



OPINION 6

BY POLL RESULTS INDICATE A SHIFTING VOTER PREFERENCE

WORLD 8

BANDAGED TRUMP'S RAPTUROUS GOP CONVENTION DEBUT

MONEY 10

SENSEX, NIFTY CLOSE AT RECORD HIGH LEVELS

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HARDIK PANDYA TO LEAD INDIA IN T20IS AGAINST SRI LANKA 12 SPORTS

Spiralling Terror in Jammu claims four Army personnel

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A Captain of the Indian Army, along with three other soldiers, was martyred during a fierce gunfight with a group of suspected foreign terrorists in Jammu Dassa forest area, which shares its boundaries with Basantgarh in Udhampur, Anantnag, Keshwan in Kishtwar, and Pogal Paristan in Ramban district, late Monday night. It is suspected the joint team of security forces was lured into the deep forest area where they were ambushed by the well-entrenched group of the foreign terrorists. Kashmir Tigers, a proxy outfit of the Jaish-e-Mohammad, has claimed responsibility for the attack. The gruesome attack comes close on the heels of another deadly ambush on the soldiers near Badnota village of Machhedi in the Billawar tehsil of Kathua district on July 8 in which five soldiers were martyred and five others were injured. The Indian Army, however, maintained that a joint operation with J&K Police was launched in the general area of Urabaggi, 10 km North of Doda. At about 8.40 pm on Monday, the search party was able to establish



Security forces personnel during an encounter with terrorists in Doda forest area, in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir, on Tuesday PTI

contact with the terrorists hiding in the area, which is a thickly forested and mountainous area with restricted visibility due to low clouds and rain. In the initial volley of fire, four Indian Army personnel were injured, who later succumbed to their injuries. Additional troops and equipment have been

inducted to flush out the terrorists and the use of drones and other technical resources is being ensured. The bravehearts have been identified as Captain Brijesh Thapa, son of Col (Retd) BK Thapa, Naik D Rajesh, Sepoy Bijendra & Sepoy Ajay. Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh spoke to Indian Army Chief General Upendra

Dwivedi, who apprised him of the ground situation and ongoing operation in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda on Tuesday. In a post on X Defence Minister said, "Deeply saddened by the loss of our brave and courageous Indian Army Soldiers in a counter-terrorist operation in Urrar Baggi, Doda (J&K). My heart goes out to the bereaved

families. The nation stands firmly with the families of our soldiers who have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty. Singh said the Counter Terrorist operations are underway, and our soldiers remain committed to eliminating the scourge of terrorism and restoring peace and order in the region. Continued on Page 2

Mod marches on self-reliance in manufacturing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sustaining the momentum in achieving self-reliance in defence manufacturing and minimising import by defence public sector undertakings (DPSU), the Ministry of Defence has notified the fifth Positive Indigenisation List (PIL) consisting of 346 items. It means Indian industry will manufacture these items. Giving details of the list, officials said here on Tuesday the items include strategically-important Line Replacement Units/Systems/ Sub-systems/Assemblies/Sub-assemblies/Spares and Components and raw materials, with import substitution value worth ₹1,048 crore. The items will only be procured from the Indian industry after the timelines of indigenisation as indicated in the list available on the Srijan portal. The Ministry of Defence had launched the Srijan portal in 2020. On this portal, DPSUs and Service Headquarters (SHQs) offer defence items to the industries, including MSMEs and start-ups, for indigenisation. Continued on Page 2



Security personnel and locals near the residence of Jitan Sahani, father of former Minister Mukesh Sahani, after he was found dead, at Ghanshyampur in Darbhanga district, on Tuesday PTI

Spate of political murders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA/CHENNAI/NEW DELHI

In two separate ghastly murder incidents that have sent shock waves across Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and the political circles of the national Capital days ahead of Parliament Session, former State Minister Mukesh Sahni's 70-year-old father was found stabbed to death at his native home in Darbhanga district. Meanwhile, in southern India, a senior functionary of Naam Tamilar Katchi was hacked to death in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, on Tuesday. The killing of Balasubramanian, who is Madurai district deputy secretary of the NTK, comes days after the murder of Bahujan Samaj Party state chief K Armstrong in Chennai. Jitan Sahani, father of Mukesh Sahani, was allegedly found murdered at his ancestral

home in Bihar's Darbhanga district, police said on Tuesday. His body, with several stab injuries and cut marks on his chest and stomach, was found inside his room at his house in Biraul area this morning. A former Bollywood technician who heads a fledgling outfit Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP), Sahni was away in Mumbai when the information reached him, party sources said. Upon arriving in Patna, on way to Darbhanga, Sahni told reporters at the airport that he was telephoned by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and RJD president Lalu Prasad. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, in whose Cabinet he had served for about a year-and-a-half, called Sahni to offer condolences and ensure speedy investigation. Continued on Page 2



Two arrested in NEET leak case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Tuesday arrested two persons, including a key accused in the NEET-UG paper leak case, who allegedly stole the paper from a National Testing Agency's trunk in Hazaribagh in Jharkhand. With the two arrests, the total number of persons arrested in connection with cases pertaining to leakage, impersonation and other irregularities in the medical entrance exam has now reached 14. The CBI has arrested Pankaj Kumar alias Aditya, a 2017-batch civil engineer from the National Institute of Technology Jamshedpur, who allegedly stole the NEET-UG paper from the NTA trunk in Hazaribagh officials said. Kumar, a resident of Bokaro, was arrested from Patna. According to officials, the CBI has also arrested one Raju Singh who allegedly helped Kumar in stealing the paper and passing them on to other gang members, adding that Singh was arrested from Hazaribagh. Earlier this month, the CBI arrested the main accused, Rakesh Ranjan alias Rocky, from Bihar's Nalanda. Rakesh Ranjan is believed to be one of the key players in the NEET paper leak. The CBI set a trap and conducted raids at four locations in Patna and Kolkata to arrest Ranjan. The CBI has been utilising advanced investigative techniques to track down and apprehend those involved.

