second spot if they beat Afghanistan. Speaking to the media after the game, Chhetri said he wished that the team got the 3 points on the night. The legend feels that the team can get the job done in Qatar.

"I wish we could've got 3 points today. One point still keeps us in. I hope we will do a good job in Qatar. We still have a chance to qualify," said Chhetri.

Still part of the team's WhatsApp group Chhetri said that he had made peace with the decision to call time on his international career and also claimed he is still in the team's WhatsApp group. The legendary striker said that they had got the message that there is a recovery session on June 7 and he plans to attend it. Chhetri said he gave his all for the side. "I have made peace with it. Day after tomorrow the team travels. I am still the part of the WhatsApp group. We got a message, there is a recovery tomorrow. I will try to go. I hope the coach allows. On the 8th, the team is travelling and I will miss it. I gave whatever we had," said Chhetri. Chhetri ended his career as the fourth-highest goalscorer in men's international football with his 94 goals, behind the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi and Ali Daei. Ending his India career as the side's most-capped, and most successful player, Chhetri was graced with a loud standing ovation from the fans at the Salt Lake stadium.

## Scotland 'not surprised' topping Group B which has England, Australia: Michael Leask

NEW DELHI. Scotland's Michael Leask has claimed that the team isn't surprised that they're topping Group B at the moment above both Australia and England at the moment. Scotland, whose first game with England was washed out because of rain, won their match against Namibia on June 6. The two points helped them to leapfrog Australia to the top of the table. Speaking at the post-match press conference, Leask, who was the Player Of The Match, said Scotland has got a great squad and others might say it is a surprise to see them at the top of Group B. The all-rounder said that they have two games left to go and would back themselves to get the win and top the group.

"Look, we've got a hell of a squad. It's no surprise to us. It might be a surprise to some. England will probably say it was a surprise



to them the other day that we're 90 off 10 overs. It doesn't surprise me. This team's got great depth. We've played together for a number of years, a number of us. We've got some new fresh blood so it doesn't really surprise us that we're in this position. And yeah, we've got two more huge games and

why can't we top the group at the end of then?" said Leask.

## Still a lot of cricket to play

Leask went to show caution, saying that Scotland could end up being at the bottom of the group if they lose the next two games and feels there's still a lot to play for. He called the match against Oman a huge fixture for the side. "Yeah, well we're only top of the table with two games to go. Those two games could put us bottom of the table. So, we've still got a lot of cricket to play, there's still 80 overs of cricket to play and there's still a lot of other teams to do a lot of other things as well. So, we can only do what we can control. We've got Oman on Sunday which is a huge fixture for us and then we go again," said Leask.

## Oracle congratulates 'engineering, cricket star' Saurabh Netravalkar after PAK vs USA

**Netravalkar defended the total for USA in Super Over Netravalkar works as an engineer at Oracle Oracle had a special message for the USA pacer**

NEW DELHI. Oracle decided to congratulate their very own 'engineering and cricket' star Saurabh Netravalkar after his heroics helped USA secure a monumental win over former champions Pakistan in the T20 World Cup 2024 on June 6, Thursday. Netravalkar picked up 2 wickets in his spell of 4 overs and then delivered the Super Over, where he defended the target to hand USA the famous win. The left-arm pacer had made the headlines before the start of the T20 World Cup when his LinkedIn profile went viral and a colleague of his revealed that he was working with him at Oracle. Netravalkar represented India in the 2010 U-19 World Cup, but moved to the USA to study for a Master's degree in Computer Science at Cornell University and then joined Oracle.



The computer software company put out a tweet for Netravalkar after the win, where they congratulated the USA team as well. "Congrats @USACricket on a historic result! Proud of the team and our very own engineering and cricket star @Saurabh\_Netra," said Oracle. "Congrats @USACricket on a historic result! Proud of the team and our very own engineering and cricket star @Saurabh\_Netra," said Oracle.

Netravalkar's job did not end there as he was entrusted to bowl in the Super Over. With the USA needing to defend 18 runs in the one-over eliminator, Netravalkar did not give the Pakistan batters much to work with. Netravalkar and the USA team will now enjoy a mini-break as they will head to New York to take on India in a mouth-watering clash. The USA went to the top of the table with the win on Thursday.

## Son tells South Korean football bosses not to rush coach search

SINGAPORE. Son Heung-min told South Korean football chiefs not to rush their search for a permanent coach as Jurgen Klinsmann lashed out over his sacking in February. Tottenham star Son scored twice as South Korea booked their place in the final round of World Cup qualifying on Thursday with a 7-0 thrashing away at Singapore. The Koreans were playing under their second interim coach since Klinsmann was fired following their semi-final exit at the Asian Cup earlier this year in Qatar.

