

Frame strict law to safeguard healthcare workers

THE rape and murder of a resident doctor at the state-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital earlier this month has triggered widespread outrage and shaken the conscience of people. The post-mortem report indicates a Nirbhaya-like brutal assault. Shocking as it is, the incident occurred on the premises of the medical facility while she was on duty. To make it worse, the hospital authorities tried to cover it up.

This was not an isolated case. Last year, a 22-year-old doctor was stabbed to death in Kerala in the presence of cops. These two cases are extreme instances of violence against medical professionals, something that has been going on for years. Just a couple of months ago, doctors at a hospital in Raichur were thrashed by relatives after a patient's death. And earlier, in January, a doctor was assaulted at a taluk hospital in Karnataka. Violence against doctors falls into two categories. First, there is violence by the relatives or attendants of a patient over perceived negligence or billing disputes. And then there is violence by criminal elements. The Kolkata incident is a case of crime against a woman. Doctors at bigger, private hospitals are relatively safe, thanks to restrictions on the entry and number of attendants, the presence of CCTV cameras and adequate infrastructure.

However, at government hospitals, the entry of outsiders goes mostly unchecked. Besides, there is a shortage of security personnel, corridors are poorly lit, duty rooms are not adequate, and there is often little electronic surveillance. Currently, most Class III and IV employees are hired on contract, and their antecedents are not verified. The victim in the Kolkata case had gone to a seminar room to take rest, perhaps because of the unavailability of a proper duty room. The culprit is said to be a 'civic volunteer', who would ostensibly help patients get admitted to government hospitals, in all likelihood, for a commission. But it is not only doctors who are at the receiving end; other healthcare workers (HCWs) also face violence. The most gruesome incident was the sexual assault on a nurse by a hospital lift operator at Mumbai's KEM Hospital in 1973. The victim suffered brain damage and remained in a vegetative state for over 40 years. Nurses and other female employees are the most vulnerable segment at hospitals. The WHO defines workplace violence in the healthcare sector as incidents in which a staff member is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work. Lancet surveillance yielded 225 violent incidents against HCWs in 2020 and 110 in 2021. Though India contributes less than 1 per cent of global HCWs, it accounted for 3.4 per cent of all such incidents. The incidence of violence against HCWs in India was 57 times that in the UK and 850 times that in China, countries that have taken legal action against violence. According to an estimate, there is at least one case of violence against an HCW in the national capital every day, with a majority going unreported.

The Indian Medical Association has been demanding a separate law to ensure the safety and security of doctors and other HCWs. Following reports of violence against HCWs during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020, was promulgated to supplement the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare had released the Healthcare Service Personnel and Clinical Establishments (Prohibition of Violence and Damage to Property) Bill in September 2019 to address violence against healthcare professionals and damage to property. But it was rejected by the Ministry of Home Affairs on the grounds that the Bill would set an improper precedent for others seeking such exclusive protections for their respective professions. Subsequently, in September 2020, the Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Act, 2020, was passed, but its provisions fall short of the doctors' demands.

Since law and order is a state subject, there are state laws in 25 states (including West Bengal) and union territories called the Medicare Service Persons and Medicare Service Institutions Act. Under the Act, violence against HCWs is a non-bailable offence in most states, but there is no uniformity in its provisions in different states. Moreover, there is apathy and a lack of awareness about it among law enforcement agencies.

INDIA and the Maldives appear to be working quietly to reset their ties since their low point between January and March this year. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's visit to Male earlier this month came two months after President Mohamed Muizzu visited Delhi for the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The realisation on both sides that each needs the other is apparent. India had to pull out its military personnel from the Maldives, but the archipelago's tourism-and-imports-dependent economy is sinking under a twin fiscal and current account deficit crisis and a debt of mountainous proportions. India tends to dismiss popular movements in its neighbouring countries as orchestrated by foreign hands or political parties, leading to nasty surprises.

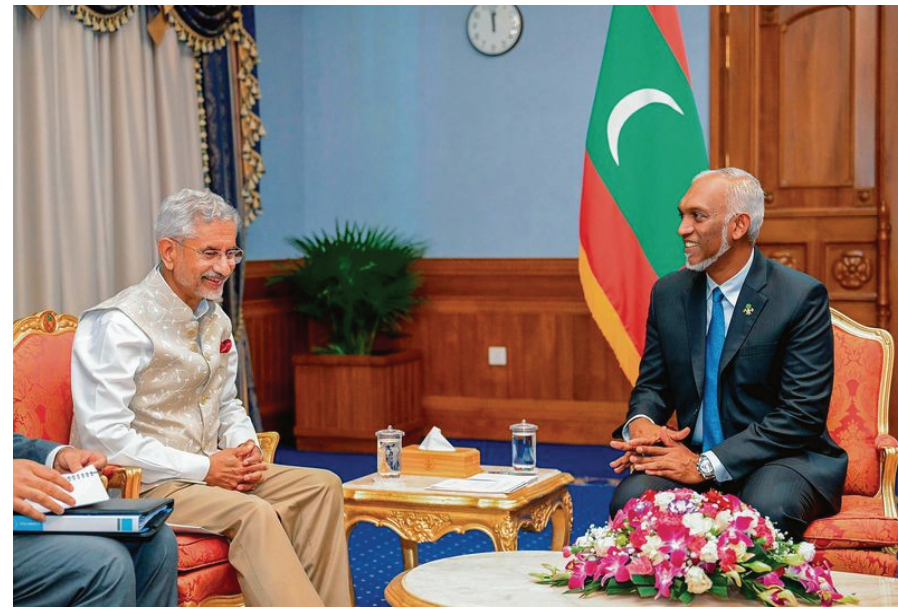
Last month, Muizzu announced cutbacks in spending. Public expenditure has been slashed drastically, leaving in the lurch infrastructure projects. The free healthcare system is to be streamlined and loss-making state-owned enterprises face 'reforms'. If the Maldives needs Delhi for an economic bailout, the latter remains acutely aware of the strategic importance of the Maldives. At Male's request, Delhi rolled over a \$50-million Maldives Treasury Bill, re-subscribing to it for one more year upon its maturity. The thank-you note came a month later. On a visit to China, Maldivian Minister of Economic Development and Trade Mohamed Saeed noted in an interview to a TV channel the importance of India to his country's economy. It was a 180-degree turn from Muizzu's "India is a threat to our sovereignty" declaration in Beijing in January. But Delhi's more significant ask from the Maldives is a free trade agreement. Saeed told a press conference in Male that India "is asking that there should be a free trade agreement" and that deliberations had been initiated in this regard. He said the Maldives was open to having FTAs with 'all countries' for 'ease of trade'. It already has an FTA with China dating back to 2018, signed during the Abdullah Yameen government. He was voted out before it could be implemented. The successor Ibu Solih government shelved it. It is significant that Muizzu's announcement on implementing the FTA with China in September came days ahead of Jaishankar's visit. All this was likely discussed during Jaishankar's visit.

What this means is that the Maldives-India reset is still a work in progress and it will not be all smooth. But the

A lesson about the neighbourhood

Putting govts into 'pro-India' or 'pro-China' boxes serves to show up Delhi's insecurities

pragmatism that now informs the relationship between India and a small country like the Maldives is instructive for India's relations across the region. For one, it shows that putting governments abroad into narrow 'friend of Delhi' or 'anti-India' boxes only reveal India's own insecurities behind the bluster of a 'strong' foreign policy. It reinforces an unflattering image of a Delhi whose diplomacy succeeds only in ideal conditions, that is when 'loyalty' from the other government is available on tap. How much the 'pro-India' Ibu Solih's decision to outlaw criticism of India in 2022 was influenced by Delhi is not known. What is clear is that the undemocratic decree played right into the hands of the Maldivian opposition and those behind the 'India Out' protests. Just like the much-advertised friendship between India and Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh exposed bilateral ties to high risk, especially when Delhi could not deliver on her



one big demand — an agreement on the sharing of the Teesta waters — and her own turn to authoritarianism began to be blamed on India.