Government convenes all-party meet ahead of Monsoon session of Sadan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has convened an all-party meeting on July 21 ahead of the Monsoon session of Parliament which will start next Monday during which the full fledged annual Budget of the third term of the Narendra Modi-led NDA Government will be presented. The traditional "halwa" ceremony, marking the final stage of the Budget preparation process for Union Budget 2024, was held in North Block on Tuesday, in the presence of Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The customary ceremony begins with the Finance Minister stirring the "halwa" in the kadhai and then serving it to the colleagues in the Ministry. It is a tradition performed every year ahead of the Budget and it marks the final stage of preparing the plan for the upcoming financial year. Meanwhile, the Opposition parties under the INDIA Bloc too have convened a meeting of their Parliamentarians the same evening and another on July 22 morning ahead of the resumption of Parliament to discuss the strategy to raise the issues during the three-weeks-long Monsoon cum



The Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Nirmala Sitharaman, commences final stage of Union Budget 2024 with halwa ceremony, in New Delhi, on Tuesday

Budget session. The meeting has been called by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju, the Ministry said in a statement. This will be Leader of Opposition and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's first time at the customary session-eve meeting of the floor leaders from all parties if he attends it. Another large party in the Opposition ranks, Trinamool Congress, has regretted it won't attend the meet. The Monsoon session is scheduled to begin on July 22 and will conclude on August 12. The Union Budget will be presented on July 23. Finance Minister Sitharaman will

become the first Finance Minister in India's history to deliver seven consecutive Budgets. She will surpass the record previously held by Morarji Desai, who presented six consecutive Budgets between 1959 and 1963. While P Chidambaram is in the second spot, having presented the Budget on nine occasions, but in breaks which includes first in 1997, during the United Front Government led by Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda. Former President Pranab Mukherjee presented eight Budgets during his time as Finance Minister. Continued on Page 2

EC releases SOPs for EVMs

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Acting on a Supreme Court judgment, the Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday released a technical Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for checking and verifying the burnt memory of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), with expanded choices for candidates. It specifies that if the results of a mock poll tally with the VVPAT slips, then there is no tampering. The technical SOP includes the selection of EVMs from any polling station in an Assembly constituency, the mix and match of EVM units (BU-CU-VVPAT) from any polling station, connecting BU-CU-VVPAT in any sequence and the option of casting up to 1,400 votes in a mock poll in any sequence. In its letter to the Chief Electoral Officers, Chairman-cum-Managing Directors of Bharat Electronics Limited and Electronics Corporation of India Limited, the EC said the candidates would have the choice of selecting EVMs from any polling stations in the constituency and also any combination of the Ballot Units (BUs), Control Units (CUs), and VVPATs up to 5 per cent of the total. They would also be able to decide in which order they want the BU, CU, and VVPAT to be connected. The



order in which the units are connected does not have an impact on how they work. According to the SOP, the checking would be done by authorised and trained engineers from BEL and ECIL. The entire process would be carried out under CCTV cameras and in the presence of candidates or their representatives. On April 26, the Supreme Court had ordered the EC to facilitate checking and verification of the burnt memory or microcontrollers of up to 5 per cent of the Electronic Voting Machines (ballot units and control units) and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails of an Assembly constituency or Assembly segment of a Lok Sabha constituency on the written request of the candidates who come in

second and third in that seat. The EC wrote, "There can be varied technical methods to verify the fidelity of a firmware burnt into a microcontroller within confines of a research laboratory or a secured manufacturing environment. Checking and verification of any firmware burnt (fused) into the memory of a microcontroller can be verified in a public process by giving a vast number of ransom test vectors as inputs and evaluating the intended outcome(s)." The poll body said the eligible candidates can give choices of polling stations or serial numbers of machines from within the Assembly segment or constituency, subject to a maximum of five per cent EVMs used in that segment or seat to undergo check and verification

process. This will ensure the EVMs are picked up from across the constituency as per choice of the applicant without the involvement of a third party or officials in selecting or leaving out any particular machine. The choice to mix and match EVM units from any polling station in the assembly constituency has also been offered. If any applicant candidate selects any specific unit — ballot unit, control unit or VVPAT — of a particular polling station, he/she is not bound to choose other units of the same set used at that polling station. At least one ballot unit, one control unit and one VVPAT or paper trail machine makes up for one EVM. Instead, the applicant candidate can mix and match and give his choice of other units from remaining polled units used at other polling stations in the assembly constituency or assembly segment to make a set. Polled units are those which were used in the elections to cast votes. All EVM units will undergo self-diagnosis. Several electrical parameters will be checked, including the fidelity of the burnt memory and only self-diagnosed units will thereafter go for further check and verification. Continued on Page 2

Top babus tasked to push Modi's 100-day agenda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Top bureaucrats of all Central Government Ministries and departments have been directed to identify at least one impactful project to be commissioned in the first 100 days of the Government and implementation of action points, as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In a communication to all secretaries, Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba also said the 'whole of the Government' approach has to be adopted by the Ministries and departments in formulating and implementing their policies and schemes and



Rajiv Gauba File photo

concerted steps should be taken for India to become the third largest economy in the shortest possible time. He said Modi has emphasised that all Ministries and departments should identify at least one impactful project to be commissioned, one project to be grounded and one scheme or initiative to be

launched during the first 100 days of the new Government. "Ministries/departments to take steps for implementation of action points in 100 days' agenda prepared by them, after obtaining necessary approvals," the letter said. The secretaries were told that each Ministry and department will formulate initiatives and ideas for implementation as part of 'Panch Pran' (five resolutions) announced by the Prime Minister during his Independence Day address on August 15, 2022. "Each Ministry/ department to effect qualitative improvements in their grievance redressal systems to make them more sensitive, accessible and meaningful.

