

Presiding officers must run Parliament sans bias

The Speaker is thus for all practical purposes impartial, and the House can leave to him the important judicial functions of deciding all points of order. AS the 18th Lok Sabha assembled for its first session on June 24, partisanship began from where the parties had left it off in the 16th and 17th Lok Sabhas, which had the BJP in the majority. Obviously, the race for and the 'election' of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the conduct of the subsequent proceedings of the House were far from 'impartial', a condition that Sir Jennings recorded and analysed in considerable detail in his monumental study of the British Parliament.

In fact, not given to respect for the Constitution, let alone its convention, the Narendra Modi-led BJP asserted that it would ensure that Parliament functioned on its bidding, even by exhibiting partisanship. Thus, the age-old convention of the Westminster model being followed since the Constitution was inaugurated in both the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assemblies — of the senior-most member of the House being appointed as the pro tem Speaker for administering the oath to the newly elected MPs — was given the go-by, because then the role would have been assigned to a Congress MP. Hence, the second senior-most member, who belonged to the BJP, was given the chair. Obviously, any Opposition suggestion for a consensus was unlikely to be expected in the political assertion that 'acceptance of our choice is consensus'. This happened despite the fact that the people snatched away the Modi-led BJP's absolute majority in the Lok Sabha this year, reducing it from 303 seats to 240. The pre-poll National Democratic Alliance (NDA) became a saving grace, enabling it to form the government with 293 MPs. The return of the Congress with 99 seats and the broad-based Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) with 234 seats completed the story of juxtaposing the treasury benches with an Opposition that can assert itself. The office of the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) brought Rahul Gandhi in the lead. However, despite first proposing a contest for the speakership, INDIA supported the NDA's (read Modi's) choice, previous Speaker Om Birla, expecting the assigning of the deputy speakership to the Opposition, a Westminster convention that India has mostly followed. But in order to deny the Opposition this privilege, the position has been kept vacant for a decade. The continuing silence on this is ominous. The question of the presiding officer of the Rajya Sabha is settled when a regime selects the Vice-President of India, who is the ex-officio chairman of the House. Article 89, which mandates this, also obligates the election of the deputy chairman from among the members. There is neither a constitutional provision nor a convention to offer this position to the Opposition. However, there have been several occasions since 1952 when an Opposition MP has occupied this post.

The conventions in the UK clearly suggest that "once a Speaker is appointed, he divests himself of his party character and is prevented from advocating the claims of his constituents."

Conditioned in the Westminster system, India began with a healthy practice when Vithalbhai Patel severed his ties with the Swaraj Party and declined to walk out with the legislators in 1926. He followed the tradition in 1927 also. On his election as the Speaker of the Central Assembly in 1946, GV Mavalankar said, "Though a Congressman... it would be my duty to be impartial and remain above all considerations of party..." In March 1956, MA Ayyangar resigned from the Congress on assuming the office of the Speaker. Sardar Hukum Singh (Lok Sabha Speaker from 1962 to 1967) acquitted himself well. However, he observed that the dependence of an incumbent or aspirant on the majority party for election to the chair made her/him vulnerable to the dictates of the ruling parties.

It's time to rethink education

The existing system is giving birth to an unhappy generation with aggression, fear and psychic stress

I often ask myself why I continue to write on education. Possibly, it is difficult for me to give my consent to what society regards as 'education'. If you go by the dominant common sense of the age, education primarily means three things: (a) it is some sort of 'training' or a mode of 'skill learning' — the skills the market demands or the skills that fetch one a job; (b) education is a kind of graded learning one passes through, or it is a way through which one becomes an 'expert' in some sort of specialised academic knowledge; and (c) it transforms one into a 'resource' that can be used for economic/militaristic/technological purposes. But then, I am not comfortable with this narrow/utilitarian/technical approach to education. The reason is that if education fails to activate our humanistic/ethical/aesthetic/spiritual sensibilities, it remains faulty and dangerous, even if it produces the 'skilled' labour force for enhancing the 'growth rate' of the nation, trains 'resource persons' for strengthening the techno-militaristic state and manufactures thousands of research papers in order to hard sell 'top-ranking' colleges/universities. Imagine the damage we cause to the mental health of children when we deprive them of the opportunity to develop an aesthetically enriched self. Let me be harsh. I have no hesitation in saying that this kind of instrumental education has proved to be completely incapable of imagining and striving for a new world free from militarism, the psychology of war, environmental disaster, xenophobic nationalism, religious fundamentalism and utter commodification of life. These days, we have an abundance of experts and specialists without a conscience, technology without soul, market without ethics and human 'resources' devoid of inner richness and higher ideals. In a way, the prevalent practice of education transforms a young learner into a reckless warrior; it is giving birth to an unhappy generation with aggression, chronic restlessness, fear, psychic stress and spiritual dumbness. Yes, it is this anguish that arouses my critique. I critique the hollowness of standardised tests like NEET, JEE, NET and CUET — tests that deprive our students of the joy of deep/thoughtful/reflexive/relaxed learning. I debunk the phenomenon called Kota, a town in Rajasthan

which is the embodiment of the life-killing coaching factory or machine that robs teenagers of their wonder years and transforms them into robotic 'exam warriors' who know only one thing — how to solve a physics or mathematics riddle quickly, instantly. I loathe the corporatisation of higher education or the vulgar act of measuring the worth of education through the mathematics of a 'salary package'. And yes, I am worried about the growing devaluation of liberal arts and humanities. In this context, let me recall some of the forgotten ideals of education. For instance, sensitivity, Jiddu Krishnamurti repeatedly emphasised, is the



highest form of intelligence — sensitivity to life or sensitivity to nature. Krishnamurti used to urge young students to watch the amazing sunset with absolute mindfulness and meditiveness. It is not idle daydreaming; it is not a waste of time; it is not a temporary relief from physics and mathematics. Instead, it is about becoming alert, developing awakened intelligence and nurturing a self that relates compassionately to the world. In a way, this aesthetic/spiritual dimension of education can also be seen in Rabindranath Tagore's critique of regimented/oppressive school culture; and his plea for the development of artistic/aesthetic sensibilities of the young learner. Think of Devi Prasad — a great artist and a disciple of Gandhi and Tagore. His insightful book Art: The Basis of Education reminds us of the necessity of cultivating the innate creativity of the child. Imagine the intensity of the damage we cause to the mental health of our children when we deprive them of the

opportunity to develop this aesthetically enriched relational self. They grow up with fear, anxiety and hyper-competitiveness.

I often draw inspiration from American feminist scholar bell hooks. Till the time she was alive, she continually inspired her students with a beautiful blend of critical pedagogy and ethic of care. Her pedagogic conversations with the likes of Paulo Freire, Erich Fromm and Thich Nhat Hanh gave her the strength to interrogate racism, patriarchy and all sorts of domination. And education, she demonstrated through her teaching and writing, should cultivate the capacity to love and heal the world tormented by all sorts of violence. But then, think of our collective decay, our fall. As parents and teachers, we are advising this generation only to think of their careers — their salary packages. We are asking them to run like mad horses and not to think of others — their pain, trauma and suffering. What we regard as education these days seems to be only reproducing the ideology of a violent/hierarchical/exploitative society.

And finally, I recall distinguished political theorist and philosopher Martha Nussbaum's reminder: "Not everything is for profit; democracy needs humanities." We see the primacy of techno-science and economics in our colleges/universities, and the resultant

devaluation of liberal arts and humanities. As Nussbaum argues, it is like thinking that the primary goal of education is to teach students to be economically productive rather than to think critically and become knowledgeable, productive and empathetic individuals. And this sort of one-sided focus on 'profitable skills', says Nussbaum, is eroding our ability to criticise authority and reducing our sympathy with the marginalised. Looking beyond the act of reducing education to a tool of the gross national product, Nussbaum wants to reconnect education to the humanities in order to encourage students to be true democratic citizens.