Secondly, change of government is inevitable in democracies, making a diplomatic outreach to opposition parties important. India has been seen reaching out to the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in Sri Lanka, a party with a history of virulent opposition to India and whose leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake is a strong contender in the upcoming presidential election. He was invited to India recently, given a tour of Anand, the heart of India's hard-wrought milk self-sufficiency, and Kerala, where the JVP, a party that combines Sinhala nationalism with leftism, could see India's federalism in action.

Doing this as a matter of course is important rather than six months before an important election, when it sends a message of another kind. In Bangladesh, India has shunned the BNP since 2012. Thirdly, in a region partitioned along religious lines, communally charged statements at home or violent incidents of communal hate travel swiftly across borders. In June 2022, despite the Solih government's India First policy, it was forced by the Opposition to issue a statement of 'deep concern' over remarks by a BJP spokesperson against Prophet Muhammad. Sheikh Hasina's government, on the other hand, declared the matter 'an internal issue', reinforcing the perception that she was taking orders from Delhi. India was right in asking Bangladesh to protect its minorities but Delhi's own failure to lead by example is conspicuous. Muhammed Yunus, head of Bangladesh's interim government, has visited a Hindu temple and reassured the country's Hindus that they will be protected. In India, the PM has engaged in dangerous dog-whistling. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, for India, which positions itself as a first responder to multiple crises in the neighbourhood - from economic emergencies to climate change, piracy, accidents at sea, water shortages, tsunamis, earthquakes, etc. — the people should be at the heart of the engagement. Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives, civil society and media are strong actors and influence public opinion in no small measure. People's perceptions and views about India and its role contributes directly or indirectly to anti-incumbency in most of these countries.

A recent statement by mediapersons and civil society activists of Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka asks India to "be supportive of the democratic aspirations of South Asia's peoples and let them build their individual paths to the future". But Delhi's securitised foreign policy in the region has little place for engagement with non-government actors, mirroring the Modi government's attitude towards them at home. When was the last time an Indian foreign minister gave an interview to the media in these countries? Instead, there is a tendency to talk down people's agency in these countries and to dismiss popular movements as orchestrated by foreign hands or political parties, leading to nasty surprises.

In Afghanistan, the one country in the region where the people love India unconditionally, Delhi has stepped away deliberately from a robust people-to-people engagement for the sake of its Pakistan/security-driven engagement with the Taliban. But even there, Delhi would be making a mistake by believing that the people will never win back their agency.

Doctors' strike

A right cause, but at what cost to patients?

THE doctors' strike, triggered by the shocking rape and murder case in Kolkata, highlights deep-seated issues in our healthcare system. While the outrage is understandable and the demand for justice justified, the impact of this strike on patients, especially the poor, is profoundly concerning. The healthcare system in our country is already plagued by inadequate facilities and overburdened services. Forcing vulnerable patients to bear the brunt of this protest is neither fair nor humane.

The medical community's demand for security is critical and should not be dismissed. Doctors are rightly concerned about the dangers they face while performing their duties. However, there are more balanced ways to express these grievances without compromising patient care. Wearing black badges or organising rotational strikes could be effective alternatives that would allow doctors to voice their concerns while ensuring that essential services



remain available. The Madhya Pradesh High Court has emphasised the importance of maintaining healthcare services during strikes, highlighting the legal and moral

responsibility of medical professionals to their patients.

The government needs to address the root causes of the doctors' dissatisfaction by ensuring their safety through adequate funding and infrastructure improvements, such as providing more CCTV cameras and security personnel in medical institutions. In a country where healthcare access is already a challenge, the strike only exacerbates the suffering of those who can least afford it. The lack of political will to improve healthcare services is evident. The government must act swiftly to resolve this crisis so that justice is delivered speedily. Balancing the doctors' legitimate concerns with the fundamental right to healthcare is not just a necessity, but it is also a moral imperative.

Zero-tolerance approach a must to curb crimes against women

The plight of victims in high-profile rape cases and the relief accorded by the state to the accused are stark in cases such as that of Bilkis Bano.

THE horrific gangrape and murder of a junior doctor at a medical college and hospital in Kolkata has triggered national outrage. This was reflected in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day address.

Alluding to the incident, Modi said: "I would like to express my pain once again, from the Red Fort today. As a society, we will have to think seriously about the atrocities against women that are happening — there is outrage against this in the country. I can feel this outrage. The country, society and state governments will have to take this seriously." He added that such cases of crime against women should be investigated speedily "and those responsible should be punished without delay". The victim in the Kolkata case is being referred to as Abhaya by her shell-shocked colleagues, recalling the horrific 2012 Delhi gangrape-murder that was termed the 'Nirbhaya' case; it took eight years before the perpetrators were finally brought to justice in March 2020. Whether the culprits in the Abhaya case will be awarded exemplary punishment is a moot point, as the case has already generated a predictable political slugfest. The Trinamool Congress (TMC) government led by CM Mamata Banerjee has accused the Opposition parties (BJP, Congress and CPI) of muddying the waters. Some very anomalous developments characterise the Abhaya case.

While law and order is a state subject, in what amounts to a no-confidence signal against the local police, Mamata has backed the transfer of the case probe to the CBI and demanded that the perpetrators be apprehended and tried expeditiously. Preliminary reports about how the case was handled by the local police in the early stages of the investigation have raised many troubling questions, including allegations of a botched cover-up attempt to shield the perpetrators. A rebuke by the Calcutta High Court has shamed the police. To compound the alleged perfidy

by the state government, the principal of the medical college concerned was allowed to 'resign' but was immediately appointed at another local hospital, thereby exonerating him of the lapses resulting in the Abhaya tragedy. Even wellwishers of the TMC are dismayed.

The sexual violence unleashed on the doctor is gut-wrenching. Hopefully, the CBI will be able to move swiftly, even as the Abhaya case is the tip of a murky iceberg. In the same fortnight, a nurse returning home after night duty at an Uttarakhand hospital was sexually assaulted and murdered (July 30); the accused was arrested a week later from Bareilly. India's rape statistics indicate that 90 such dastardly incidents are reported daily. This may be relatively low by global standards — as per an estimate, India reports 1.8 rape cases per 100,000 population, while the figures for Botswana and South Africa are 92.9 and 72.1, respectively. However, this is callous justification for the deplorable trends related to the security and safety of women and the girl child over the past two decades. A large number of rape and molestation cases do not get reported by the families of the victims. Alas, in many instances, close family members are the culprits. Despite Nirbhaya-2012 and the outrage it generated at that time, the response of both the state and society has not changed for the better in any visible manner. Immediate uproar after every ghastly incident is followed by political platitudes. The 'Beti Bachao' (save the girl child)



pledge, made with fanfare by Modi 1.0 in January 2015, remains a mere slogan. The law is enforced in a selective manner. Once assured of state patronage, the ubiquitous male predator remains on the prowl and vulnerable women are exploited, whether at the workplace (as in the Abhaya case) or on the streets (Nirbhaya case).

PM Modi made an intriguing observation in his August 15 address when he highlighted the importance of creating a 'fear of consequences of rape'. He said: "When an incident of rape happens, the media discusses the case at length, but when these perpetrators are brought to book, there is very little discussion on the same. We need to speak about the action taken on such criminals so that it can act as a

deterrent." The plight of victims in high-profile rape cases and the relief accorded by the state to the accused are stark in cases such as that of Bilkis Bano (2002 Gujarat riots); clearly, political considerations trump the sanctity of the law. Electoral compulsions have made a mockery of justice; the perpetrators, instead of being brought to book, are feted and treated with kid gloves. The sordid Gurmeet Ram Rahim saga and the latitude given by the Modi government to ex-MP and former wrestling federation chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh are illustrative. Alas, the Indian ecosystem stinks when it comes to political rectitude and institutional integrity. This is borne out by a disturbing trend. The nexus between crime and politics in India was outlined in the 1993 Vohra committee report, but to little avail. An ADR (Association for Democratic Reforms) survey after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections revealed that 251 (46 per cent) of the 543 newly elected MPs had criminal cases registered against them and 27 had been convicted. In 2023, it was estimated that 134 sitting MPs and MLAs were facing cases related to crimes against women; this list included 21 MPs and 113 MLAs. Chanakya's tenet that the ruler (the elected leader in the current times) has to be guided by the yogakshema (welfare) of the citizens, particularly vulnerable ones such as women, must come back into focus for the Indian political class. PM Modi needs to ponder deeply over the Kautilyan maxim, "Prajaa sukhe sukham rajyah, Prajanam cha hite hitam" (in the welfare and happiness of the people lies the king's welfare and happiness) and ensure that his government can walk the talk when it comes to streerakshana (women's safety), lest sophistry become his legacy.