'Ease of Living' for citizens is a high priority for government. Ministries/departments to make sustained efforts for reducing compliance burden and decriminalising minor offences," the letter said. The Cabinet Secretary said a comprehensive exercise to be undertaken by all Ministries and departments to simplify rules and regulations and processes to ensure that these are consistent with the spirit of laws and policies. This may be ensured also while framing new rules and processes, he said. He said Ministries and departments should revamp their websites to ensure that they are user friendly, taking into account the global best practices. Continued on Page 2

Controversial IAS officer Puja Khedkar grounded

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Relieving her from its district training programme, the Maharashtra Government on Tuesday ordered controversial trainee Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Dr Puja Manorama Dilip Khedkar — who is under scanner for alleged misuse of power and privileges — to return to the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie. Acting on a letter received from the LBSNAA which recalled Puja "for further action", the Maharashtra Government kept her district



training programme on hold and directed her to join the academy on or before July 23. "It is informed that the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie has decided to keep your district training programme on hold

and immediately recall you for further necessary action. Therefore, you are hereby relieved from the district training programme of the State Government of Maharashtra.... You are instructed to join the academy at the earliest but not later than July 23, 2024 under any circumstances," Maharashtra's additional chief secretary (P) Nitin Gadre stated in a letter issued to Puja. Puja's recall to LBSNAA came on the heels of her transfer to Washim from Pune, amid allegations of manipulation of disability and OBC certificates for getting into the civil services. Continued on Page 2



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Cycle of terror

Terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir continue unabated, resulting in a heavy toll on lives

In yet another tragic incident four security personnel lost their lives in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), underscoring the persistent instability in the region. Four Indian Army soldiers, including a Major, were killed in action during an encounter with terrorists in Doda district. This incident highlights the ongoing challenges faced by security forces and raises concerns about the broader implications for peace and security in the area. Despite tall claims to restore order, the frequency and intensity of attacks remain alarming. The recent fatalities among security personnel are not isolated incidents but part of a broader pattern of violence that has plagued Jammu and Kashmir in recent times. The shift of terror incidents and targeted killings to Jammu, which had been peaceful for two decades, represents a significant and concerning development. Since 2021, following the abrogation of Article 370, Jammu has seen a troubling rise in terror attacks and targeted killings, leading to an alarming escalation in violence that has destabilized the region. The counter-terrorism strategies that proved effective in Kashmir may not be suitable for Jammu's unique geopolitical and social landscape. Although past strategic lessons can provide some guidance, the new wave of terror in Jammu requires a new counter-terrorism approach.

A notable change is the decline in stone-pelting and social unrest in Kashmir; however, the militancy and terrorist groups that remained active have now relocated to the Jammu region. These groups often receive support from across the border, complicating the security landscape. Despite significant military operations aimed at curbing militancy, the resilience of these groups remains a significant hurdle. The socio-political environment in Jammu and Kashmir also plays a crucial role in perpetuating violence. Historical grievances, political disenfranchisement, and socio-economic challenges contribute to a fertile ground for militancy. Many local youths, feeling marginalised, are drawn into the cycle of violence, further complicating the security situation. Addressing these underlying issues is vital for any long-term solution to the conflict. The loss of security personnel is not just a statistic; it represents the human cost of the ongoing conflict. Each casualty not only affects the families of the deceased but also has a profound impact on the morale of security forces operating in the region. The high casualty rate raises questions about the effectiveness of current strategies and the need for a re-evaluation of approaches to counter-terrorism and internal security. Following the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, there was a glimmer of hope, but that now appears to be diminishing. Jammu and Kashmir seems to be slipping back into its previous cycle of violence and persecution. To address the unabated violence in Jammu and Kashmir, a multi-faceted approach is essential. This includes not only robust security measures but also concerted efforts towards political dialogue and community engagement.

PICTALK



A vendor sells Capsicum at Azadpur Mandi, in New Delhi

Bypoll results indicate a shifting voter preference



KALYANI SHANKAR

This outcome raises questions about the stability of the Govt, as the BJP grapples with internal and external pressures to maintain its coalition

The recent results of by-elections for 13 seats in various states are essential for understanding what people think of the major political parties. One month after the 2024 elections, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi won a third term, the INDIA bloc's significant victory in securing ten of the 13 seats has shifted the country's politics. This positive result for the INDIA bloc could weaken the ruling coalition's power. The BJP won 240 seats but fell short of the 272-majority mark in the recent Lok Sabha elections. As a result, the party had to seek the support of NDA allies, which could influence its policy decisions and lead to compromises to maintain the coalition. This situation raises concerns about the government's stability. A boost to the Opposition could create unpredictability within the ruling coalition. Despite securing 240 seats in last month's Lok Sabha polls, the BJP fell short of the 272-majority mark. It had to seek the help of the NDA allies. This reliance could sway the BJP's policy decisions.

The BJP may have to compromise on specific issues to maintain the coalition. There is also a shadow of uncertainty over the government's stability. A substantial boost to the Opposition can shift the balance of power and create a sense of unease and unpredictability in the ruling coalition. The Election Commission conducts the by-polls when a legislative seat becomes vacant. There could be many reasons for a vacant seat. It could be death, resignation, disqualification, or expulsion of a sitting member. Elections are held to fill empty seats when a member of Parliament resigns or dies. Only voters from the area can vote, and there is no party vote. On Wednesday, by-elections were held for 13 assembly seats in Punjab (1), Himachal Pradesh (3), Uttarakhand (2), West Bengal (4), Madhya Pradesh (1), Bihar (1), and Tamil Nadu (1). The Congress,



TMC, AAP, and DMK are some of the parties that put forward candidates in the by-elections to test their strength. The INDIA bloc's win significantly boosted the Opposition. They have been a crucial test for the INDIA bloc as it faced the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the first electoral battle after the Lok Sabha Elections 2024. The regional chieftains in the Opposition performed exceptionally well. Trinamool Congress, a key player in the INDIA bloc, secured all four seats in Bengal, a significant victory. At the same time, the surging Congress won two seats each in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, further strengthening its position in these states. The DMK won one seat, and AAP captured Jalandhar West. These diverse outcomes hint at potential shifts in power dynamics, adding a layer of uncertainty to the current political scenario. Also, the BJP securing only two seats and an independent candidate winning in Bihar add a layer of complexity. Typically, the party in power wins the by-election seat. The TMC, DMK,



THERE IS ALSO A SHADOW OF UNCERTAINTY OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S STABILITY. A SUBSTANTIAL BOOST TO THE OPPOSITION CAN SHIFT THE BALANCE OF POWER AND CREATE A SENSE OF UNEASE AND UNPREDICTABILITY IN THE RULING COALITION.