It is indeed high time we began to rethink education. If education is not saved from the virus of market fundamentalism, technocratic/instrumental reasoning and the existentially destabilising rat race, we will cause severe damage to the mental health of the new generation. We will not be forgiven for this crime.

Kathua ambush

India needs to review military, diplomatic options

THE killing of five Army personnel, including a Junior Commissioned Officer, in an ambush by heavily armed terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district has compounded the internal security challenge for the Narendra Modi government, barely a month after it assumed office for the third time. This is the latest in a series of terror incidents, beginning with the attack on a bus carrying pilgrims in Reasi district on June 9 — the very day the new government was installed in Delhi.

The situation is deteriorating despite PM Modi's go-ahead to officials to deploy the 'full spectrum of counter-terror capabilities'. Pakistan-based terror groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba have stepped up activities in the Jammu region through their local agents and recruits. The government, which is gearing up to conduct the long-delayed Assembly elections in J&K by September, has its work cut out. Defence Secretary



Giridhar Aramane has vowed that the sacrifice of soldiers will not go unavenged and India will defeat the evil forces behind the Kathua attack. The onus is on India to review its military and diplomatic options. The naming and shaming of Pakistan on international forums has not been of much help as Islamabad has continued to play the victim card, claiming that it is more sinned against than sinning as far as terrorism is concerned. Dependent on its allies for the first time in a decade, the ruling BJP may find it tough to adopt a typically muscular approach. During the Modi government's first term, cross-border 'surgical strikes' were carried out in the wake of the September 2016 Uri terror attack, while the Balakot airstrikes were conducted in retaliation for the February 2019 Pulwama suicide bombing. It's an 'enough is enough' scenario all over again, but Modi 3.0 might have to restrict itself to efforts to restore peace in J&K without crossing any red line.

China's mediation in Gaza war beset with pitfalls

China has been busy meeting Hamas and Fatah leaders and hosting them in Beijing to iron out their sharp differences.

AFTER the Antony Blinken-Wang Yi meeting in Washington DC, the BBC reported on November 1, 2023, that "the US would work with China on trying to find a resolution" of the Gaza war. This point is now relevant as Israel has run aground in the Gaza quicksand, with even the Israel Defence Forces questioning Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's strategic aims. Simultaneously, the US-led Western bloc has failed to exercise any check on the right-wing-dominated Israeli government even after over 37,000 Palestinians have been killed, with the possibility of the conflict escalating to a regional war with Iran and with the Netanyahu government appearing to be nonchalant even after inflaming its Opposition.

Will China, which managed an 'impossible' rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2023, leaving the US "on the sidelines during a moment of significant change", as the New York Times said in March last year, be able to bring peace in Palestine? Does Beijing have the adeptness to do that impossible task? Will its intervention risk ruining its reputation by getting involved in the quagmire? Before the Iran-Saudi deal, there was a mistaken impression that China was hesitant to intervene in other nations' knotty problems. This is not correct. The Mercer Institute of China Studies had said in 2018 that, by 2017, China was mediating in nine Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) countries' conflicts, compared to only three in 2012, when Xi Jinping took over as the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. This was confirmed last month by the Stimson Centre, which added North Korea, where the Chinese aim is to ensure that the US "does not determine the future of the Peninsula bilaterally with North Korea."

A 2019 'Cairn International' assessment by Guy Burton, visiting fellow at the London School of Economics (Middle East Centre), identified three phases of the Chinese policy towards the Israel-Palestine dispute: the first was "ideological and revolutionary" during the

Mao Zedong era, favouring the Arab world, and rebuffing Israel's approaches for relations; the second, a 'pragmatic' policy under Deng Xiaoping, using foreign policy for economic, technical and agricultural development by establishing diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992; and the third, from the late 1990s, seeking good relations with both parties in the conflict.

According to the Emirates Policy Centre (EPC), the third phase coincided with the rise of the Gulf states as a critical energy source since China transformed from being an exporter to an oil importer in 1993. China's regional policy also focused on enhancing economic and trade ties with Israel and discouraging Palestinians from 'internationalising' their cause. In 2017, China and Israel signed an 'Innovative Comprehensive Partnership' agreement as China became Israel's largest trading partner. During this period, China invested \$4 billion in Israel, increasing bilateral trade to \$24 billion from \$11 billion in 2012. The marker of the fourth phase, in my view, was November 21, 2023, when President Xi Jinping categorically told an online BRICS Summit that China supported "the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people and the establishment of an independent state" and called for a ceasefire. Xi also suggested an international conference "to build international consensus for peace and to work for a comprehensive, just and sustained solution to the question of Palestine as soon as possible." To this, Israel expressed its 'deep disappointment'. China also spoke during the International Court of Justice proceedings and said in February that "in pursuit of the right to self-determination, the Palestinian people's use of force to resist foreign oppression and to complete the establishment of an independent state is an inalienable



right well founded in international law." This was almost like Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan's statement on October 25, 2023, that Hamas was "a liberation group, mujahideen waging a battle to protect its lands and people." Even before this, there were some signs of China realigning its West Asia policy to assume leadership of the Global South. China had condemned Israel's 2014 war on Gaza and supported the United Nations' investigation into allegations of 'crimes against humanity', even as it invested \$4 billion in Israel.

The reason why China lost interest in Israel could be attributed to Israel's appointment, under US pressure during the Donald Trump era, of an 'Advisory Committee for Examining National Security Aspects in Foreign Investments' in 2019 to investigate Chinese investments. This was confirmed during President Joe

Biden's Israel visit in July 2022, with the establishment of a 'strategic dialogue' between both countries during Prime Minister Yair Lapid's tenure. According to the EPC, another reason for Xi's strong stand on Gaza was PM Benjamin Netanyahu's 'enthusiastic' support to the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, declared during the September 2023 G20 Summit in New Delhi and showcased as one of the projects of the American Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment to compete with the BRI. In these circumstances, Israel is unlikely to agree to China's mediation as long as the Netanyahu government is in power. Meanwhile, China has been busy meeting Hamas and Fatah leaders and hosting them in Beijing to iron out their sharp differences. Lin Qin, professor of politics at the Guangdong Institute in China, told Al-

Araby Al-Jadeed on May 8 that intra-Palestinian differences must be resolved to present a united front during the proposed international peace conference. This is because the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority had, under US pressure, agreed to adopt specific reforms in preparation for a post-war Gaza administration. On April 30, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian announced that both Fatah and Hamas leaders had met in Beijing to have an "in-depth and candid dialogue". This was a follow-up of a meeting in Moscow on March 1. The second was to have been held by June-end. However, The Foundation for the Defence of Democracies, based in Washington DC, described by Prof John Mearsheimer as an 'Israel lobby', reported that Fatah and Hamas leaders blamed each other on June 24 for the indefinite postponement of the June reconciliation talks in Beijing.

Dunkis and donkey routes: Arrest of 108 Indian immigration agents reveals all

The IGI Airport Police has tried to strike at the root of the illegal immigration network by arresting 108 agents in the six months of 2024. The crackdown goes beyond just arresting passengers, and reveals secrets of the donkey route.

New Delhi: When an elderly Sikh man standing in the queue at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport spoke, the CISF officials smelt something was not adding up. A bespectacled Guru Sevak Singh with his white beard didn't sound like a 67-year-old person. That's what led to his arrest and the revelation of how he was about to fly to Canada and take the donkey route to the US. Earlier, the story would have ended with the arrest of 24-year-old Guru Sevak Singh, who was pretending to be 67 and was flying out. However, Delhi Police has decided to strike at the root of the problem. Investigations now don't end with just the arrest of passengers but getting to the immigration agents who are an intrinsic part of the illegal network that spans across several countries around the world. In the last six months, IGI Airport Police has arrested 108 fraudulent immigration agents, according to Delhi Police data, reports news agency ANI. The number of arrests in six

months is double the 51 made in the same period in 2023.