Sonia Gandhi Slams Centre's Move, Says Khadi Sole Fabric For Indian Flag

The Flag Code of India has historically required the national flag to be made of "hand spun and hand-woven wool/cotton/silk khadi bunting", she pointed out.

New Delhi: Slamming the central government for the "rampant adoption" of machine-manufactured polyester flags, Congress leader Sonia Gandhi today called for the restoration of khadi as the only fabric with the distinction of bearing the Indian flag and asserted that the fabric must find its rightful place as an embodiment of national pride. Penning an article in The Hindu, Mrs Gandhi said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's renewed call for a 'Har Ghar Tiranga' campaign in the week leading up to the Independence Day offers an opportunity to collectively introspect on the national flag and its significance to the country. "His (PM Modi's) moral duplicity in paying deference to the national flag while pledging allegiance to an organisation that has remained, indifferent to it, is one matter. The rampant adoption of machine-manufactured polyester flags,

with raw materials often imported from China and elsewhere, is another," she said.

The Flag Code of India has historically required the national flag to be made of "hand spun and hand-woven wool/cotton/silk khadi bunting", she pointed out. Khadi, that coarse but versatile and sturdy fabric which the Mahatma himself spun and wove in his leadership of the national movement, is imbued with a special meaning in our historical and cultural memory, she said. Khadi is at once a symbol of our storied past, and an icon of Indian modernity and economic vitality, the Congress Parliamentary Party chief asserted. It was in deference to this eternal symbolism that the tricolour once bore the Mahatma's charkha as its centrepiece, and that the modern-day Indian flag used to insist on khadi as its sole



fabric, Mrs Gandhi said.

"In 2022, on the auspicious occasion of the 75th anniversary of our Independence, the Government amended the code ('vide its order dated 30.12.2021') to include 'machine made...polyester ... bunting' and simultaneously exempted polyester flags from the Goods and Services Tax (GST). Thereby, it put them on the same tax

footing as khadi flags," she said. At a time when it would have been appropriate to bind ourselves afresh to the service of our country's national symbols, the Government chose to set them aside and pursue mass-market, machine-made polyester fabric, Mrs Gandhi said.

She pointed out that the Karnataka Khadi Gramodyoga Samyukta Sangha (KKGSS) in Karnataka's Hubballi district, the country's sole national flag manufacturing unit accredited by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), had to resort to an indefinite strike to call attention to the state-sponsored murder of India's khadi industry.

This decision came at a time when India, far from its glory days as a global hub for polyester manufacturing, became a net importer of polyester yarn in 2023 and 2024, she said. "We thus have the real

misfortune of importing polyester yarn, primarily from China, and then weaving this imported yarn to produce cloth for our national flag. This shameful inversion of our national pride occurred at the time of grave encroachments by the Chinese armed forces on our borders, and at the peak of the Prime Minister's 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' spectacle," Mrs Gandhi said, in a scathing attack at the Centre. "The hollowness and inadequacy of the government's vision has had direct and calamitous consequences for the Mahatma's foremost legatees - our khadi spinners and weavers," she said. The case of our national flag is not an exception, rather, it is a vividly poignant illustration of this government's general disinterest in cultivating India's storied handloom and handicraft traditions - khadi or otherwise, she said.

Arunachal Makes Inner Line Permit Mandatory For Non-Residents To Enter State

Itanagar: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Monday took steps to strengthen the existing Inner Line Permit (ILP) system that makes it mandatory for a non-Arunachalee person to obtain a permit to enter the state. In a joint meeting with top government officials and leaders of the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) in Itanagar, Mr Khandu emphasised the need to strengthen the ILP system to prevent illegal entry and prolonged stay of



non-local migrants in the state. "Our main objective is to protect our indigenous tribes from outside influx and we are committed to it," he said. While informing that the state government is internally preparing to strengthen the ILP system, Mr Khandu said that it was necessary to take inputs from the state's premier students' organization. AAPSU, headed by its President Dozi Tana Tara, through a PowerPoint presentation explained in detail a survey conducted by the Union and ways and means to strengthen the present system.

Bharat Bandh Today: Reason For August 21 Strike, Who Called It And What Services Will Stay Open - Find Out

New Delhi: The Bharat Bandh scheduled for August 21, 2024, has been organised as a nationwide protest by the Reservation Bachao Sangharsh Samiti against a recent Supreme Court ruling concerning reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). The ruling, which allows states to create sub-categories within these groups, has sparked widespread controversy. The apex court, while creating the sub-categories, said, "Those who really need it should get priority in reservation." The primary objective of the Bharat Bandh is to challenge this ruling and demand its reversal, emphasizing the need to protect the integrity of the reservation system as it stands.

The Supreme Court's decision to allow sub-categorization within SC/ST reservations has led to significant unrest. The court ruled that states could prioritise reservations for sub-groups within SC/STs that are more disadvantaged, stating, "Those who really need it should get priority in reservation." This decision has been met with strong opposition, with many arguing that it could dilute the benefits intended for SC/ST communities as a whole.

Nationwide Support and Participation

The Bharat Bandh has garnered support from various social and political organisations across the country. SC/ST groups in Rajasthan have been particularly vocal, and their participation is expected to be significant. The protest has also found backing from political leaders who have expressed concern over the potential long-term implications of the Supreme Court's ruling.

In anticipation of potential unrest, authorities have implemented extensive security measures across the country. Senior police officials have conducted meetings via video conference to coordinate efforts and ensure public safety. According to news reports, divisional commissioners, district magistrates, and senior police officers have been instructed to maintain law and order throughout the bandh.

"Nation Can't Await Another Rape For Real Changes On Ground": Supreme Court

The CJI DY Chandrachud-led bench also expressed strong dissatisfaction with the West Bengal government and the authorities at the hospital over the delay in filing the FIR.

New Delhi: The Supreme Court, hearing the Kolkata rape-murder incident today, said the nation cannot wait for another rape for changes on the ground. The DY Chandrachud-led bench also expressed strong dissatisfaction with the West Bengal government and the authorities at the hospital over the delay in filing the FIR and other procedural lapses in handling the case. "Medical professions have become vulnerable to violence. Due to ingrained patriarchal biases, women doctors are targeted more. As more and more women join the workforce, the nation cannot wait for another rape for things to change on the ground," CJI Chandrachud noted. During the hearing, Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud raised several pressing questions regarding the actions of the hospital's administration and the local police. "Why was FIR registered three

hours after the body was handed over for cremation," the Supreme Court bench asked.

'What Was Principal Doing?'

The Supreme Court, on its own, took up the investigation into the brutal rape and murder of a 31-year-old post-graduate trainee doctor at Kolkata's RG Kar Medical College and Hospital on August 9. The incident has triggered widespread protests across the country and raised questions over women's safety, particularly in medical colleges. The three-judge bench is led by CJI Chandrachud and comprises Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra. "What was the principal doing? FIR was not filed; the body was handed late to the parents. What is the police doing? A serious offence has taken place, the crime scene is in a hospital... What are they doing? Allowing vandals to enter the hospital?" CJI Chandrachud asked.

Sandip Ghosh, who resigned as the principal of RG Kar Medical College just two days after the incident, has been under scrutiny by the CBI and questioned for nearly 53 hours over the past four days regarding his actions following the doctor's death. In response to the bench's questions, Kapil Sibal, representing the West Bengal government, countered that people at the hospital had taken photos, a case of unnatural death was immediately started, and a board was set up with a judicial magistrate present. However, CJI Chandrachud said that it was the hospital's duty to file the FIR, especially in the absence of the victim's parents. Justice Pardiwala questioned the timeline of the FIR, asking, "Who is the first informant who filed the FIR? What is the time of the FIR?" Mr Sibal responded that the first informant was the father of the victim, who filed.