Congress, and Aam Admi Party controlled their states. For the TMC, the results were a shot in the arm just a month after it had bagged 29 parliamentary seats, up from 22 in 2019. In Uttarakhand and Bihar, things were different. The candidates from the ruling parties - BJP and JD(U) - lost. Congress won two out of the three by-elections in Himachal. After the results, the party has 40 members again in the 68-member house. This will bring stability to our government. Bye-elections are a crucial test for political parties and their popularity. Parties gauge public sentiment and assess their support base. They often use by-elections to test campaign strategies, influencing future elections. If the ruling party wins seats in the by-election, it could increase its overall number of seats and have more influence on the government's stability and decision-making. The BJP still needs to improve its performance despite investigating the reasons for its low number of seats in the Lok Sabha elections. This raises questions and potential strains within the party. There are speculations about

a possible strain between the RSS and the BJP, which could negatively affect the RSS's support for the party, adding to tension and uncertainty in the ruling coalition. The strong performance of the INDIA bloc shows that power dynamics may be shifting. Despite their differences, this success is because the opposition parties continued to work together. Some analysts think that both factors led to their success. The Opposition's strong showing could weaken the ruling coalition's power and strengthen the Opposition's position. The future is difficult to predict at this stage. Winning and losing are part of the game in a democracy. The impact of these events will be more precise in the upcoming assembly polls in Maharashtra and Haryana later this year. The INDIA bloc's strong showing in the by-elections could strengthen the Opposition's position in these forthcoming assembly polls. They will help determine whether the Opposition gains strength or weakens.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AP and Telangana resolve issues



It is heartening that the chief ministers of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have, putting aside their political affiliations, met each other recently to amicably resolve long standing issues that have arisen after the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh. AP Chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu is has taken the initiative. Both the sides have agreed upon setting up high-level chief secretarial and ministerial dispute resolution committees that will address grievances. Contentious issues like water shar-

ing and power distribution are not easy to sort out but it is heartening that Naidu and Reddy have made a start.

Both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are claiming power payment "dues" from either side while Telangana appears keen to get more water allocation. Division of assets and liabilities running into a whopping 1.42 lakh crores, some that have been mentioned in the AP Reorganisation Act and a few that have not been stated, figured prominently in the chief ministers' meeting. Telangana's access to the long coastal corridor of AP may be an important issue. It's no wonder that allocation of some important landmark buildings of Hyderabad, that has exclusively become the capital of Telangana from June 2, have already occupied the attention of both chief ministers.

Ganpathi Bhat | Akola

words "NO REVENGE" to promptly bring back the situation under control. Even though Mandela was yet to become the President of the country, he led the nation in what a sane way guiding the society towards light by shedding all sorts of jingoism. Immediately after his release from prison Mandela said "I am not the only one who did not want revenge. Almost all my colleagues in prison did not want revenge, because there is no time to do anything else except to try and save your people". Yes, "Save your people" needs to be the only priority of a true leader, not "call of revenge". And Mandela indeed did walk the talk when Chris Hani got murdered rendering him to a statesman and torch-bearer of the society guiding all on the path of peace. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr had stated "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that", "We must learn to live together as brothers or we will perish together as fools".

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

ALCARAZ TRIUMPHS AGAIN
Madam — Winning is a habit, and Alcaraz has mastered the art, clinching the Wimbledon men's singles title for the second time against all odds. Spectators at the Centre Court were treated to vintage tennis in a packed stadium. Alcaraz set the ball rolling, winning the first two sets rather comfortably. The final lasted for 147 minutes, with the defending champion establishing a 5-4 lead and serving for the championship point. However, he committed a couple of double faults, and the set went to a tie-break. The number three seed secured his second Wimbledon title and fourth Grand Slam win with a straight-set victory. Djokovic could not recover from the fierce serve-and-volley game of the Spaniard. Alcaraz played calculated tennis on his fourth match point, ultimately winning the tie-break, set, match, and Championship.

C K Subramaniam | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Cultivating civic sense: The path to a better society

A lack of civic sense results in numerous societal issues, but it can be instilled through awareness and the enforcement of stringent punitive measures

Citizens are one of the four essential elements that define a country, and a responsible citizenry is undoubtedly an asset to any nation. Today, our country boasts state-of-the-art facilities, with concerted efforts being made to upgrade infrastructure, services, logistics, and public transport. Additionally, inclusive and integrated policies are being formulated, and comprehensive citizen-centric actions are being implemented. While the government's efforts are commendable, there is also a need for citizens to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining public goods and ensuring resources are accessible to all, especially the marginalised. Civic sense is the act of considering others in society and having a sense of responsibility towards public goods. It can be described as "a set of perceptions and attitudes that guides an individual's independent actions or actions within a group for the benefit of many and harm towards none." Conversely, a lack of civic



signifies disregard for fellow beings, depriving others of a fair chance of accessing what is due to them. Civic sense involves inculcated socially and ethically good behavior, conduct, and approach. Patriotism is deeply rooted among Indians, and we have a strong affinity for our civilizational values and ethos. However many of us are not adept at it, and civic rules are often flouted in some way or another. Examples of this lack of civic sense include vandalism, mishandling public property, disobeying laws, infringing traffic rules, evading taxes, prejudice, intolerance, indiscipline, sectarianism, and insensitivity towards the beliefs and prac-

tices of other social and religious groups. These behaviors create law and order problems and are rooted in disregard for social norms and appropriate behavior. Despite significant improvements in literacy rates in our country over the past few decades, people often remain casual regarding their societal responsibilities. Examples of this include dumping household waste on streets; destroying public property and so on. Such uncivil behavior is rampant and alarming, detrimentally impacting the collective well-being of society. It not only translates into social conflicts but also triggers a vicious cycle, where such behavior, often being an easier way out, is quickly emulated by many, making the problem difficult to address. India witnessed 461,312 road accidents in 2022, resulting in the tragic loss of 168,491 lives. Many of these accidents could have been avoided had people not flouted traffic rules. Similarly, problems arising from adulteration, corruption, and exploitation can be mitigated through a mindful

approach that prioritizes common interest over self-interest. Civic sense is crucial for quality of life and plays an important role in building the reputation of the country. Inculcating civic virtues is not a choice but is essential for addressing both perennial and new problems. Education plays a significant role in civilising people, but the fact that even well-educated individuals living in metropolitan cities often behave in an unruly and uncivilised manner makes it imperative that the desire to perform constructive and positive roles should come "from within." Elders need to set good examples for the young to emulate. Spreading awareness, rewarding good practices, and enforcing stringent punitive actions against law violations can be effective strategies for inculcating civic sense among the people.