Arrests have been made nationwide, including in Punjab, Gujarat, Haryana, Maharashtra, and West Bengal," Delhi Police said. The crackdown has also revealed how the visa-on-arrival facility extended by several countries to Indians is exploited by these agents to send dunkis on the donkey route.

HOW VISA-ON-ARRIVAL SCHEME IS ABUSED?

Donkey routes are used for illegal immigration to Asian countries as well. In many cases, the visa-on-arrival scheme is abused for this. Agents exploit passengers by sending them to countries offering visa-on-arrival to Indian nationals, and organising routes that facilitate illegal border crossings into destination countries. Eleven immigration agents involved in this were arrested in 2024.

Delhi Police have even returned to earlier cases where only passengers were arrested to nail the immigration agents involved.



Investigating officers were told to track down and prosecute these agents. In 2024, 51 immigration agents from the previous cases, where only passengers who would have been sent on donkey routes were arrested, have been apprehended. "Several Proclaimed Offenders (POs), mostly from cases over a decade old, have been apprehended this year, demonstrating the police's commitment to resolving long-standing cases," according to the police statement.

The IGI Airport Police probe has revealed how methods like affixing fake departure stamps,

fake visas, forged passports and work permits, and fake identities are created for illegal immigration. In fake-visa cases, immigration agents created and provided counterfeit visas to passengers that resembled genuine visas. In the six months of 2024, 24 agents have been nabbed for trying to send passengers with similar facial features on someone else's passport. Agents send passengers with fake Schengen visas to easily accessible European countries like Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, from where they are put on the donkey route through Central American countries to reach the US border. "The journey along the donkey route began from Ecuador. We travelled all day, sometimes by bus, sometimes by car," Jitendra, who was deported back to India from the US after spending 11 months at a detention camp, told IndiaToday.in, earlier. He recounted how he, along with other dunkis, crossed choppy seas in small, rickety boats.

Businessman, out on bail in murder attempt case, stabbed to death in Delhi

New Delhi: A businessman, who was recently released from prison after getting bail in an attempt to murder case, was stabbed to death by 3-4 boys in the Bhajanpura area of north-east Delhi. Sumit, who had a tour and travel business and was also a gym instructor, sustained 17 stab wounds on his face, neck, chest and abdomen. After the attack, Sumit was rushed to JPC Hospital, where doctors declared him brought dead.

The incident happened on Wednesday at 11.30 pm when Sumit was sitting outside his house in Gamri Extension. Eyewitnesses said Sumit had a verbal spat with 3-4 boys following which he was attacked with a knife. The boys continued stabbing Sumit even as he lay motionless on the ground.

Sumit is married and has a three-year-old son. He was convicted in an attempt to murder case and was recently granted bail by the Delhi High Court. Police said the CCTV footage of the area was being scanned and efforts are on to apprehend the culprits. Further investigation is in progress.

In another incident in Delhi, a 23-year-old man was thrashed to death by a woman's brother for allegedly misbehaving with her near Jhuggi Dera Gazi Khan area. The accused was arrested when he was trying to flee the city, police said.

UGC-NET row: Man allegedly shared 'fake' screenshots of question paper online

New Delhi: The CBI team, which is probing the alleged leak of the UGC-NET examination paper, has found that a young man allegedly circulated a "doctored" screenshot of the UGC-NET paper on Telegram, which led to the cancellation of the exam, officials said. The CBI is likely to file a charge sheet against the man. On June 19, the National Testing Agency (NTA) cancelled the UGC-NET exam for eligibility to become Assistant Professors, a day after it was conducted, saying the "integrity of the examination may have been compromised." At 1,205 exam centres in 317 cities across the country, over 11 lakh candidates had appeared for the test. The CBI team, however, found that the screenshot of the "leaked" question paper for the June 18 exam was "doctored" by a school student and did not find any large-scale conspiracy.

The officials said that the student changed the date of the



screenshot to June 17 to create the impression that he had prior access to the question paper and could arrange subject-specific papers which were to be held later. Forensic experts examined the screenshot and found it was doctored. It is likely that the central probe agency will limit the chargesheet to offences of attempt to cheat or cheating, news agency PTI reported. According to officials, the CBI has informally conveyed its findings to the government.

The Union Education Ministry, while cancelling the examination, had said they were alerted by the Union Home Ministry's National Cyber Crime Threat Analytics Unit, highlighting that their primary inputs indicated that the "integrity of the aforesaid examination may have been compromised."

This happened amid the massive row over the discrepancies in the alleged paper leak and discrepancies of the NEET-UG examination. The investigation was handed over to the CBI. The exam was cancelled based on inputs received by the University Grants Commission from the IAC that the paper was available on the darknet and was allegedly being sold for Rs 5-6 lakh on messaging platforms, sources said.

Supreme Court Judge On How Advanced Tech Can Prevent White-Collar Crimes

New Delhi: White-collar crimes present a formidable challenge to judicial and the economic systems, requiring a "multipronged and nuanced" approach, Supreme Court judge Justice Hima Kohli said on Wednesday. The top court judge batted for using advanced technologies to prevent such crimes. "Leveraging advanced technologies such as data analytics, artificial intelligence, and blockchain will enhance the ability to detect, investigate, and prosecute white-collar crimes, she said.

Justice Kohli was speaking on the topic of 'Second Discourse on Judicial Perspective on Economic Offences and Corporate Malfeasance' at an event organised by the Centre for Discourses in Criminal and Constitutional Jurisprudence. "White-collar crime presents a formidable challenge to

India's judicial and economic systems, necessitating a nuanced and comprehensive response. Fighting



against this crime requires a multipronged approach.

"The judiciary, supported by robust legislative frameworks and dedicated institutional mechanisms, is pivotal in addressing these offences. Establishing

specialised courts assisted by experts in financial and economic crimes is essential for timely and effective adjudication," she said. Differentiating between traditional and white-collar crimes, she said traditional offences often stem from emotions like anger or revenge, and if cold-blooded, are meticulously planned and executed, sometimes with the help of those with previous criminal history. "Conversely, white-collar crimes are driven by greed and are characterised by careful planning and execution by individuals with professional assistance. While white-collar crimes inflict reputational or financial damage and lead to substantial financial penalties when detected, traditional crimes result in physical harm and emotional damage," Justice Kohli said.

"He's Not Heavy, He's My Brother": Ex Soldier Praises Op To Retrieve 3 Bodies

New Delhi: A retired army officer has explained why it took over nine months to retrieve the bodies of three soldiers who died after their mountaineering expedition team was struck by an avalanche in October 2023 at a height of over 18,300 feet in Ladakh.

Brigadier Hardeep Singh Sohi (retired) in a post on X thanked and congratulated soldiers of the Gulmarg-based High-Altitude Warfare School (HAWS) for retrieving the bodies. The bodies of Havildar Rohit Kumar, Havildar Thakur Bahadur Ale, and Naik Gautam Rajbanshi were trapped deep within a crevasse and lay buried under thick layers of ice and large volumes of snow for the last nine months. "He is not heavy, he is my brother. A big salute to HAWS Gulmarg for retrieving the bodies of three Havildar instructors who were

buried in snow in October last year while undertaking an expedition to Mount Kun," Brigadier Sohi said in the post. On queries by some people on social media seeking to know why the bodies lay buried in snow for the last nine months, the retired army officer said the team this time went with proper tools and even then took nine days of digging to recover the bodies. "Some people are questioning as to why the bodies of the three soldiers [were] buried for over nine months and efforts were not made to retrieve them earlier. To set the record straight, when four soldiers were lost on October 8, 2023, after six days of digging only one body was recovered," Brigadier Sohi said. "This time the team went with chainsaws and GREF grade shovels using RECCO radar and after nine days digging successfully

recovered [the] balance three. The bodies were buried under a 70-foot crevasse covered with snow," he said. The body of Lance Naik Stanzin Targais was recovered soon after the incident last year. In July 2023, a 38-member expedition team from the HAWS had set out to conquer Mount Kun in Ladakh. The expedition started on October 1 and the team hoped to reach the peak by October 13.