"Papa, Your Teachings Are... ": Rahul Gandhi On Rajiv Gandhi's Anniversary

New Delhi: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday paid tribute to his father, former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on his birth anniversary and emphasised that he'll fulfil Rajiv Gandhi's dreams for India taking his memories with him. "A compassionate personality, an epitome of camaraderie and goodwill... Papa, your teachings are my inspiration, and your dreams for India are my own - I will fulfil them, taking your memories with me," the Congress leader posted on X. Rahul Gandhi also visited Veer Bhumi and paid floral tribute to Rajiv Gandhi on his birth anniversary.

Party RS MP Jairam Ramesh also celebrated Rajiv Gandhi's contribution to India's political and

technological landscape. "Today is Rajiv Gandhi@80. His was a short but very consequential political life. The March 1985 Budget in which he played a key role heralded a new approach to economic policy. The manifesto for the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, on which he spent long hours a few weeks before his tragic assassination, provided the foundations for the Rao-Manmohan Singh reforms of June-July 1991. Peace accords in troubled regions of the country like Assam, Punjab, Mizoram, and Tripura were made possible by his statesmanship that put national interest over the immediate interests of his party.... We recall not just a Prime Minister today but also a very fine and

caring human being who bore no malice showed no vindictiveness, sought no revenge, indulged in no bombast and self-glory, and exhibited no qualities of self-delusion," he added.

"He had a vision for societal applications of science and technology that were reflected in the impactful technology missions in drinking water supply, immunization, literacy, oilseeds production and telecom and dairy development. In 1985, 165,000 villages had been identified as not having easy access to any potable water source. By 1989, 162,000 villages of these villages had been provided with at least one safe source of drinking water.

Cancel lateral entry ad, Minister asks UPSC chief amid reservations row

Jitendra Singh, in his letter to the UPSC, said there was a need for lateral entry to align with the principles of equity and social justice enshrined in the Constitution.

New Delhi: Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Tuesday asked the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) to cancel its advertisement for lateral entry into top posts in central ministries amid backlash from the opposition as well as NDA allies. Jitendra Singh wrote the letter to

the UPSC chairperson citing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's directions. In his letter, Singh said there was a need for lateral entry to align with the principles of equity and social justice enshrined in the Constitution, particularly concerning the provision of reservations. The Congress, which had strongly criticised the ad as an "attack on Dalits, OBCs and Adivasis", was swift to react. "A letter from a Union Minister working under a non-biological PM to a Constitutional authority WITHOUT a date. What pathetic governance this is," Congress leader Jairam Ramesh tweeted. Last week, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) sought applications for recruitment of 45 joint secretaries, directors and deputy secretaries in the biggest tranche of lateral entry in bureaucracy. It was aimed at appointing specialists, including those from the private sector, in central

government departments. The UPSC's announcement created a political stir, with at least two NDA partners -- the



Janata Dal (United) and Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) -- joining the opposition ranks to oppose the move. Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi was the first to pounce on the BJP government, criticising it for the lack of reservations in appointments

made through lateral entry. "Lateral entry is an attack on Dalits, OBCs and Adivasis. The BJP's distorted version of Ram Rajya seeks to destroy the Constitution and snatch reservations from Bahujans," Gandhi had tweeted. BJP ally and Union Minister Chirag Paswan also voiced concern on appointments in government posts without reservation. "Reservation provisions must be there in any government appointment. There are no ifs and buts in this," he said. The Centre had mounted a strong defence, asserting that lateral entry in bureaucracy had been happening since the 1970s during Congress-led governments. Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the move would not affect the recruitment of SC/STs in the services. Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal reminded the Congress that Manmohan Singh was made the finance secretary in 1976 through the lateral entry route.

Centre's U-Turn On Lateral Entry Amid Pressure From Ally, Opposition

New Delhi: The government today asked the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) to cancel its advertisement for lateral entry into bureaucracy, pulling a 180 amid massive opposition criticism of the move. Prime Minister Narendra Modi believes that the "move should be aligned with social justice", Union Minister Jitendra Singh wrote in a letter to the UPSC chief. The UPSC last week issued the advertisement seeking "talented and motivated Indian nationals" for lateral recruitment to various senior positions within the Union government. These positions included Joint Secretary, Director, and Deputy Secretary in 24 ministries, with a total of 45 posts up for grabs.

"While most of the major lateral entries before 2014 were made in an ad-hoc manner, including cases of alleged favouritism, efforts of our government have been to make the process institutionally driven, transparent and open," the minister's letter read. "The Prime Minister is of the firm belief that the process of lateral entry must be aligned with the principles of equity and social justice enshrined in our Constitution, particularly concerning the provisions of reservation."

Lateral entry into bureaucracy refers to the recruitment of individuals from outside the traditional government service cadres, such as the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), to fill mid and senior-level positions in government departments. The move triggered a debate on lateral entry into bureaucracy, with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi denouncing the process as an "attack on Dalits". The ruling BJP countered by pointing out that the concept emerged under a Congress-led government.

The lateral entry process was formally introduced during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenure, with the first set of vacancies announced in 2018. This marked a departure from the traditional system where senior bureaucratic positions were almost exclusively filled by career civil servants.

According to government sources, the idea was first proposed during the UPA government, led by Congress, in the mid-2000s. In 2005, the UPA established the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) under the chairmanship of Veerappa Moily. The Commission was tasked with recommending reforms to the Indian administrative system.

News box

Israeli strike targets Hezbollah site in Lebanon, 8 injured

Beirut. An Israeli strike on Monday evening targeted a Hezbollah arms depot in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley, the Israeli military said. The strike did not result in any fatalities, two security sources told Reuters. Lebanon's health ministry said of the eight injured six were Lebanese citizens and two Syrian children. The Israeli military said its air force struck a number of Hezbollah weapons storage facilities in the area of Beqaa in Lebanon. Following the strikes, secondary explosions were identified, indicating the presence of large amounts of weapons in the facilities struck, the military said in a statement. It said earlier strikes in Deir Qanoun and Tayibe south of Lebanon targeted a senior militant in Hezbollah's Rocket and Missile Unit and a cell operating from a Hezbollah military structure. Following the depot strike, the Lebanese Agricultural Scientific Research Authority said it would close its research stations in the Beqaa region as a precaution because unexploded missiles landed nearby. On Saturday, the Israel military said it targeted a weapons depot used by Lebanese armed group Hezbollah militants in an airstrike, killing at least 10 people including two children. In July, Israeli strikes also targeted another depot storing ammunition belonging to the Iranian-backed group in the town of Adloun in southern Lebanon, three security sources told Reuters. Israel and Hezbollah have been trading fire since Hezbollah announced a "support front" with Palestinians shortly after its ally Hamas attacked southern Israeli border communities on October 7, triggering Israel's military offensive in Gaza.

We're going nowhere': Thai opposition figure says court interventions must stop

BANGKOK. Politicians in Thailand must reform the judiciary to prevent interventions that have the country "going around in circles", a recently banned opposition figurehead said, after two big rulings that dissolved his party and dismissed a prime minister. Pita Limjaroenrat, whose now defunct Move Forward Party was blocked from forming a government last year, said a 10-year political ban would not weaken his resolve to lead Thailand and start major reforms, including stopping independent institutions from being politicised. Thailand has been trapped in a tumultuous two-decade cycle of coups and court rulings that have toppled multiple governments, as part of a power struggle between popularly elected parties and an influential establishment with powerful connections in the military and key institutions. "It's back to square one and nothing has been achieved for the people," Pita told Reuters, reflecting on upheaval that saw Move Forward dissolved and Srettha Thavisin dismissed as premier in the space of a week, both by the same court. "We confuse movement with progress," he said. "It's almost like we're going around in circles and we're thinking we're going somewhere but actually we're going nowhere." His remarks came as 134 Thai academics and legal experts in a statement criticised the court, which they said overstepped its jurisdiction and damaged the public's trust in legal and democratic systems. Pita will return to Harvard University as a democracy fellow following his ban over his party's plan to amend a law that punishes royal insults with up to 15 years in jail, a campaign the court said undermined Thailand's constitutional monarchy.