(The writer is Assistant Professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, Delhi; views are personal)



GURDEEP KAUR

OPPOSITION GAINING GROUND

Madam — The recent state assembly bypolls held on July 10 may not have been critical for the survival of state governments in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. However, the results were highly anticipated as a potential indicator of shifting political winds, especially after the national elections where the BJP saw a reduced tally and the Congress-led INDIA bloc significantly increased its presence in the Lok Sabha. In these state assembly by-elections, the Congress and its allies achieved significant victories, winning 10 out of 13 seats. The ruling BJP secured only two seats, with an independent candidate winning in Bihar. While these results do not necessarily signal a nationwide trend, the BJP's below-par performance should be a concern for the central ruling party. The Congress and its partners in the INDIA bloc celebrated their success. Congress won two seats each in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, the TMC secured all four seats in West Bengal, AAP won in Jalandhar West, and DMK triumphed in Vikravandi, Tamil Nadu. Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi claimed these results reflect a changing political climate, suggesting the BJP's influence is waning. BJP leaders, however, dismissed these claims, pointing out that the ruling party did not previously hold the 13 contested seats. Bishal Kumar Saha | Murshidabad

MANDELA'S LEGACY

Madam — Kudos to Rajdeep Pathak for the article titled "Lessons in forgiveness from Mandela's life" (July 15). On 10th April 1993, the South African Communist leader Chris Hani was murdered by a far-right White. When the newly independent Blacks were seething in anger and were getting ready to massacre the Whites in retaliation, it took Mandela to utter just two firm



FIRST COLUMN

THE TRUE MEANING OF SUCCESS

Strive for achieving success that is based on contentment, humility, peace and respect



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Most of us want to be successful, but not everyone knows what success looks like. The concept of "success" can be a real subject of contention because everyone has their definition of success. Success has different meanings to different people, however, to define it in simple words, it can be said that success is very largely a matter of adjusting one's self to the ever-varying and changing environments of life, in a spirit of harmony and poise. So, is it simply the completion of the next task, another job well done, a promise kept, an exam passed, a medal won or a mountain climbed? Whatever we believe success to be, there is no doubt that it will have a profound influence on our lives.

The great philosopher Lao Tzu said - "When you are content to be simply yourself and don't compare or compete, everyone will respect you." However, what we see today in the so-called modern society is something way too different. If we were to follow the trends of the current world, then success would be measured by acquisition i.e. the more you have the more successful you are. Nowadays even our education systems are geared to producing people whose character and skills are shaped and developed to make more. Similarly, economic growth is the yardstick for national success based on the production and selling of more. And amidst all this, we continue to avoid the connection between the philosophy of more and the unprecedented levels of unhappiness, abuse and breakdown of human relationships worldwide.

Some of us say that because we have more telephones there is more communication between more people in more countries every day than at any other time in history. But communication of what? Electronic symbols, packets of data, cold information? This is far from human communication. We seldom nourish each other at the level of mind and spirit over a telephone. Do we? Off lately we have developed more intimate relationships with our techno-toys than we do with each other. So what exactly does it mean to be successful? At what level, in what context and by whose standards? If we were to live in this question for long enough it would challenge us at the deepest level. It would invite us to



review and probably revise our core values. But we don't want that challenge because it means we might have to change how we think and what we do. So we live instead in avoidance and denial while going with the flow of traditional belief, and then we wonder why both contentment and fulfillment are so elusive. Just imagine for a moment that every school student in the world spent one year discussing and debating the question, "What is success?" inside out, and upside down. What would our children tell us? Would we have the patience and the faith to listen and to learn from them?

Instead of imposing our inherited beliefs, definitions and conditions, would we have the humility to facilitate their discussion and allow them to tell us? Or do we intuitively know they would be wiser than us and therefore pull the carpet from under our comfortable feet? Would we be threatened if their wisdom defined success as a simpler, more considerate, caring, sharing, spiritual state of being and giving, and not a material state of acquisition, accumulation and possession? Would success be less and not more for them? If we were to give ourselves the time to explore this question, we would likely arrive at the fairly obvious insight that success is not a material thing, it is not something that can be possessed, it is a state of being. We might call it contentment, or happiness, or even peace because these are the deepest and most meaningful symptoms of success, but only when they are not dependent on anything outside ourselves. So, let us engage our energies in achieving success that is based on a strong foundation of values like contentment, humility, peace, and respect and inspire the next generation to do so.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist for publications; views are personal)

Imam Husain dared fighting terrorism



HASAN KHURSHID

The tragic events of Karbala, where Husain and his followers were mercilessly slain, serve as a poignant reminder of the values of justice and unwavering faith in the face of oppression