The treacherous terrain and unpredictable weather in this glaciated region posed immense challenges. While fixing ropes on a snow wall, the team was struck by a sudden avalanche on October 8 at a height of over 18,300 feet, trapping four members, news agency PTI reported. In the army's spirit of "leave no man behind", a team of mountaineers of the HAWS then undertook

Isro spy case: Cop framed ex-scientist after Maldivian woman rejected advances

A special branch officer of Kerala Police allegedly created an espionage case against former Isro scientist Nambi Narayanan to justify his illegal detention of a Maldivian woman in the country after she spurned his advances, the CBI said in its chargesheet.

New Delhi: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said the 1994 Isro espionage case, in which former space scientist Nambi Narayanan was falsely implicated, was allegedly created by a then special branch officer of Kerala

Police to justify his illegal detention of a Maldivian woman in India after she rejected his advances. The central agency made the allegation in its chargesheet filed against former police officers for allegedly implicating Narayanan and five others, including two Maldivian women, in the espionage case. In the chargesheet filed in the last week of June but became public on Wednesday, the CBI said that the then special branch officer S Vijayan, who retired as an SP, seized travel documents and air tickets of Mariyam Rasheeda, a Maldivian national, preventing her from leaving the country, as she rejected his advances.

Vijayan found out that Rasheeda was in contact with an Isro scientist, D Shashikumar, and surveillance was initiated on Rasheeda and her Maldivian friend Fauzia Hasan, the CBI chargesheet claimed. The police had also informed the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIB) about the women, but the IB officers who examined the foreign nationals could not



find anything suspicious, the CBI said. Rasheeda was then arrested under the Foreigners Act for overstaying in the country without a valid visa, the agency said. When Rasheeda's custody under the Foreigners Act was about to expire, based on a false report submitted by Vijayan, she and Hasan were implicated in a case under the Official Secrets Act and their custody was handed over to a Special Investigation Team (SIT) formed to probe the espionage issue, the CBI said in its chargesheet. Subsequently, the SIT arrested four Isro scientists including Narayanan, it said. In the chargesheet, the CBI has said that its probe revealed that the espionage case was an "abuse of law

right from the initial stage" when Maldivian national Mariyam Rasheeda was detained illegally and framed for overstaying in the country for allegedly spurning the advances of Vijayan.

"To sustain the initial wrongs, another case of serious nature was launched with false interrogation reports against the victims (including Narayanan and others)," the agency has said in its final report recommending the prosecution of former DGPs RB Sreekumar and Siby Mathews, former SPs S Vijayan and KK Joshua and ex-intelligence officer PS Jayaprakash. The agency has charged them under various provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), including sections 120B (criminal conspiracy), 342 (wrongful confinement), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 330 (voluntarily causing hurt to extract a confession), 167 (public servant framing an incorrect document), 193 (giving false evidence) and 354 (outrage modesty of a woman).



NEWS BOX

UK cops locate suspect in triple murder of radio commentator's family

London. British police said on Wednesday (local time) they had located a man wanted in connection with the murder of three women, the wife and two daughters of a BBC horse racing commentator, in an incident believed to have involved a crossbow. Officers had discovered the three victims, aged 25, 28 and 61, with serious injuries at the house in Bushey, a leafy town 20 miles (around 32 km) northwest of London, on Tuesday evening. They had died at the scene a short time later. The BBC said that the women were Carol Hunt, the wife of its commentator John Hunt, and two of their daughters. A huge search involving armed officers was launched for suspect, Kyle Clifford, with police warning the public not to approach the 26-year-old. "Following extensive enquiries, the suspect has been located and nobody else is being sought in connection with the investigation at this time," Detective Inspector Justine Jenkins from the local Major



Crime Unit said in a statement. Police said Clifford had been located in north London and was receiving medical treatment after being found with injuries. No shots were fired by police, the statement added. The victims were yet to be formally identified but police said they believed Clifford was known to the three women. Earlier on Wednesday, Chief Superintendent Jon Simpson called the incident "horrific", telling reporters a crossbow and possibly other weapons were believed to have been involved. Friends and colleagues of Hunt expressed their shock at the news. "Impossible to comprehend the pain. Just know we are all here for you John. We love you pal - racing loves you," ITV horse racing commentator Matt Chapman said on X.

US coast guard patrol spots Chinese naval ships off Alaska island

ALASKA. A U.S. Coast Guard cutter on routine patrol in the Bering Sea came across several Chinese military ships in international waters but within the U.S. exclusive economic zone, officials said Wednesday. The crew detected three vessels approximately 124 miles (200 kilometers) north of the Amchitka Pass in the Aleutian Islands, the Coast Guard said in a statement. A short time later, a helicopter aircrew from Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak spotted a fourth ship approximately 84 miles (135 kilometers) north of the Amukta Pass. All four of the People's Republic of China vessels were "transiting in international waters but still inside the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone. The Chinese naval presence operated by international rules and norms," said Rear Adm. Megan Dean, Seventeenth Coast Guard District commander. We met presence with presence to ensure there were no disruptions to U.S. interests in the maritime environment around Alaska," which extends 200 nautical miles (370 kilometers) from the U.S. shoreline, the statement said. U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Kimball is a 418-foot (127-meter) ship based in Honolulu. This wasn't the first time Chinese naval ships have sailed near Alaska waters. In September 2022, Kimball spotted guided missile cruiser from China in the Bering Sea. And in Sept. 2021, Coast Guard cutters in the Bering Sea and North Pacific Ocean encountered Chinese ships, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) off the Aleutian Islands. The U.S. military routinely conducts what it calls freedom of navigation operations in disputed waters in Asia that China claims as its own, deploying Navy ships to sail through waterways such as the South China Sea. The U.S. says freedom of navigation in the waters is in America's national interest.

Elon Musk Defeats Ex-Twitter Staff Seeking \$500 Million In Severance Package

Washington. Elon Musk won dismissal of a lawsuit claiming he refused to pay at least \$500 million of severance to thousands of Twitter employees he fired in mass layoffs after buying the social media company now known as X. U.S. District Judge Trina Thompson in San Francisco ruled on Tuesday that the federal Employee Retirement Income Security Act governing benefit plans did not cover the former employees' claims, and therefore she lacked jurisdiction. The case is one of many accusing Musk of reneging on promises to former Twitter employees, including former Chief Executive Parag Agrawal, and vendors after buying the company for \$44 billion in October 2022.

Musk also runs the electric car company Tesla and is the world's richest person, according to Forbes magazine. An outside spokeswoman for Sanford Heisler Sharp, which represents the former employees, said the law firm was disappointed and considering its legal options. Lawyers for Musk and X did not immediately respond to requests for comment. According to the complaint, Twitter's severance plan called for employees who stayed on after the buyout to receive two or six months of pay, plus one week of pay for each year of employment, if they were laid off. The plaintiffs Courtney McMillian, who oversaw Twitter's compensation and benefits, and Ronald Cooper, an operations manager, said Twitter instead offered fired employees just one month of pay as severance, with no benefits. Thompson said ERISA did not apply to Twitter's post-buyout plan because there was no "ongoing administrative scheme" where the company reviewed claims case-by-case, or offered benefits such as continued health insurance and out placement services. "There were only cash payments promised," she wrote. The judge said employees fired in Twitter's 2022 and 2023 mass layoffs can try amending their complaint, but only for claims not governed by ERISA.