Minorities in Bangladesh being forced to resign, threatened to leave country'

DHAKA. Although attacks on minorities have come down significantly in Bangladesh, members of the minority community are reportedly facing new challenges like alleged forced resignations, threats to leave the country, and rampant extortion. There have been reports of major changes in govt offices, autonomous bodies, schools and colleges amid reports that resignations of employees



belonging to the Hindu, Buddhist and Christian communities were secured under coercion. Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad general secretary Rana Dasgupta told TOI that over the last couple of days he had got 10-12 complaints of minorities being forced to quit through threats and harassment. He said his outfit was ascertaining the veracity of the complaints. The lawyer said there are also growing cases of extortion with minorities being told that they will be forced to leave the country if money is not paid.

Trump posts fake AI image of Taylor Swift endorsing him for President



Los Angeles Former President Donald Trump has posted a fake social media image of pop superstar Taylor Swift asking people to vote for him in the November election. A Sunday entry by the Republican candidate on Truth Social showed Swift dressed in red, white and blue with a caption that said "Taylor Swift Wants You To Vote For Donald Trump." "I accept!" Trump wrote. Swift has not publicly endorsed a candidate in the 2024 race but has supported Democrats in the past. The singer backed President Joe Biden and running mate Kamala Harris in 2020. Harris is set to be formally nominated as the 2024 Democratic candidate at the party's national convention in Chicago this week. Swift also criticised Trump in a 2020 documentary. A spokesperson for Swift did not respond to a request for comment. Trump also posted photos of young women wearing "Swifties for Trump" shirts, and a satirical article with the headline "Swifties Turning to Trump After ISIS Foiled Taylor Swift Concert." The article was marked "SATIRE" above the headline.

Swift cancelled three shows in Vienna this month after authorities said they had foiled a planned attack. Local officials arrested a 19-year-old man who they said was inspired by Islamic State. Swifties for Trump is a massive movement that grows bigger every

single day." Trump campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung said in a statement when asked for comment about the fake Swift image. Several Swift fans and watchdog groups said many of the images posted by Trump appeared to be deepfakes generated

by artificial intelligence. Advocates in the music industry, Hollywood and Washington have been pushing for federal legislation and other measures to fight the explosion of fake AI images online. Trump's post was "yet another example of AI's power to create misinformation," consumer group Public Citizen said. "The potential harms to our society that could result from such misinformation, including abuses of our elections, are wide-reaching and immensely damaging," the group added. At the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Swift fan Rebecca Goff handed out friendship bracelets, a common practice among the singer's fans, at a Nevada Democratic Party breakfast. Goff, 39, said she felt Trump was the antithesis of what she believes Swift stands for, including celebrating girlhood and womanhood. "That's like the antithesis of what Trump and the GOP are trying to do, especially to women. They're trying to make us smaller. They want us to go back to being just housewives, child bearers," Goff said.

Bangladesh authorities unfreeze ex-PM Khaleda Zia's bank accounts after 17 years



Dhaka, UPDATED Tax authorities in Bangladesh on Monday decided to unfreeze the bank accounts of Bangladesh Nationalist Party Chairperson Khaleda Zia, 17 years after banks were ordered to block them. The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has instructed banks to unfreeze the accounts of BNP Chairperson Zia, the Daily Star newspaper reported. In August 2007, the NBR's Central Intelligence Cell directed banks to freeze the accounts of the BNP Chairperson, who has been elected Bangladesh's prime minister twice since 1990. The decision was based on a recommendation of a panel formed during the then Army-backed caretaker government, said a senior official of the

NBR. Since then, her accounts have remained blocked. The BNP has on several occasions demanded that they be unfrozen. The latest move comes after a mass uprising toppled Sheikh Hasina, a long-time rival of Khaleda, on August 5,

ending the Bangladesh Awami League's 15-year rule. An interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus was sworn in on August 8. Zia, 79, was released from jail after Hasina, 76, fled to India on August 5. Zia served as the prime minister of Bangladesh from March 1991 to March 1996, and again from June 2001 to October 2006. The NBR said they received an application from Khaleda's lawyer on Sunday seeking to unfreeze the accounts. "As there are no tax-related issues pending investigation relating to her, we have advised banks to unlock all her accounts. We have asked them to take immediate action and provide a compliance report," the official was quoted as saying.

Kamala Harris thanks Biden for 'historic leadership': We are forever grateful

World US Vice President Kamala Harris made a surprise appearance on the first day of the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Chicago and expressed gratitude to President Joe Biden for his "historic leadership." "Thank you for your historical leadership, for your lifetime of service to our nation, and for all you will continue to do. We are forever grateful to you," Harris said at the DNC on Monday night. "I want to kick us off by celebrating our incredible President Joe Biden," she stated amid a cheering crowd. "Let us fight for the ideals we hold dear and let us always remember, when we fight we win!" Harris stated. Biden, who stepped aside from running for reelection, will give a keynote address at the DNC later tonight. He is expected to make the case for electing Harris and defeating Republican nominee Donald Trump. Harris is the first black woman and Asian American to lead a major party ticket. She entered the convention with a radiant smile and unmistakable confidence, reflecting the support of nearly half the country — 48% — who hold a very or somewhat favourable view of her, according to a recent poll conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Earlier this month, the vice president was officially confirmed as the Democratic nominee through a virtual vote, solidifying the party's unity after Biden withdrew from the race and endorsed her. As the campaign turns toward November, Harris expressed confidence in the collective strength of the nation, stating that people from all walks of life will "come together and declare with one voice, as one people: we are moving forward." Harris is set to deliver her formal acceptance speech on Thursday night (IST). Democratic National Convention The theme for the first day of the Democratic National Convention is "For the People." Former US President Barack Obama is scheduled to address the convention.

Israel accepts 'bridging proposal' for Gaza ceasefire deal: Antony Blinken

Tel Aviv, UPDATED US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had accepted a "bridging proposal" presented by Washington to tackle disagreements blocking a ceasefire deal in Gaza, and urged Hamas to do the same. Blinken spoke to journalists after a day of meetings with Israeli officials, including a 2-1/2-hour meeting with Netanyahu that Blinken described as "very constructive." The top US diplomat had said earlier that this push was probably the best and possibly last opportunity for a deal. Talks in Qatar seeking a ceasefire and hostage return agreement last week paused without a breakthrough, but the negotiations are expected to resume this week based on the US proposal to bridge the gaps between Israel and Hamas. Blinken's visit

comes as US President Joe Biden faces mounting election-year pressure over his stance on the conflict, with his Democratic party starting its national convention on Monday amid pro-Palestinian protests and worries about Muslim and Arab American votes in swing states. However, with the Palestinian Islamist group announcing a resumption of suicide bombing inside Israel after many years, and claiming responsibility for a blast in Tel Aviv on Sunday night, and medics saying Israeli military strikes killed at least 30 Palestinians across the Gaza Strip on Monday, there are few signs of conciliation on the ground and fears of wider war in the region. "In a very constructive meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu today, he confirmed to me that Israel accepts the bridging

proposal - that he supports it," Blinken told reporters in Tel Aviv. "It's now incumbent on Hamas to do the same, and then the parties, with the help of the mediators - the United States, Egypt and Qatar - have to come together and complete the process of reaching clear understandings about how they'll implement the commitments that they've made under this agreement." DIFFICULT NEGOTIATIONS Despite US expressions of optimism and Netanyahu's office describing the meeting as positive, both Israel and Hamas have signalled that any deal will be difficult. Months of on-off talks have circled the same issues, with Israel saying the war can only end with the destruction of Hamas as a military and political force and Hamas saying it will only accept a permanent, and

Trump open to appointing Elon Musk to Cabinet if re-elected in November

Former US President Donald Trump said he would certainly appoint tech billionaire Elon Musk to any Cabinet position or advisory role if he was elected for a second White House term.