Kim Do-hoon will again be in caretaker charge against China at home on Tuesday. Even if it takes time, I think it's important for us to find a coach that suits us and the kind of football we want to play," the skipper told reporters in Singapore after the big win. Under-23 coach Hwang Sun-hong was put in temporary charge for two World Cup qualifiers in March but his reputation took a

heavy hit when South Korea failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics.

Son said it "really is not easy" to be without a permanent coach, but added: "The players are making an effort to adapt, allowing us to play well in a relatively positive atmosphere." Klinsmann was fired after only a year at the helm after the Koreans were beaten 2-0 by underdogs Jordan at the Asian Cup. Just prior to his sacking, it emerged there had been a bust-up on the eve of the semi-final between Son and Lee Kang-in of Paris Saint-Germain, leaving the skipper with a dislocated finger. Klinsmann lifted the lid on the incident in an interview with The Athletic and blasted the Korea Football Association



for making him the scapegoat. "In the Korean culture, somebody has to take responsibility, take the blame," the former Germany striker said in the interview with

ex-England forward Alan Shearer. "They made us (coaches) responsible for the fight." The KFA were last month rebuffed in their search for Klinsmann's successor by their top target Jesse Marsch when the former Leeds United boss chose Canada instead. The KFA reportedly talked to the American Marsch and Iraq's Spanish coach Jesus Casas, with 71-year-old Senol Gunes from Turkey and former Saudi Arabia coach Herve Renard also in the picture. Klinsmann said the KFA should have known what they were getting when they hired him to replace Portugal's Paulo Bento. I tried to adjust to a lot of things, but if you want me to 100 adjust to 100 percent of what you do, then why did you hire a foreigner in the first place?" he said. "If you wanted it to just be the Korean way, it would be much easier to just take a Korean coach, right?"



# Disha Patani

Looks Sultry, Flaunts Her Curves In Beige Crop Top



Disha Patani is making heads turn with her impeccable fashion sense! Her everyday looks speak volumes about her sense of style. Be it with her gym outfits or tank tops and baggy pants flaunting her curves and elegance, the actress always manages to make heads turn. Having said that, the Yodha actress recently left her fans gasping for breath with her latest hot video. Disha looked all things ravishing in a nude-coloured crop top with brown pants. The actress took to her Instagram to share a new advertisement. Disha Patani looked sultry as she left her fans gasping for breath with her latest video. Watch it here:

Meanwhile, on the work front, Disha Patani was last seen sharing the screen space with Arjun Kapoor, John Abraham, and Tara Sutaria in Ek Villain Returns. She will also be seen in Nag Ashwin's action drama Kalki 2898-AD alongside Deepika Padukone, Dulquer Salmaan, and Amitabh Bachchan. Disha Patani is currently seen in Sagar Ambre and Pushkar Ojha's action drama Yodha, where she shares the screen with Sidharth Malhotra and Raashii Khanna.

Apart from her professional life, Disha often grabs headlines for her personal life. Time and again, she has been linked to Tiger. Though the duo never admitted to dating each other, they have always maintained that they are close friends. In a recent interview, Tiger, who is currently gearing up for the release of Bade Miyan Chote Miyan along with Akshay Kumar, opened up about his relationship status. "Are you single? Aapki zindagi kis 'Disha' mein jaa rahi hai?" Times Now.com asked Tiger, while hinting at his dating rumours with Disha. To this, Tiger wittily replied, "Meri ek hi Disha hai life mein... aur wo hai mera kaam (I have only one direction/focus in my life which is my work)."

This Heeramandi And Laapataa Ladies Crossover Gets Bibbojaan Aka Aditi Rao Hydari's Approval



Internet is back with a crossover that we never anticipated. Courtesy: Laapataa Ladies stars Pratibha Ranta and Sparsh Shrivastava. Bringing the best of both the worlds — Heeramandi and Laapataa Ladies — the talented duo recreated the viral Gaja Gamini walk of Aditi Rao Hydari. The video was posted on Netflix India's official Instagram handle with the caption, "Hatto jao, we're looking for Sajni." For the background, they picked Saiyaan Hatto Jaao from Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar. The wholesome video showcases both Pratibha and Sparsh walking through the corridors of Netflix's office with a sunflower in their hands. However, it was their walk that immediately captured the Internet's attention. The duo imitated Aditi's now-viral walk. Dressed in a grey corset top with matching trousers adorned with unique patterns, Pratibha rocked a chic look. Sparsh, on the other hand, created a contrasting visual as he opted for an all-white ensemble. The clip also had a text written over it which read, "Kuchh nahi bhai bas Phool ko dhundne jaa rahe hain (Nothing, just going to look for your Phool," referring to Nitanshi Goel's character from their film. Even our Bibbojaan aka Aditi Rao Hydari couldn't stop herself from commenting on the video. The Heeramandi star, approving their walk, wrote, "Bibbojaan certified! Nailed it guys."