US to resume shipping 500-pound bombs to Israel for Gaza war: Official

Washington DC President Joe Biden's administration will resume shipping 500-pound bombs to Israel but will continue to hold back on supplying 2,000-pound bombs over concerns about their use in densely populated Gaza, a US official said on Wednesday (local time). The US in May paused a shipment of 2,000-pound and 500-pound bombs due to concern over the impact they could have in Gaza during the war that began with Hamas's deadly October 7, 2023 cross-border raid. The administration's particular concern had been the use of such large bombs in Rafah, where over one million Palestinians had taken refuge. We have been clear that our concern has been about the end-use of the 2,000-lb bombs, particularly for Israel's Rafah campaign, which they have announced they are concluding," a US official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity. One 2,000-pound bomb can rip through thick concrete and metal, creating a wide blast radius.

The US official said the 500-pound bombs were put together in the same shipment with the larger ones that were paused and therefore got held up. "Our main concern



had been and remains the potential use of 2,000 lb bombs in Rafah and elsewhere in Gaza. Because our concern was not about the 500 lb bombs, those are moving forward as part of the usual process," the official added. The US has notified Israel that it is releasing the 500-pound bombs but keeping the hold on the larger ones, a person familiar with the matter said.

In June, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed Washington was withholding weapons, and pleaded with US officials to remedy the situation. Biden's aides expressed disappointment and confusion over the Israeli leader's remarks. During his visit to Washington, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said there had been significant progress

on the issue of US munitions supply to Israel, adding "obstacles were removed and bottlenecks were addressed". Despite the pause on one shipment, Israel has continued to receive a steady flow of US weaponry. Reuters reported last month that between the start of the Gaza war last October and end-June, the US has transferred at least 14,000 of the MK-84 2,000-pound bombs, 6,500 500-pound bombs, 3,000 Hellfire precision-guided air-to-ground missiles, 1,000 bunker-buster bombs, 2,600 air-dropped small-diameter bombs, and other munitions. International scrutiny of Israel's military operations in Gaza has intensified as the Palestinian death toll from the war has exceeded 38,000, according to the Gaza health ministry, and has left the coastal enclave in ruins.

The latest bloodshed in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict began on October 7 when Palestinian Hamas terrorists attacked southern Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking 250 others hostage, according to Israeli tallies.

Biden's press conference will be key test for him. But he's no master of big

WASHINGTON. President Joe Biden has a fresh opportunity Thursday to try to prove to the American public that he's capable of serving another four years after his shocking debate flop threw the future of his presidency into doubt. But Biden is not known as a master of the big rhetorical moment and his recent cleanup efforts have proved inadequate. Biden, 81, will close out the NATO summit in Washington — an event meant to showcase his leadership on the world stage — with a rare solo press conference. His stamina and effectiveness are under the microscope like never before and he's struggling to quell the Democratic Party's panic about his chances this November. By many metrics, from job growth and major legislation to the expanded transatlantic alliance, Biden can point to successes during his tenure in office. But where he has sometimes failed — spectacularly, in the case of the debate — is at a defining part of the role that isn't in the official job description: Delivering inspiring oratory that commands the attention and respect of



the nation. Biden has tried to step up his performance since the debate but his follow-up interview on ABC last week was disappointing. Nothing he's tried seems to be stopping the bleeding, with more lawmakers calling for him to bow out in the face of concerns that he could hand the White House back to former President Donald Trump. Americans tend to regard their leaders less for what they do than how they make them feel, and Biden's debate disaster has shaken his party to its core. "The debate was a reminder that you can have as many policies as you want, but what the public sees and hears might matter more," said Julian Zelizer, the Princeton presidential historian.

Rhetoric is intertwined with the modern presidency, from Franklin D. Roosevelt's "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself" to Ronald Reagan's "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" It can inspire in the wake of tragedy, like George W. Bush's bullhorn speech on the smoky rubble at Ground Zero and help a war- and recession-weary country recover its sense of self, like Barack Obama's "Yes we can!" Even Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" cry echoed the temperament of the agitated nation. "People saw Trump as a reflection of a more turbulent, chaotic and angry country," Zelizer said. "Voters may see Biden's frailty as a symbol of weakness or its own kind of instability." Biden can give a good speech — his State of the Union address earlier this year helped quiet doubters about his viability as a candidate. But his strength as a president and politician has been how his humanity in intimate settings resonated with voters, and the power of his personal narrative and down-to-earth roots.

Democratic Senator publicly asks Biden to quit amid calls to end White House race

World Support for US President Joe Biden for the presidential race in the forthcoming elections has further dwindled after a Democratic Senator publicly asked the 81-year-old to step aside following his poor performance in the debate with former President and Republican pick Donald Trump on June 28. Peter Welch publicly asked Joe Biden to withdraw from the presidential race in an op-ed published in The Washington Post. He said Democrats cannot "unsee" the US President's "disastrous debate performance".

"We cannot ignore or dismiss the valid questions raised since that night. For the good of the country, I'm calling on President Biden to withdraw from the race," Welch wrote. The Senator further urged Joe Biden to reassess whether he is the best pick to beat former President and Republican candidate Donald Trump, adding that mounting concerns and talks about the 81-year-old's age, health and abilities have shifted focus from Trump's flaws.

"Trump is a felon. He is a pathological liar. He is a menace. And he is sure to be emboldened by his activist Supreme Court, which granted him near total immunity. But the national conversation is focused on President Biden's age and capacity. Only he can change it," Peter Welch wrote in the op-ed. Peter Welch is among a host of other Democratic heavyweights who have cast doubts on Biden's ability to run as President again. Former US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Hollywood actor George Clooney have joined the calls. In an interview with news channel MSNBC, Pelosi stressed that Joe Biden has a "decision" to make because "time is running short". "It's up to the president to decide if he is going to run. We're all encouraging him to make that decision because time is running short," she said.

Clooney, on the other hand, a Democrat who co-hosted a star-studded fundraiser for the US President last month, also dropped his backing for Joe Biden with a strong opinion piece in the New York Times, saying he "loved" him, but he cannot win the "fight against time". "None of us can. It's devastating to say it, but the Joe Biden I was with three weeks ago at the fundraiser was not the Joe 'big F-ing deal' Biden of 2010. He wasn't even the Joe Biden of 2020. He was the same man we all witnessed at the debate," the actor wrote in the op-ed. Despite increasing pressure to quit the presidential race, Joe Biden has stayed firm on his decision to stay in. On Monday, in a strong letter to his fellow Democrats, he reiterated that he wasn't going to back out, adding that he would not be seeking re-election if he wasn't sure he was "the best man to defeat Donald Trump in 2024". Furthermore, in a recent interview with George Stephanopoulos of ABC News.

Indian-American Astronaut Sunita Williams Confident That Boeing Starliner Will Bring NASA Crew Home

Washington D.C. Indian-American astronaut Sunita Williams said on Wednesday that she is confident Boeing's Starliner capsule will be able to bring her back home from the International Space Station, once the company and NASA resolve thruster issues that have extended their stay in space. Williams and veteran NASA astronaut Barry Wilmore were launched aboard Starliner from Florida on June 5 and docked the next day at the ISS, where they were initially scheduled to spend roughly eight days. Issues with Starliner's propulsion system have extended their mission indefinitely. Five of Starliner's 28 maneuvering thrusters failed during its trek to the station, a propellant valve did not properly close and there have been helium leaks. FAILURE NOT AN OPTION "I have a real good feeling in my heart

that this spacecraft will bring us home, no problem," Williams said during the test crew's first news conference since docking to the ISS more than a month ago. "I feel confident that if we had to, if there was a problem with the International Space Station, we can get in our spacecraft, and we can undock, talk to our team, and figure out the best way to come home," she added. Wilmore said that they are "absolutely confident," adding that "failure is not an option." "And that's why we're staying, because we're going to test it.