World Former US President Donald Trump said on Monday (local time) that he would offer tech billionaire Elon Musk a Cabinet position or an advisory role if he were re-elected to the White House again. In an interview with news agency Reuters, Trump was asked whether Musk was being considered for an advisory role or Cabinet job. The former president replied he was willing to do so "if he (Musk) would do it." "He's a very smart guy. I certainly would, if he would do it, I certainly would. He's a brilliant guy," Trump said. Last month, Trump was endorsed by Musk for president. The tech billionaire praised the former president's "instinctual courage" after surviving an assassination attempt in Pennsylvania and expressing admiration for Trump's vice presidential pick, JD Vance. Musk's relationship with Trump has become increasingly close, with the two engaging in a friendly conversation on the billionaire's platform, X, earlier this month, where Musk reaffirmed his support for Trump's campaign. This is not the first time that Musk has had a brush with an advisor role or a Cabinet position under the Trump administration. After Trump won the election in 2016, Musk was appointed to two of the Republican president's



advisory councils, where he aimed to influence environmental and immigration policies. However, the tech billionaire resigned in 2017 following Trump's decision to pull the US out of the landmark Paris climate accord. During his interview with Trump on X, Musk weighed on the idea of having a "government efficiency commission" to oversee spending and reduce waste and said he was keen to serve on such a board, according to Axios. In May, the Wall Street Journal reported that Musk and Trump discussed a potential role for the billionaire in the latter's administration if he is re-elected. However, Musk and SpaceX had pushed back on

the report at the time. TRUMP PLANS SCRAPPING OF EV TAX CREDITS Meanwhile, during the Reuters interview, Trump said he was planning to end a \$7,500 (around Rs 6.28 lakh) tax credit for purchasing electric vehicles if he was re-elected, saying, "Tax credits and tax incentives are not generally a very good thing." The move, if enacted, may have significant outcomes for Tesla, the electric carmaker which Musk owns. If Trump is elected in the November 5 presidential election, he could take initiatives to reverse Treasury Department rules, which make it easier for automakers to take advantage of the \$7,500 credit or could ask the US Congress to scrap it completely, Reuters reported. When Trump was president from 2017 to 2021, he sought to revoke the EV tax credit that was later expanded by President Joe Biden in 2022. "I'm not making any final decisions on it. I'm a big fan of electric cars, but I'm a fan of gasoline-propelled cars, and also hybrids and whatever else happens to come along," the former president said of the tax credit. Trump underlined he would scrap the Biden administration's rules that give automakers a free hand to build.

Bridging proposal: Blinken says Israel accepts Gaza plan, presses Hamas to agree

World US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has accepted a "bridging proposal" presented by Washington to address disagreements hindering a ceasefire deal in Gaza. Blinken also urged Hamas to agree to the proposal. This announcement follows a day of discussions with Israeli officials, including a 2-1/2-hour meeting with Netanyahu. This effort is described as potentially the best and possibly the last chance for a deal. Talks in Qatar aimed at securing a ceasefire and a hostage return agreement paused last week without a breakthrough but are anticipated to resume based on the US proposal designed to bridge gaps between Israel and Hamas. Blinken's visit follows rising election-year pressures on US President Joe Biden over his stance on the conflict, amidst

Democratic party national convention and protests. However, tensions persist on the ground with Hamas announcing a resumption of suicide bombings in Israel, claiming responsibility for a blast in Tel Aviv on Sunday night. Meanwhile, Israeli military strikes reportedly killed at least 30 Palestinians in Gaza on Monday. These developments add to concerns of a broader conflict. "In a very constructive meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu today, he confirmed to me that Israel accepts the bridging proposal - that he supports it," Blinken told reporters in Tel Aviv. "It's now incumbent on Hamas to do the same, and then the parties, with the help of the mediators - the United States, Egypt, and Qatar - have to come together and complete the process of reaching clear understandings about how they'll implement the

commitments that they've made under this agreement." Despite expressions of optimism and Netanyahu's office describing the meeting as positive, a deal remains challenging. Both parties have signalled significant difficulties in the negotiations. The core issues have remained unchanged over months of talks. Israel insists that the war should end only with the destruction of Hamas as a military and political force, while Hamas demands a permanent ceasefire. Key disagreements include Israel's continued military presence in Gaza, particularly along the Egypt border, the free movement of Palestinians within Gaza, and the specifics of a prisoner swap. Hamas officials have accused the US of favoring Israel, complicating the negotiation process. "When Blinken says that the Israelis agreed, and then the Israelis say that there is an updated

proposal, this means that the Americans are subject to Israeli pressure and not the other way around. We believe that it is a maneuver that gives the Israelis more time," senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan told Reuters. The current conflict in Gaza began on October 7, 2023, with Hamas gunmen attacking Israeli communities, resulting in about 1,200 Israeli deaths and around 250 hostages abducted, per Israeli tallies. In response, Israel's military operations have majorly impacted the Gaza Strip, displacing nearly all of its 2.3 million residents and leading to severe humanitarian crises. Palestinian health authorities report a death toll of at least 40,000 in Gaza. Blinken, on his ninth trip to the region since the conflict began, met Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Prime Minister Netanyahu on Monday, followed by a meeting with defence minister Yoav Gallant.

NEWS BOX

Jannik Sinner wins Cincinnati crown after hammering Tiafoe, gears up for US Open

Ohio. World number one Jannik Sinner secured a significant victory at the Cincinnati Open by defeating Frances Tiafoe 7-6(4), 6-2 in the final on Monday, August 19. This win not only marked his fifth title of the year but also positioned him as a top contender for the upcoming US Open in New York. Sinner, who has been battling a hip issue and recently missed the Paris Olympics due to tonsillitis, showed resilience despite his recent health struggles. The 23-year-old Italian started the match cautiously, struggling with errors and even limping after several points in the tight first set. However, he regained his form during the tiebreak, successfully neutralizing Tiafoe's powerful serve on set point to take the opener. "It was a very difficult week, tough week. I'm very happy about today's match...It was very



tough mentally... We both felt a lot of tension, but I'm very glad about the level I played, especially in the important moments," Sinner said in the on-court interview after the match. Now, for sure, it's important to recover, to be to be ready for New York," Sinner added.

Tiafoe, who has faced challenges this season, had three break point opportunities in the first set but failed to capitalize. Sinner took advantage of Tiafoe's struggles, breaking his serve early in the second set and extending his lead to 4-1 with a forehand winner up the line. Sinner then sealed the match with an unreturnable serve on match point.

This victory at the Masters 1000 event in Cincinnati is particularly significant for Sinner, as it follows his Grand Slam breakthrough at the Australian Open earlier this year. Sinner's win in Ohio also makes him the youngest champion at the tournament since Andy Murray in 2008.

With the US Open just around the corner, Sinner's performance in Cincinnati sends a clear message to his competitors. Despite recent setbacks, Sinner has proven that he is still the player to beat, and he now shifts his focus to continuing his success on the grand stage in New York.

No Lionel Messi, Angel di Maria in Argentina squad for first time in 11 years

New Delhi The transition period at the Argentina national team has well and truly begun. For the first time in 11 years, the football team squad will not include talismans Lionel Messi and Angel di Maria. Argentina announced their 28-man preliminary squad for matches against Chile and Colombia on Monday, 19 August. Lionel Scaloni's side did name all their top players, bar Messi, di Maria and Paulo Dybala.

Advertisement The last time both players were not named in the squad was in a 2014 World Cup qualifier against Uruguay in 2013, when the Argentine team had already qualified for the showcase tournament. While Angel di Maria has already announced his retirement from international football, Messi is reported to be recovering from his injury sustained in the Copa America Final.

Lionel Messi was left in tears on Argentina's



bench after being substituted due to an injury during the Copa America final against Colombia on July 15. The 37-year-old exited the match with a non-contact injury after chasing the ball on defence, limping off the pitch in tears. Earlier in the match, Messi had gone down with an apparent leg injury while attempting to kick the ball before it went out of bounds. He planted his right leg awkwardly and seemed to make contact with Colombia's Santiago Arias. Messi writhed in pain, clutching his lower right leg, and rolled over several times. Trainers attended to him for a few minutes before helping him to his feet. He walked slowly towards the sideline but later reentered the game. Messi had been dealing with a leg injury and discomfort throughout much of the tournament, causing him to miss Argentina's group-stage finale. He managed one shot attempt in the first half in the game. The talismanic forward has since missed his matches for Inter Miami at the Leagues Cup and Major League Soccer.