John Bradshaw once said, "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." Can man stand up to these conditions? "Man can but not necessarily with ease", Imam Husain, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad announced from the battlefield of Karbala (Iraq), on the fateful day of 10th Muharram, 61 A.H. (October 10, 680 A.D.). The pre-Islamic period in Arabia is known as the "age of ignorance". Scudding away from the noble attributes of human principles, the Arabs were treading the path of retrogression and abhorrence. Suffering from the worst evils and vices, these Arabs known as Bedouins (uncivilised rustics) were highly tentative of wrecking vengeance, group quarrels, and tribal animosities leading to bloody warfare that lasted for generations. In the pre-Islamic period, these Arabian Bedouins used to bury their newly born daughters alive out of ego. They had no sense of equality, humanity, decency and brotherhood. In this crucial moment, the Prophet of Islam Hazrat Mohammad brought the message of peace, tolerance, humanity, forbearance, liberty, equality, and brotherhood, assisting to weak and securing justice for the persecuted. The Prophet gradually started transforming the heartless brutes to humanise and turn towards peaceful life. The most notorious among them were the Bedouin tribals of "Bani-Omayya" (Omayyads). Omayyads did not tolerate the sojourn of humanity and peace. They violently opposed the Prophet's teachings. Omayya's grandson, Abu Sufiyan, son of Herb, unfurled the flag of revolt against Islamic teachings. They started a campaign of persecution on the Prophet, who was forced to migrate from his home in Mecca to Medina. As such, the year of the Prophet's flight from Mecca to Medina is marked as the beginning of the Hijri era of the Islamic calendar. Still, the Prophet Mohammad was not given any respite or relief. Mohammad was compelled to fight battles many a time. In Medina, the



AFTER THE DEATH OF MUAWIYA, HIS SON ACCUSED YAZID ASCENDED TO THE CALIPHATE SEAT OF SYRIA. HE WAS A HARDCORE TERRORIST AND HAD SURPASSED ALL HIS ANCESTORS IN PRACTISING CRUELTY, VIOLENCE AND CORRUPTION

Prophet established the system for administering the "rule of law" in the light of Islamic jurisprudence, under the command of his son-in-law Hazrat Ali Murtaza. Notwithstanding the bravery of Ali, Omayyads suffered a thorough collapse. The shrewd Abu Sufiyan played a trick to subscribe to Islam outwardly and the Prophet mercifully granted a quarter to Abu Sufiyan and his men. On the contrary, Mohammad realised his duties as Prophet were preparing his two beloved grandsons, 'Hasan' and 'Husain', sons of Ali Murtaza and Fatima Zehra, as perfect specimens of his attainment and imparted to their young minds all the characteristics of his high morality. After the demise of the Holy Prophet Mohammad, the school of Islamic thought, philosophy, culture and administration was shifted to the 'Caliphate' with temporal and ecclesiastical powers.

The first three caliphs were: Abubakar, Umar and Usman. The last caliph Imam Ali Murtaza, was assassinated by the henchmen of the conspirator and hypocrite Muawiya son of Abu Sufyan while Hazrat Ali Murtaza was prostrating before Allah in the mosque. After Ali's assassination, Muawiya with the might of a sword, usurped the seat of the Caliphate in Syria and declared himself as the self-appointed caliph. Muawiya, the first ruler of the House of Omayyads displaced the democratic Islamic rule by oligarchical and barbaric despotic rule.

After the death of Muawiya, his son accused Yazid ascended to the Caliphate seat of Syria. He was a hardcore terrorist and had surpassed all his ancestors in prac-

tising cruelty, violence and corruption. Yazid was a libertine and sinner to the extent that the barest mention of his objectionable character is taboo in this civilised society. Yazid was the mammon of unrighteousness, whose lust for power prompted him to beat society into the mould he favoured. Yazid's criminal behaviour indicated the extreme occurrence of vulgar, and inhuman innovations in the established Islamic values.

On the contrary Imam Husain was recognised throughout the Arab world for his excellence of behaviour, wisdom, compassion and piety. When Yazid occupied the erstwhile seat of the Caliphate, deceitfully usurped by his father Muawiya, Yazid by terrorising the citizens sought their allegiance to accept him as leader of the faithfully. He then demanded allegiance from Hazrat Imam Husain. Yazid was equipped with all the paraphernalia of power but so long, he didn't get the allegiance of Imam Husain, the grandson of the Prophet, he had no religious sanction to claim the Caliphate. He therefore demanded allegiance from Imam Husain to subscribe to him as the leader of the faithfully. When Yazid bargained hard for Imam Husain to choose between allegiance and death, Husain straightaway refused his allegiance, saying, "A person of my kind, can not accept the allegiance of a man of his (Yazid's) kind."

Husain knew that recognition of Yazid's immorality would permanently disfigure the "true faith" and a "pseudo-religion" would emerge in the guise of Islam. Had he encountered no opposition, Islam was bound to acclimatise to

the paralysing atonality from Yazid's degenerated symphony. Imam Husain was mercilessly assassinated in the desert of Karbala along with 71 family members and companions on the 10th of Muharram, 61 Hijri (October 10, 680 A.D.), after being kept hungry and thirsty for three days. Their heads were severed from the bodies and were mounted on lancers. Among the slain martyrs was Husain's six-month-old infant son, Ali Asghar, the buoyancy of whose innocent blood floated the sinking ship of Islam.

Ali Asghar's moon-like innocent severed head was too mounted on a lancer. Asghar's little body among 71 others was too trampled through the hoofs of office horses of Yazid's cavalry. The tents of Husain's household were torched. Daughters and grandchildren of Prophet Mohammad's extended family and the only surviving, ailing son office Imam Husain, were taken captives and paraded from Karbala to Syria, on bare backs of camels, where they appeared before accused Yazid, the wild beast in human form. 10th Muharram is universally observed by right-thinking and kind-hearted people irrespective of caste, religion or faith. "Never in the fight of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few", said Churchill. The event of Karbala, taking place on 10th Moharram, 61 Hijri, teaches us: Never to support injustice and oppression, no matter, how powerful the oppressor might be. No matter, what incentive, what threat you might be given.