That's what we do," Wilmore said, acknowledging that an ongoing investigation by the U.S. space agency and Boeing involving thruster tests on Earth is key for their return. WHAT'S WRONG WITH THRUSTERS NASA and Boeing are investigating why some thrusters overheated and ceased

functioning during Starliner's journey to the ISS. Officials are conducting test firings of identical thrusters at New Mexico's White Sands Missile Range to replicate the issues. Simultaneously, an inquiry at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Alabama is underway to understand why a seal in the spacecraft's propulsion system allowed helium to leak.

The return of astronauts Wilmore and Williams to Earth aboard Starliner hinges on the outcome of these thruster tests. NASA's commercial crew chief Steve Stich has stressed that "we're taking our time" with the testing, acknowledging that the results of the New Mexico thruster tests "are not quite what we would have hoped for."

Starliner is cleared to remain docked to the ISS for 45 days, until July 21, with provisions to extend up to 90 days using backup systems.

Ukraine's Zelenskyy meets US Congressional leaders amid worries over Trump return

Washington DC, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy returned to the US Capitol on Wednesday (local time) to cement relationships with lawmakers who will vote on future US aid for his country, which could be in jeopardy if former President Donald Trump is re-elected. Zelenskyy, who is in Washington for this week's NATO summit, met with leaders of the Senate and House of Representatives and members of committees involved in defence, spending, diplomacy and national security. "It's an incredibly important mission and we've got to stand by Ukraine," Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Mark Warner told Reuters. The visit comes amid deep uncertainty about this year's US presidential election, which pits incumbent Democrat Joe Biden, a strong supporter of aid to Ukraine, against the Republican Trump, who has expressed scepticism about the amount of aid given.

Zelenskyy awarded the Order of Merit of Ukraine to Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell before having lunch with a group of Democratic and Republican senators. He later sat down with the Republican House of

Representatives speaker, Mike Johnson, telling reporters he had just invited Johnson to Kyiv. Johnson, a close Trump ally, said it would be difficult to find the time for a trip before the November election, when every seat in the House will be up for grabs and his fellow Republicans hope to preserve or expand their narrow majority. "We'd sure like to. The schedule's pretty tight through the election for us, so it's difficult to find the time to go, but we'd certainly like to," Johnson said. Biden's uneven June 27 debate performance against Trump and low public approval have raised fresh doubts about his mental fitness, and a handful of congressional Democrats have called for Biden to step aside. Reuters reported last month that two Trump advisers had presented the Republican candidate with a plan to end Russia's war in Ukraine - if he wins the November 5 election - that involves telling Kyiv it will only get more US weapons if it enters peace talks. Zelenskyy urged US political leaders in a speech on Tuesday not to wait for the outcome of the US election before moving forcefully to help Ukraine and called for fewer restrictions on the use of



US weaponry. JOHNSON CHANGED COURSE

In Congress, dozens of Trump's closest allies have voted repeatedly against assisting Zelenskyy's government, although Democrats and more internationally focused Republicans have worked together to approve the \$175 billion in aid for Ukraine Washington has approved since Russia invaded in February 2022. Most recently, Johnson changed course in April - months after

of the House, Senate and White House in November. However, Johnson said in his first major national security address this week that Russia poses a threat beyond Ukraine, and that American voters have expressed support for the aid as he travelled around the country.

"People understand that (Russian President Vladimir Putin) would not stop if he took Kyiv. He's a ruthless dictator in my view," Johnson said.

NEWS BOX

Uruguay star Darwin Nunez punches Colombia fans in ugly fight at Copa America

New Delhi . A fight broke out between Uruguay players and a section of hostile Colombia fans at the Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte on Thursday after the Copa America semi-final between the two teams. Liverpool star Darwin Nunez was among the ones who were seen punching fans in the stands during the ugly post-match scenes. Fans were seen hurling caps, cans, and punches at the Uruguay players, who were making their way back to the changing room after a disappointing loss in the last-eight match.

In a video shot by one of the fans at the Bank of America Stadium, Darwin Nunez can be seen getting irked by chants from Colombian fans before he enters the stands and throws punches at a few of them. Barcelona's Ronald Araujo and Atletico Madrid's Jose Maria Gimenez were also seen standing alongside Nunez when the fight broke out. Security officials and police officers rushed to calm the situation down



and escort the players away from the scene. A few players, including Nunez, returned to the field and met their families, who reportedly were abused by a section of fans. Uruguay captain Gimenez lashed out at the security situation in Charlotte, saying the players feared for the well-being of their families, pointing fingers at hostile behaviour from Colombia fans, who dominated the stands on Thursday.

OUR FAMILIES WERE SUFFERING'

"It's a total disaster. There wasn't a single police officer. They showed up half an hour later. A disaster. And we were there, standing up for ourselves, for our loved ones," Gimenez told the broadcasters after the match. "Our families are suffering because of some people who have a few drinks and don't know how to drink, who act like children. Hopefully, they'll take more precautions for the next game so this doesn't happen again, because this is a disaster," he added. Nunez, who looked shaken after the incident, was cooled by his Liverpool teammate Luis Diaz and veteran Luis Suarez. It was a disappointing evening for Nunez and Uruguay as they paid the price for not being clinical with their chances in the Copa America semi-final. Nunez missed three good opportunities to put Uruguay in the lead in the first half before Colombia took the lead in the 39th minute after Jefferson Lerma headed a corner into the net.

Copa America 2024: 10-man Colombia beat Uruguay to set up final vs Argentina

Colombia ended their 23-year-long wait for a major tournament final as they defeated Uruguay 1-0 in an entertaining semi-final of Copa America 2024 at the Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte, North Carolina, United States on Thursday, July 11. Colombia will meet Lionel Messi's Argentina in the final of the continental tournament in Miami on Sunday.

The Colombian players were left in tears as they celebrated the sensational victory in front of thousands of fans, who traveled to Charlotte and filled the stands. James Rodriguez's emotional celebration was reflective of the mood in the camp as Colombia worked their way through to their first Copa America final since 2001. Colombia will defend their 28-game



unbeaten run -- the longest in their football history -- when they meet defending champions and pre-tournament favourites Argentina in the big final. Colombia managed to hold on to the 1-0 lead until the final whistle despite being reduced to 10 men for 45 minutes of the semi-final. Jefferson Lerma put them ahead in the first half with a well-timed header from a corner and the Colombian backline did the rest of the job, making sure Uruguay were constantly under pressure. The match was physical as players kept pushing and shoving each other, resulting in seven yellow cards and a red. Uruguay paid the price for being wasteful upfront. Liverpool star Darwin Nunez missed several chances in the first half and Colombia made them pay. It could have easily been game over for Colombia when they were reduced to 10 men just before half-time. Daniel Muñoz lost his cool and got himself sent off, with the right back receiving a second yellow card for elbowing Manuel Ugarte in the chest when play was stopped. However, Colombia showed incredible grit and determination to hold off Uruguay, who dominated possession in the second half.

'VAR breaking football': Koeman angry after Netherlands lose Euro semi-final

← **Netherlands boss Ronald Koeman heavily criticised the use of video assistant referees (VAR) for "breaking football" following a contentious penalty decision that led to England's comeback victory during the Euro 2024 semi-final.**

New Delhi . Netherlands manager Ronald Koeman claimed that VAR is "destroying" football after England were given a controversial first-half penalty that helped them secure a 2-1 victory over the Netherlands in the Euro 2024 semi-final. The Netherlands had taken an early lead through Xavi Simons' powerful strike. However, England were handed a lifeline when Harry Kane was caught on the follow-through by Denzel Dumfries after the England captain had already shot over



the bar. Initially, no penalty was awarded, but referee Felix Zwayer pointed to the spot after being advised to review the incident by VAR. Kane converted the spot-kick, and substitute Ollie Watkins netted a 90th-minute winner, securing England's place in Sunday's final against Spain.