Stefanos Tsitsipas asks ChatGPT to roast him, tennis star shares hilarious response

New Delhi. Greek tennis star Stefanos Tsitsipas seems to have made the most of his time away from the game. After an early exit from the Cincinnati Masters, Tsitsipas sought the help of Artificial Intelligence to 'roast' him. Yes, you read that right. The World No. 11 took to social media to share the response of the AI chatbot, ChatGPT, when he asked it to roast him. The chatbot's response playfully highlighted Stefanos Tsitsipas's ability to serve up pearls of philosophy on social media and complemented his hairstyle. "Stefanos Tsitsipas: the guy who spends more time philosophizing on Twitter than actually serving up a solid second serve. He's the only player who can turn a simple changeover into a TED Talk on Greek mythology and still come back to the court with his shoelaces untied. Maybe if he spent less time perfecting his Instagram captions and more time working on his backhand slice, he'd have a few more trophies by now. But hey, at least, his hair



game is winning, even if his forehand occasionally forgets what direction it's supposed to go," the AI chatbot said, according to the tennis player. Tsitsipas's social media post led to more funny responses with several of his fans appreciating his sense of humour. Stefanos Tsistipas has been struggling to emulate his best in the ongoing season. The former Australian Open and French Open runner-up was knocked out in the second round of Cincinnati Masters after a controversial match against Jack Draper.

Tsitsipas reached the quarter-final of the French Open, but he was knocked out in the second round of the Wimbledon. Tsitsipas ended his collaboration with his father Apostolos as his coach earlier in the month.

BBL 14: Retired David Warner set to play full season of Big Bash for first time

Former Australia batter David Warner has committed to his first full Big Bash League season after rejoining Sydney Thunder on a 2-year deal, after retiring from international cricket. Warner will be playing alongside other Australian cricket stars in BBL 14.



New Delhi. David Warner has committed to playing his first full Big Bash League (BBL) season after signing a two-year deal with the Sydney Thunder. The former Australian opener, who retired from international cricket earlier this year, will don the lime green for the entire duration of BBL14, marking a significant boost for the Thunder. Warner's previous stints with the team have been limited due to his commitments with the Australian national

team, but this time, fans will see him in action throughout the season. 37-year-old David Warner has been a key player for the Thunder since his BBL debut in 2011, where he made history by scoring the team's first century, an unbeaten 102 off 51 balls against the Sydney Sixers. Over the years, he has played ten matches for the Thunder, amassing 301 runs at an average of 37.62 and

a strike rate of 135.58. "I've always been part of the Thunder...I really liked the environment last year (at the Thunder), I gelled back with the boys and I just love playing cricket," Warner said on his decision to re-sign with the franchise. "The group of guys that we had last season really brought a lot of energy, we had a lot of fun on the field, but off the field we gelled very well together and this year, I think we can go a couple of steps better and play some play some good cricket. In addition to Warner, the Thunder will feature other prominent players, including England wicketkeeper Sam Billings, rising star Ollie Davies, and Warner's former Test opening partner Cameron Bancroft. Warner's availability for the entire season comes after his retirement from international cricket, allowing him to focus fully on the BBL.

Aryna Sabalenka thumps Jessica Pegula to clinch iconic Cincinnati Open crown

New York. Aryna Sabalenka showcased her formidable power and precision to defeat American Jessica Pegula 6-3, 7-5 and win the Cincinnati Open on Monday. This victory marks Sabalenka's sixth WTA 1000 title and sends a strong message ahead of the upcoming U.S. Open. Sabalenka, a two-time Australian Open champion, dominated the match with her powerful serve, dropping only nine points on serve and delivering 10 aces.



advertisement Despite some late jitters in the second set, she maintained control throughout the match. Pegula, who had been in excellent form after winning the Toronto Open earlier this month, struggled with her serve, committing five double faults. Her nine-match winning streak came to an end as she couldn't withstand Sabalenka's relentless pressure. "I want to thank my team -- we've been through a lot but we never stopped working, never

stopped improving ourselves and I'm really happy to have you by my side," Sabalenka said during her on-court interview after the match. The Belarusian secured the first break in the fourth game when Pegula netted a forehand, and she quickly built on that momentum to take the first set. In the second set, Sabalenka broke Pegula's serve in the

opening game with a series of powerful forehands. Although she faltered briefly, allowing Pegula a break point in the 10th game, Sabalenka quickly regained her composure, breaking back immediately and sealing the victory. With this win, Sabalenka will rise to number two in the rankings, solidifying her status as a top contender for the U.S. Open. She cruised through the Cincinnati tournament without dropping a set, including a victory over world number one Iga Swiatek, positioning herself as one of the favourites in New York after finishing as runner-up last year. Sabalenka's dominant performance in Cincinnati underscores her readiness to challenge for the year's final Grand Slam title.

Naseem Shah opens up on World Cup loss vs India: 'Could not put up with it anymore'

Naseem Shah opens up on losing against India in T20 World Cup 2024. Pakistan were hammered by fans and experts after their loss. Pakistan had failed to chase down 120 runs in New York.

against their arch-rivals in New York, failing to chase 120 runs at the Nassau County Stadium. The team was subjected to intense scrutiny after that game - one that essentially knocked them out of the tournament. In fact, Pakistan Cricket Board president - Mohsin Naqvi - had said that the cricketing structure needed major surgery after the way the team had played against USA and India. Shah, speaking to Cricbuzz ahead of their Bangladesh Test series said that at point of time, he felt that he could not take the criticism anymore. "Though I was not being targeted by the fans or the media, one cannot be satisfied and say I did my bit after your team loses. I am a person who wants to win. I get disappointed even when I lose while



playing at home or in my street. I play to win and the World Cup exit pained me a lot," the tearaway fast bowler said Cricbuzz in an interview. "People come up to me in restaurants and ask me why we lost. Even my

relatives have asked about it. I understand their sentiments are driven by social media and, as a player, all I can do is listen to them," he further added. Naseem however agreed that it was the hard losses and the criticism that motivated him to do better and make a comeback. "There are times when you feel that you cannot put up with it anymore. But, it also burns a desire for a comeback. People had many questions to ask and there was a lot of frustration in them, which is understandable. Now, we have an opportunity to win the hearts again by playing good cricket," the fast bowler concluded on the matter. Pakistan are playing 2 Test matches against Bangladesh. The first Test begins on August 21.

Ishant Sharma raring to make a mark in DPL: 'Need little more time to prepare'

UPDATED Purani Dilli 6 pacer Ishant Sharma is eager to get back on the field and showcase his skills in the ongoing Delhi Premier League (DPL) here at the iconic Shri Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi. Purani Dilli 6 is locking horns with East Delhi Riders on Tuesday and will meet West Delhi Lions on Wednesday. Ishant last played a white-ball match in IPL 2024 but is now looking forward to step on the field in the DPL. "Preparation for DPL has been good. I didn't get much time to practice after the IPL. Just a little more preparations for my franchise and I'll be ready to take the field in DPL. You all will see me bowling in the coming games for Purani Dilli 6," Ishant Sharma said in a statement. Ishant has been guiding the young players through his vast experience. The young lads of Purani Dilli 6 are making the most of their stay with Ishant

Sharma. "My message for young players is to keep working hard and believe in your abilities, this format might be cruel but if trust your abilities and work hard you can do wonders in any format," Ishant said last week. Purani Dilli 6's team owner Akash Nangia said, "Ishant Sharma brings a wealth of experience to Purani Dilli 6. His guidance and mentorship are invaluable to our younger players. Having someone of his calibre in the squad enhances the learning curve for the entire team."



Na Seats The, Na Bathrooms': PCB Chief's Accepts as Pakistan Stadiums Get Ready to Host 2025 Champions Trophy

Lahore, Pakistan Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi after a recent trip to Lahore for a visit of Gaddafi Stadium, accepted the vast difference in stands between stadium in Pakistan and other international venues.