(The writer is a legal journalist and author. The views expressed are personal)

Indian tourism industry: The challenges, resilience, and future prospects

As the Union Budget 2024 approaches, the Indian tourism industry has high hopes for increased support and strategic initiatives

Tourism has always been a significant contributor to the economic growth and GDP of nations worldwide, and India is no exception. Indian tourism has consistently shown remarkable growth, even though it has not been a primary focus of government policies. There have been improvements in infrastructure and connectivity, but these efforts have been limited. The Indian Tourism and Hospitality industry, faced unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sharp decline in both domestic and international travel led to a significant downturn. Despite these challenges, the industry began to show signs of recovery in 2023. According



DIVYA BHATIA

to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), 2023 saw 152 million domestic flyers, an increase of almost 24% from 123 million in 2022, and nearly 6% more than the 144 million in 2019. International travel also showed signs of revival, with 63.9 million international travellers to and from India in 2023, close to the 64.2 million seen in 2019, and 35% more than the 47 million in 2022. Consulting firm McKinsey & Company pro-

jects that India will become the fourth-largest domestic travel market in terms of spending by 2030. Additionally, aviation analytics firm OAG indicates that India is now the third-largest domestic aviation market, after the U.S. and China. The WTTC reported that this sector contributed INR 19.13 trillion (\$230 billion) to the Indian GDP in 2023, marking a nearly 10% increase over 2019 levels. Employment in the industry also saw an 8% rise, reaching 43 million jobs. This highlights the sector's resilience and its vital role in the national economy. They projects that the Indian tourism industry will continue to grow, with contributions to the GDP expected to reach INR 21.15 trillion (\$253 billion) in 2024. Jobs in the

industry are also projected to increase by 2.45 million, accounting for one in every 11 jobs in India. Despite positive indicators, the tourism industry has been largely overlooked in recent government budgets. This lack of support is concerning given the sector's significant contributions to the economy and employment. Substantial investments and strategic initiatives are essential to fully capitalize on the industry's potential and ensure sustained growth. As the Union Budget 2024 approaches, the tourism industry remains hopeful for greater support and investment from the government. **Industry Perspectives** Jyoti Mayal, President, The Travel Agents Association of

India (TAAI) feels that the allocation for overseas promotion and publicity has been drastically reduced to just Rs. 3 crore, down from Rs. 100 crore in the previous year. She says, "The industry eagerly anticipates increased budget allocations to enhance infrastructure, marketing, and skill development. Investments in connectivity, heritage sites, and eco-tourism can propel growth. A focus on sustainable practices, waste management, and conservation efforts aligns with responsible tourism. Simplifying visa requirements and encouraging visa-free entry for tourists visiting India can significantly enhance foreign tourist arrivals". Pradeep Shetty, President, Hotel and Restaurant Association Western India

(HRAWI) says that the tourism and hospitality, accounting for around 10 percent of India's GDP and should be declared a priority sector. "Granting infrastructure status to hotels and convention centers of project cost of Rs 10 crore and above is essential for attracting investments and accelerating growth in the hospitality sector. Abolition of the 18 percent GST category for hotels with room rates above Rs.7500/-, merging it with the 12 percent GST category, would boost both domestic and inbound tourism," he says. Riaz Munshi, President, Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) says the outbound tourism sector is hoping for positive policy changes. "One key

expectation is the reduction of GST rates on outbound tour packages, making international travel more affordable. Additionally, better Tax Collected at Source (TCS) policies are hoped for as compared to current TCS rates, which are causing financial and administrative problems," says he. Mr Rajiv Mehra, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) feels that the adequate funding is needed for promote tourism on global map. He says, "Ministry of Tourism should be given separate substantial funds for marketing and promotion for participation in overseas travel marts along with industry stakeholders, organizing road shows and for MDA Assistance to tour operators".

Mr. Ajay Prakash, President, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) feels that for all the lip service to the economic and social benefits of tourism, the industry remains sadly neglected. Mere infrastructure development is not enough - the sector needs specific incentives if it is to realize its potential. The travel and tourism industry puts forth its Wishlist every year before the Budget and, come the day, is invariably disappointed. "The highest GST slab should not exceed 10% and travel agents/tour operators should be eligible to claim a setoff. Aviation fuel must be brought under GST to make airfares more affordable," says he. (The writer is a travel influencer and writes on travel & tourism; views are personal)

Balaji has explosive game, we can't be written off just like that: Bopanna

PTI ■ PARIS

As if a fine wine, Rohan Bopanna is all fired up for his last hurrah at the Olympic Games. Not the one who would rail against circumstances or crib about not having the strongest of partners, the veteran Indian tennis player says his comrade N Sriram Balaji has enough firepower and the scratch pairing is potent enough to test the big teams in Paris. Had Bopanna been ranked outside the top-10, India would not have any representation in the men's doubles event at the Paris Olympics, starting July 26. The 44-year-old had to make a choice between Balaji and Yuki Bhambri and after consulting his coaches -- Scott Davidoff and Balachandran Mannikath -- he eventually settled for the more "athletic and agile" Balaji. "I really believe that when we go out there, we genuinely have a chance to win every match, whoever we play against. It's not like we're just going to be written off, I feel," Bopanna told PTI in an exclusive interview. Bopanna has reason to have that confidence in Balaji's ability to rise to the occasion. He had a chance to test Balaji at

the French Open where Bopanna was pushed along with Matthew Ebden by the Tamil Nadu player and his Mexican partner Miguel Reyes-Varela. Not only this, Balaji had a consistent run on the ATP Tour where he scalped a few big names such as Americans Rajeev Ram and Austin Krajicek -- both top-10 players -- at the Houston ATP 250 event on clay. With his German partner Andre Begemann, Balaji also defeated Austria's top-50 players Alexander Erler and Lucas Miedler. Balaji also showed that he can quickly adapt to conditions when he was asked to do the singles duty during the Davis Cup tie against Pakistan on grass. The rival was not of the highest quality but Balaji showed that he was willing to come out of his comfort zone if the team demands. "The idea is to go prepared, at least believe in as a team. That is what we're trying to do. With Bala, he definitely has the firepower to do well," Bopanna said. He also gave his reason for picking Balaji over Bhambri. "I felt Balaji, depending on the surface we're playing with, which is the clay, would have been the ideal partner. Currently, even if you look at



(Matthew) Ebden, who I'm playing with, he's somebody who's more agile, more explosive on that surface. "And for clay, especially, I need a partner who would suit me

better in terms of going by the surface. If it was a hard court or a grass court, maybe Yuki would have been the preferred choice." Bopanna though admitted that

it was not an obvious but a difficult choice since he has not played with either of them on the Tour. "Balaji can move well on both flanks? I think he is, given on

the clay court, he's definitely more athletic, given the two of us. Between me and Bala, I definitely need a partner who's more athletic, more agile. "Bala has similar capabilities as