"In my opinion, it should not have been a penalty," Koeman stated. "He kicked the ball and the boots touched. I think that we cannot play proper football, and this is due to VAR. It really breaks football." Despite

the loss, Koeman expressed more pride than hurt, feeling optimistic about the future. He acknowledged the heartbreak of losing a match where he felt his team performed better overall but praised his players' attacking mentality and resilience.

"I'm disappointed about the final result because it started well for us," Koeman said, referring to Xavi Simons' early goal. However, the Dutch struggled to maintain control in midfield against England's Jude Bellingham and Phil Foden before

regaining momentum late in the match. "The feeling was we were the better team overall in the last 20 minutes; we attacked more. And suddenly, there was that great goal," Koeman added, referring to Watkins' stoppage-time winner. "And I was all over... that's difficult to accept."

Koeman reiterated his disagreement with the penalty decision but acknowledged that his team had opportunities to turn the game in their favor. "As a former defender myself what could he do in that position? He tried to block the ball... To penalize that is to tell him we cannot play proper football," he said. Despite the disappointment, Koeman remained proud of his players' efforts and believed the Dutch fans should be optimistic about the future. He is already looking forward to the 2026 World Cup confident in a promising mix of youth and experience within the team.

"I believe our team is capable of more, and there are players who will join us in the future. Some were not able to play because they were not fit," Koeman said. "We have worked well together, which was important and gave us a path to follow. We have to improve some aspects, but we were really close to the finals. Great mentality... team spirit... I wish I could see them playing in the final, but it's not possible."

India will be invincible in Test cricket if Hardik Pandya returns: Sunil Gavaskar

← **Former captain Sunil Gavaskar believes Hardik Pandya's return to Test cricket could make India unbeatable. Hardik has declared that he is not ready to play Tests since his body will not be able to withstand the demands of playing all three formats.**

New Delhi. Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar has advocated for the inclusion of all-rounder Hardik Pandya in Test cricket to make the Indian squad unbeatable in red-ball cricket. Gavaskar believes that Pandya's return to the Test squad could be instrumental in securing India's first World Test Championship (WTC) title and achieving significant victories in Australia. Pandya, who recently played a pivotal role in India's triumph in the 2024 T20 World Cup in June, has been away from Test cricket for nearly six years. Hardik has emerged as a



match-winner for India in both ODIs and T20Is, as evidenced by his recent efforts, which included 11 wickets and 144 runs in the T20 World Cup 2024. However, it is unclear whether the team management will heed Gavaskar's counsel and subject Pandya to the rigors of Test cricket.

India will play three Test matches against New Zealand in October, followed by a challenging four-Test series against Australia in late November. Gavaskar is convinced that Pandya's all-round capabilities could be the game-changer for India during these crucial fixtures. "I'm

hoping that, in these next two months, there will be some effort made to try and convince Hardik Pandya to come back to Test cricket," Gavaskar told RevSportz. "If he starts batting at no. 6 or 7, maybe bowling just ten overs a day, but there with his batting, this Indian team will be pretty much invincible in any country, on any kind of surface." Gavaskar's confidence in Pandya's potential impact is rooted

in his versatility and recent form. Despite having played only 11 Test matches in his career, Pandya has shown flashes of brilliance that suggest he could fill the vital role of a pace-bowling all-rounder. Hardik played 11 Tests for India, accumulating 523 runs and taking 17 wickets. He last played a Test for India in 2018 against England before being sidelined owing to injury and workload management difficulties. Hardik has declared that he is not ready to play Tests for India since his body will not be able to withstand the demands of playing all three formats.

Shahid Afridi slams PCB, questions captain Babar Azam backing despite failures

New Delhi. Former Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi questioned Pakistan Cricket Board's long rope to Babar Azam, saying the skipper has had enough opportunities without finding success. Afridi lashed out at the chopping and changing of players, support staff and selectors, urging the board to ensure consistency in the set-up. In an on-field interview on the sidelines of his stint in the World Championship of Legends in England, Shahid Afridi said not many former captains, including himself, were lucky to get an extended stay at the top. Afridi's comments came after the Pakistan Cricket Board sacked Wahab Riaz and Abdul Razaq from the selection committee after Pakistan's T20 World Cup flop show in the USA. "They should decide on the captain or the coach and then give them time. As far as Babar is concerned, I have captained, Younis (Khan), and Misbah have captained a lot. A captain never got so many chances. As soon as the World Cup is over, often the captain used to be the first one who got the



blame. Babar has led in two-three World Cups, two-three Asia Cups, T20 World Cups, he has had enough opportunities. If you want to keep Babar, in my opinion, a lot of things have been done. If you bring in someone new, give him chances," Shahid Afridi said. Babar Azam has been under pressure after Pakistan's group-stage exit in the T20 World Cup. The 2009 champions lost to arch-rivals India before which they were stunned by debutants USA in New York. WHY ONLY SACK TWO PEOPLE? The Pakistan Cricket Board chief Mohsin

Naqvi promised 'surgery' in response to the team's shambolic show in the T20 World Cup. Quite a few, including player Imad Wasim, said there could be wholesale changes to the team and the management group, but only two selectors have been sacked so far. "I got to know that only Abdul Razaq and Wahab Riaz have been sacked from the selection committee. I don't understand this surgery. If the selection committee is of 6-7 people then why only these two have been removed?" Afridi added. Babar, in fact, stepped down as captain in all three formats after Pakistan's poor show in the ODI World Cup in India last year. Shaheen Afridi was handed over the captain's armband in T20Is, but the left-arm fast bowler was sacked after just one series -- in New Zealand earlier this year. Babar was reinstated as captain when the new board, under Naqvi, took over. The move seems to have backfired as Babar was uninspiring in the T20 World Cup amid reports of rift in the dressing room.

India unlikely to travel to Pakistan, Champions Trophy in hybrid model: Sources

New Delhi. The Champions Trophy is likely to be held in a hybrid model in February-March because it is highly unlikely that India would travel to Pakistan to play the ODI matches. Pakistan have the hosting rights for the Champions Trophy, which will make its return to the cricket calendar for the first time since 2017. However, a couple of matches in the tournament are likely to be held in either the UAE or Sri Lanka, a source in the knowledge of development has told India Today. Pakistan Cricket Board submitted a draft schedule to the International Cricket Council last month. In the draft schedule, India's matches were scheduled in Lahore, including the big-ticket game between the arch-rivals for March 1. However, there is no official confirmation from the BCCI as far as travel is concerned at the moment. "It is highly unlikely that the team will travel to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy but a final will be taken by the government. So, in that case, a hybrid model is being worked out.

India may play their matches in UAE or Sri Lanka just like the Asia Cup. Although the ICC will also have their stand on it, as of now this is what we are thinking of. Let's see how things go in the future. As of now, it looks like it will be played in a hybrid model," the source said. The development comes days after PCB chair Mohsin Naqvi told the governing body's board of governors that efforts will be made to host the entire Champions Trophy Pakistan. Naqvi said that the issue would be brought up during an ICC Board Meeting in Colombo later in July.

India have not played bilateral cricket with Pakistan since the 2012-13 season. India have not traveled to Pakistan since 2008. Only last year, former Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur said that India would not resume bilateral cricket ties with Pakistan until the latter stops cross-border terrorism. Last year, Pakistan were forced to host the Asia



Cup in hybrid model after India refused to travel to the neighbouring country. India's matches were played in Sri Lanka and Rohit Sharma's men went on to win the tournament, which was played before the

ODI World Cup. Pakistan, however, traveled to India to play the ODI World Cup. Pakistan Cricket Board was adamant about hosting all the Asia Cup matches at their home venues, but the tournament was eventually held in hybrid model.