Meanwhile, Sparsh and Pratibha have been making headlines for their rumoured relationship. The speculations about their relationship began after a video of them dancing to a song from the film Laapataa Ladies went viral. Clearing the air, the actors have now reacted to it. During an AMA (Ask Me Anything) session on Instagram, Pratibha replied to a fan asking about their relationship status. She said, "Are we dating? Of course not." Sparsh also joined her in refuting the rumours as he said, "Yaar, ek ladka aur ladki sirf dost bhi ho sakte hain (A guy and a girl can just be friends).

Sara Ali Khan Obliges Kids With Photos As She Gets Papped Outside Gym



Sara Ali Khan has once won everyone's hearts with her sweet gesture. She was spotted today outside the gym where she obliged some little kids with selfies. Sara was seen holding them close and then clicking photos. As soon as the video was shared, it went viral and fans reacted. In the video, shared by Instant Bollywood, we can see Sara wearing red colour shorts and white crops. She was coming out of the gym when two little girls approached for photos. The actress immediately agreed. This has won fans hearts and they are showering praise on her. Many dRecently, Sara Ali Khan has posted a series of hot photos with her brother Ibrahim Ali Khan from their exotic getaway in Italy. Sara was also joined by her friends on the trip. In one of the photos, Sara can be seen posing with her girl squad on a yacht. While another pic showed her all decked up in a sexy slip dress as she posed with her younger brother, who looked dapper in a black suit. Soon after Sara shared the pics, fans flooded the comment section with heartwarming compliments.

On the work front, Sara Ali Khan is set to share the screen space with Ayushmann Khurrana for the first time in an upcoming action comedy film. This fresh pairing has generated a lot of buzz. The film will be produced by Dharma Productions and Sikhya Entertainment. ropped heart emojis in the comment section.

The film, yet to be named, will be directed by Aakash Kaushik and is expected to be a unique spy comedy. However, this is the first time Ayushmann Khurrana is working with Karan Johar. Pinkvilla has reported, "Karan and Guneet have been very excited about this subject as the script has shaped up well with a perfect blend of espionage elements with comedy. The script tick marks all the boxes of a commercial film as it has scale, thrill, and action with a lot of comedy, and the trio of Karan, Guneet, and Aakash feel that Ayushmann Khurrana fits the character."

# Kangana Ranaut

Calls Herself 'Mandi Ki Sansad', Hugs Her Mother After Winning Lok Sabha Elections

Days after winning the Lok Sabha elections from Himachal Pradesh's Mandi constituency, Kangana Ranaut is now on her way to Delhi. On Thursday afternoon, the actress-turned-politician took to her Instagram stories and shared some pictures in which she was seen bidding adieu to her family members in Mandi. In one of the photos, the actress was seen sharing a warm hug with her mother. Another photo featured Kangana taking a selfie inside a car. "On my way to the parliament," Kangana Ranaut wrote as she also called herself "Mandi ki sansad". Check out her Instagram stories here: (Screengrabs of Kangana Ranaut's Instagram stories)

On June 4, Kangana Ranaut defeated her closest rival Vikramaditya Singh of Congress by a margin of over 74,000 votes to win Mandi. After her victory, the actress also shared an Instagram post thanking the people from her constituency. "Heartfelt gratitude to all the people of Mandi for this love and trust... This victory belongs to all of you, this is the victory of your trust in Prime Minister Modi and BJP, this is the victory of Sanatan and in the honour of Mandi," she wrote. Recently, Ankit Lokhande congratulated Kangana for her win. The Pavitra Rishta actress took to her X (formerly known as Twitter) handle to share a picture of Kangana and mentioned that she "deserved" this victory. "Heartfelt congratulations, my dearest for this massive win @KanganaTeam



You deserve it and I know you will bring a positive change. Always rooting for you," Ankit wrote. On the acting front, Kangana will soon be seen in Emergency. The film is based on the Emergency declared under the Indira Gandhi leadership and she will be seen playing the role of the former Prime Minister. Kangana Ranaut announced Emergency in 2021 and later clarified that even though Emergency is a political drama, it is not Indira Gandhi's biopic. The actress is not just playing the lead in the film but is also directing it. Besides Kangana, the film also stars Anupam Kher, Milind Soman, Mahima Chaudhry and Shreyas Talpade among others. Emergency was supposed to hit theatres on June 14, 2024, but has now been postponed.