Naqvi visited Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium to check the infrastructure and said the responsibility to improve the facilities, ahead of the 2025 Champions Trophy, lies with the PCB. He also pointed out the challenges the Pakistan board would face if the entire stadium were to be renovated. There was a world of difference between our stadiums and those in the rest of the world. In no way were they international stadiums; koi bhi stadiums internationally qualify kaar hi nhi shakta tha — na seats the, na bathrooms ar view asa tha ki aap 500 metre door se dekh rahe hai (none of them could qualify as international by any standard — there



weren't enough seats or bathrooms, and the view made it seem like you were watching from 500 meters away," Naqvi said. The Frontier Works Organisation (FWO) team is working day and night. We will make our stadiums one of the best in the world. Providing basic facilities in stadiums is our first priority," he added. The PCB chief remains hopeful that the Gaddafi Stadium will host some marquee clashes next year during the Champions Trophy. According to reports, PCB has allocated approximately PKR 17 billion for renovating cricket stadiums at their three main centers ahead of the Champions Trophy. Meanwhile, the ongoing renovation of the National Bank Stadium in Karachi has forced the Pakistan Cricket Board to move the second test against Bangladesh to Rawalpindi. The PCB said it did not want to interrupt the renovation work at the stadium because it wanted the venue to be operationally ready for the Champions Trophy in time. Pakistan is due to host the Champions Trophy from Feb. 19, 2025

Bangladesh Violence

Rashami Desai's

Reaction To Video Of Hindu Girl Being Attacked Viral

Bangladesh is in turmoil after former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled her country. The nation is currently in chaos due to violence and political instability. The minorities especially Hindus are at the centre of the atrocities by the majorities of the nation. Numerous TV and Bollywood celebs have reacted to the ongoing violence in Bangladesh. In the list of the actors who raised their voices against such atrocities, actress Rashami Desai is the new name in the list. Uttaran fame actress took the stand for a Hindu girl who was allegedly attacked and thrown in the pond. Rashami Desai shared a video of a Hindu girl who was allegedly attacked by the Muslims of Bangladesh. The screenshot of the story read that a group of Muslims caught a Hindu girl, insulted her and threw her in the pond. Angered by the post, Rashami Desai wrote, "Why humans are trying to become God or a demon? There is a lot to face in life. Karma comes back," with a

heartbreak emoji. The video was posted by a news channel named United India News.

Rashami, who hails from Assam, started her acting career in 2002 with the Assamese film Kanyadaa. She made her Bollywood debut with the romantic mystery Yeh Lamhe Judai Ke alongside Shah Rukh Khan and Raveena Tandon in 2004. The 38-year-old actress has also worked in several Bhojpuri films like Kab Hoi Gawna Hamar, Sohagan Bana Da Sajana Hamaar, Nadiya Ke Teer, Gazab Bhail Rama' and Bhojpuri films like Kangana Khanke Priya Ke Angna.

Rashami Desai made her television debut with the Hindi mythological drama series Raavan in 2006. She played the role of Rani Mandodari. She got her first big break with the serial Pari Hoon Main in 2008. She played a double role in the film. Rashami Desai was also the winner of the reality show Zara Nachke Dikha 2 and later participated in Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa, Comedy Ka Maha Muqabla', Fear Factor: Khatron Ke Khiladi 6, Nach Baliye, Bigg Boss 13 and Bigg Boss 15. She was last seen in the show Entertainment Ki Raat Housefull and the film JNU: Jahangir National University.



Vedang Raina Says Working With Alia Bhatt Is 'Confusing', Calls Jigra Co-star 'Polar Opposite' Of Himself



Alia Bhatt has been on a roll with back-to-back commercial and critical success. From Gangubai Kathiawadi to Darlings, Brahmastra to Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani, the actress has also managed to create a space for herself amid the international audience with Heart Of Stone. The actress will now be seen with Vedang Raina in Jigra. In a recent chat with GQ, Vedang opened up about working with Alia Bhatt. He said, "She's the polar opposite of me as an actor, and honestly, it's so confusing! Watching her, it's clear she's brilliant and makes a significant impact. I come in with extensive preparation, setting the mood with my playlist and sitting in a corner, immersing myself in the scene. Then, Alia arrives, and bam! She nails it in the first take, and I'm left amazed."

Vedang added, "She gets into character instantly, everything is sharp and precise. It's a testament to her professionalism after spending years in the industry. I've learned so much from her—lessons that are hard to quantify but are absorbed subconsciously. It's incredible how much you can gain from observing someone you admire." When asked how it was working with the Archie's actor, Alia Bhatt had earlier told News18 Showsha exclusively, "Vedang is just sublime. He plays my brother in the film. I am not going to say much about the relationship we share in the film, but I can definitely say that we had a very seamless, easy-going work relationship."

It was widely reported that Vedang and Alia will be playing siblings in the film. When asked about this, Vedang had previously told The Indian Express, "Everyone keeps asking me this, but I am not sure what it is about. It sounds very exciting to play a sibling to Alia Bhatt." Jigra is directed by Vasan Bala and is produced by Karan Johar. Alia Bhatt is also co-producing the film along with Karan.

Shah Rukh Khan Beams With Happiness As Anushka Sharma Sings 'Haule Haule' in Viral Video; Watch Now



Anushka Sharma, who made her stunning Bollywood debut alongside Shah Rukh Khan in 'Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi', continues to be a fan favorite. Interestingly, her last film, 'Zero', also featured SRK in the lead. As anticipation builds for her return to the big screen, a nostalgic video from the 'Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi' promotions has resurfaced and gone viral on X (formerly Twitter). The clip captures a charming moment where Anushka sings the beloved 'Haule Haule' song while Shah Rukh Khan looks on, unable to hide his smile. In the video, shared by a devoted fan, SRK playfully asks Anushka about her favorite song from the movie, to which she promptly replies, 'Haule Haule.' With an infectious smile, she begins singing the song and even performs its iconic hook step. As she encourages Shah Rukh to join in, he adorably admits that he doesn't remember the dance move, but he can't help but compliment her, saying, "People say you dance wonderfully."

This heartwarming interaction is a reminder of the magical chemistry between SRK and Anushka, who have shared the screen in four films: Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi (2008), Jab Tak Hai Jaan (2012), Jab Harry Met Sejal (2017), and Zero (2018). Their on-screen pairing has been adored by audiences, with 'Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi' being one of the highest-grossing films of 2008 and a major milestone in Anushka's career. Released on December 12, 2008, the film remains one of Bollywood's most cherished romantic comedies, with both Shah Rukh's dual role as Surinder Sahni and Raj and Anushka's portrayal of Taani Gupta winning hearts. The film's music, featuring hits like 'Haule Haule,' 'Dance Pe Chance,' and 'Tujhme Rab Dikhta Hai,' continues to be a favorite among fans. As Anushka gears up for her next project, 'Chakda 'Xpress', a biopic of former Indian cricketer Jhulan Goswami, the excitement for her return is palpable. Directed by Prosit Roy, the film's release date is eagerly awaited. Meanwhile, SRK will soon be seen in King, which will reportedly also star his daughter Suhana Khan and Munjya star Abhay Verma.



Vicky Kaushal

Rashmika Mandanna

Confirm Film Teaser To Drop On THIS Date

The teaser for Chhava, featuring Vicky Kaushal as the brave Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, is set to release on August 19. The teaser was shown before Stree 2, and it has already sent fans into a frenzy. The first look is a visual feast with intense war scenes, offering a powerful introduction to Vicky as the formidable son of the legendary Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. The actors took to social media to share the title of the film and mentioned that the teaser will officially be out tomorrow. The teaser, that was attached to Stree 2, features intense war scenes, showcasing Vicky Kaushal in a powerful and commanding role. His portrayal of the Maratha emperor is both regal and convincing. While comparisons to Ranveer Singh's role in Bajirao Mastani may arise, Vicky's performance aims to stand out on its own. In Chhava, Vicky Kaushal takes on the challenging role of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, while Rashmika Mandanna stars as his wife, Yesubai Bhonsale. Set to release on December 6, the film wrapped up filming earlier this year and is already generating a lot of buzz.

Directed by Laxman Utekar, known for his work in films like Mimi (2021) and Luka Chuppi (2019), Chhava marks another collaboration between Utekar and Vicky Kaushal following their recent comedy-romance hit Zara Hatke Zara Bachke (2023). Chhava is a historical drama that revolves around the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the son of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. In the film, Vicky Kaushal is set to portray the character of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the eldest son of the Maratha empire's founder. On the other hand, Rashmika Mandanna takes on the role of Yesubai Bhonsale in the film. The film also stars Akshaye Khanna, Ashutosh Rana, and Divya Dutta in key roles. According to a report by Pinkvilla, actor Neil Bhoopalam has also been roped in to portray the character of a Mughal prince in the film.