Recently, ICC head of events Chris Tetley met PCB chairman Naqvi in Islamabad after the world body's security team inspected the venues and other arrangements. The PCB allocated approximately 17 billion rupees for upgrading its stadiums in Karachi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi ahead of the 50-over marquee tournament, featuring 8 teams.

Pakistan won the Champions Trophy in 2017, beating India in the final. The defending champions will be keen on making a mark after the flop shows at the ODI and the T20 World Cups in 2023 and 2024, respectively.

Hina Khan's

Friend Priyank Sharma Says She'll 'Conquer Every Battle' Post Cancer Diagnosis: 'Darrti Nahi'

Actor Priyank Sharma, who participated in Bigg Boss season 11 with Hina Khan, has remained a close friend of hers.

Actor Priyank Sharma, who participated in Bigg Boss season 11 with Hina Khan, has remained a close friend of hers. After Hina recently revealed her stage 3 breast cancer diagnosis, Priyank expressed his concern and said he has been in touch with her, ever since he got to know about it through social media. "This is extremely sad what has happened. I



was speechless when I got to know. I didn't know how to react to this. I was shooting in another city toh mai kaafi months se mil nahi paaya tha Hina se, but I was still in touch with her. It doesn't matter mujhe kahan se pata chala, all that matters is that my friend gets well really soon. All that matters is that she should be fine," he told HT. Priyank, who worked with Khan on the music video Raanjhana, admires her resilience and calls her a fighter. He said, "My fingers are crossed. She will come back soon. I have seen Hina fighting the strongest battles in life right in front of me, and I am sure this one will also be one of the things where she comes out victorious."

She is the strongest person I know, woh darrti nahi hain kisi bhi cheez se. She can conquer every battle. I hope

she gets well very soon. Uske fans usko sherni bilkul sahi bolte hain kyunki woh hain. It has been 6-7 years since our Bigg Boss season happened, I have seen her going through a lot of things. She is going to come out of this as well," he added. On June 28, actor Hina Khan, known for her role as Akshara in "Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai," revealed she has stage 3 breast cancer. In a heartfelt statement, she reassured fans that she is coping well despite the diagnosis.



Kareena Kapoor Khan

Drops Shirtless Photo Of 'Daddy' Saif Ali Khan From Their Beach Holiday

Kareena Kapoor Khan has escaped for a vacation in Europe. She has been on a roll recently with back-to-back social media posts highlighting her Europe vacation with hubby Saif Ali Khan and kids Taimur and Jeh. On Wednesday, the actress took to her Instagram handle to share a shirtless photo of hubby Saif Ali Khan. Sharing the photo, she wrote, DADDY-O??Summer 2024."

Earlier last week, Kareena Kapoor took to her Instagram handle and shared a bunch of sun-kissed selfies from a sandy beach in London. The actress can be seen donning a blue outfit, along with black sunglasses. However, in one of the pictures, we can see a shirtless Saif Ali Khan, walking unbeknownst to Kareena's cellphone camera. Kareena humorously wrote the caption, "For me, it's the one with the photobomber."

While enjoying a sunny day on a London beach, the doting mother Kareena Kapoor Khan made sure to capture the precious moments. On her Instagram handle, she shared a picture of Taimur as he indulged in some playful moments. Dressed in orange shorts, the elder son of Kareena and Saif looked too cute in the snapshot. Along with the picture, she wrote, "Run baby Run," followed by a red heart and a rainbow emoji. Work-wise, Kareena Kapoor Khan's last appearance was in Crew. Directed by Rajesh A Krishnan, the film also featured Tabu and Kriti Sanon in the lead roles. The heist comedy received rave reviews from the audience for its engaging storyline. Next, the actress is geared up to be seen in Rohit Shetty's highly-anticipated, Singham Again. The star-studded cast includes Ajay Devgn, Deepika Padukone, Ranveer Singh, Tiger Shroff, Arjun Kapoor, and Jackie Shroff in pivotal roles. Earlier, the film was expected to hit the theatres on Independence Day. Now, it has been postponed to release on Diwali later this year.



Gurucharan Singh Says He Had No Plans Of Coming Back, Siddharth On Why South Actors Don't Endorse Alcohol



Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah fame Gurucharan Singh has opened up about his disappearance for the first time. In a recent interview, Singh revealed that he went on a spiritual journey in April this year and had no plans of coming back. The actor further clarified that his disappearance wasn't a publicity stunt and shared that he returned home only because 'god gave me a sign'.

Hindustani 2 marks the first-ever collaboration between Kamal Haasan and Siddharth. Siddharth exclusively shared with News18 Showsha how deeply he and his generation of actors have been inspired by legends such as Haasan and Rajinikanth. Talking about how a stand taken by them has been a lesson of sorts for everyone in the Tamil film industry, he told us, "Rajini sir and Kamal sir took a decision years ago that they still stand by. They don't go and endorse surrogate advertising for alcohol, smoking, paan masala and all that."

Vicky Kaushal opened up about fasting with Katrina Kaif during their first Karva Chauth after marriage. During an interaction on Film Companion, he said, "She is a Google queen. She asked Google when she'll be able to see the moon. Google said 8:30 pm. I told her Moon won't listen to Google, it will come when it wants to. Google can't predict the movement of clouds. That delay was there and she was like, 'It hasn't come.' I said it's not like I am calling it. It will come when it wants to. She was completely fine till that time that Google set, 8:30 pm, after that she was like now I am feeling hungry."

Ranveer Flaunts Moustache As He Arrives at Anant-Radhika's Mehndi; Deepika Padukone Avoids Paps Again?



Bollywood star Ranveer Singh made a stylish entry to Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant's pre-wedding function at the Ambani residence on Wednesday evening. Ranveer looked handsome in an embroidered kurta and pyjama as he sported a classic half-up, half-down man bun hairstyle. In a video, shared by Viral Bhayani, Ranveer was seen greeting the paps with folded hands as he arrived at the mehndi ceremony. He also flaunted his moustache and waved at the paps while posing. However, Ranveer's actress-wife Deepika Padukone was missing. Earlier, Deepika, who is expecting her first baby with Ranveer Singh, avoided posing for paparazzi at Anant and Radhika's saangeet ceremony. A lot of people wondered if Deepika ignored the paps altogether due to the ongoing trolling surrounding her baby bump on social media.

Ranveer was also present at the Haldi ceremony on Monday. He also kicked off Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant's wedding saangeet with his energetic dance performance last weekend. Ranveer, who was accompanied by Deepika Padukone to the function, danced to Salman Khan's popular song 'Ishq Di Galli Vich' from David Dhawan's film 'No Entry'.

Apart from Ranveer, Salman Khan, Arjun Kapoor, Janhvi Kapoor, Sara Ali Khan, Ananya Panday, Orry, Rahul Vaidya, Disha Parmar, Udit Narayan, and Manushi Chhillar among others were photographed arriving at the Haldi ceremony at the Ambani residence on Monday. Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani and his wife Nita Ambani began the wedding festivities of their son Anant Ambani and his fiancée Radhika Merchant with the Mameru ceremony at their residence, Antilia, in Mumbai last week. The couple's grand wedding will take place on July 12 at the Jio World Convention Centre in Mumbai. The first event is the Shubb Vivah or wedding function, with a dress code of Indian traditional. On July 13, the Shubb Aashirwad ceremony will follow, with a dress code of Indian formal. The celebrations will conclude on July 14 with the Mangal Utsav or wedding reception, where the dress code is Indian chic.