Matthew. Bala would be fast, quick, swift like Ebden. But Ebden comes with a lot of experience and Bala hasn't played at that level much." It also means that Bopanna has to be leader of the team all the time. On the Tour he has Ebden to pull the team out of the pit if Bopanna is having an off day. In the past Olympics, he had illustrious teammates like Leander Paes, Mahesh Bhupathi and Sania Mirza. In Paris, it will Bopanna, who has to do the heavy lifting. But did he have any choice? "There is nobody currently in the country who has played that kind of experience as Matthew Ebden. So, no matter who I played with on the country, it would be the same scenario." Due to the considerable gap in their rankings in the past, Bopanna could never play with Balaji on the Tour. But they have planned to compete in a couple of ATP events, starting with Hamburg Open, to prepare for the Olympics. "This is my time at home basically to rest, recover and then come back into the circuit. But I thought it'll be nice to get to know whoever the partner I'm playing with. Try and work and at least try and prepare better than what we have done before

maybe." As the discussion veered over Balaji's game and how he compliments him, Bopanna had a good things to say about his partner. "His serve is definitely a big strength. He's got a powerful shot there. Which definitely helps in the doubles game. No question on it." Bopanna also said that they don't just want to show up and get back. They consider themselves worthy of a medal. "Every athlete who goes into Olympics wants to win a medal, right? There is 100 percent that belief. Everybody wants to do better than the previous time. There's no question on it, right? That's how life is. You want to do better. You want to keep going higher and higher. "Nobody can tell you what can happen. But the preparation going into the games is what really matters. "This time I was even listening that they have a fantastic medical team there to help the recovery, help the sports science, which is the first time ever, which is amazing. This is what is the progress already for what athletes can get and really see and make a difference," he signed off. Tennis events at Paris Olympics start on July 27.

Olympic tennis players return to red clay of Paris' Roland Garros after Wimbledon's grass

AP ■ PARIS

The competition surface doesn't change for most Olympic sports. A pool's a pool. A track's a track. A wrestling mat's a mat. And so on. Tennis? That's a whole other story, with tournaments contested on clay, hard or grass courts -- and now there's a shift for the Paris Games. For the first time in more than 30 years, the tennis competition at an Olympics will be held on red clay, which means players who recently made the adjustment from the dirt at the French Open in early June to grass at Wimbledon in early July will need to reverse course again in short order. The "terre battue" at Roland Garros used for the French Open hosts Olympic matches starting on July 27 -- two weeks after Wimbledon wrapped up with singles titles for Barbora Krejickova of the Czech Republic and Carlos Alcaraz of Spain -- and the transition back to that site is more concerning to some athletes than others. "That'll definitely be interesting. But everyone's kind of doing it. We'll all be in the same boat," said Jessica Pegula, an American ranked in the top 10 who is expected to play singles, women's doubles with U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff and perhaps mixed doubles, too. "I usually don't struggle too much with switching. And I like how the courts play there. It might be easier than some other places we play on clay. When the weather is warm in Paris, it plays pretty true. There's a good speed. There's not a lot to get used to." For her, maybe. "It's going to be the first time for me, going from grass to clay," said Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan, the 2022 Wimbledon champion and a semifinalist there this month. "It's not easy. Physically, it's not easy, (or) mentally." One additional factor on



some players' minds: There will be another brief turnaround after the Olympics to prepare for the move to the hard courts ahead of the U.S. Open, which starts in late August. That's less than a month after the medals are awarded in France. "It's awful for the schedule," said Taylor Fritz, Pegula's teammate for the United States and someone who just reached the quarterfinals at the All England Club. "It makes absolutely no sense. It screws everything up, for sure." Tennis becomes a different sport, in some key ways, depending on where it's being played. "You have to adapt to it. ... It's going to be weird, obviously, going back on the clay quickly," said Cam Norrie, who will represent Britain at the Olympics, "but we're changing surface and changing variables all the time." Clay is softer and slower, which can dull the power on serves and groundstrokes and create longer exchanges, putting a premium on stamina, while the grittiness can magnify the effect of heavy topspin. Grass is speedier and balls bounce lower. Hard courts tend to produce truer, midrange

bounces and generally will reward those who go for point-ending shots. The biggest difference among them might be the footwork. Clay requires sliding. Grass is more about choppy steps, to avoid slipping. Hard courts generally do not cause as many falls as either of the others. "For a clay-court player, the adjustment's not that hard," 1989 French Open champion Michael Chang said. "For (people) that have grown up playing on the surface, you just know the surface so well." So someone like Iga Swiatek, who has won four of the past five French Opens, should feel comfortable and confident on clay, by far her best surface. The same goes, of course, for Rafael Nadal, a 14-time champion at Roland Garros. Novak Djokovic has won at least three Grand Slam titles at each of the sport's biggest events, the only man to do so, and the adjustments required come rather naturally to him. Then again, Alcaraz, whose title at Roland Garros this year made him, at 21, the youngest man to win a major trophy on clay, hard and grass courts, had this to say about going from London to Paris: "It's not easy to change surfaces in just a week.

Messi loses fitness battle at Copa America, puts goal of playing 6th World Cup on hold

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

Lionel Messi cried uncontrollably after he exited from a Copa America final before fulltime for the first time in his career. Beyond the severe pain in his right ankle on Sunday night in Miami Gardens, the tears on the face of Argentina's captain showed a deeper anguish. Despite winning the title in one of his "last battles," as Messi described this Copa, the 37-year-old superstar did not pass the fitness test that could have opened the way for him to play his sixth World Cup in 2026. Argentina successfully defended its South American title with a hard-fought 1-0 extra-time win against Colombia. Messi left the pitch in Hard Rock Stadium in the 64th minute, breaking down without being touched. The Copa was Messi's first major tournament since leaving European soccer to play in the less competitive Major League Soccer in the US. Still, he has missed several games over the last year for his Inter Miami club and Argentina due to muscle issues. Messi felt muscular pains in his right leg in the second group match against Chile, which sidelined him from the



following game against Peru. He did not deliver an impressive performance in the quarterfinals against Ecuador and missed his chance in the penalty shootout. In the semifinal victory over Canada, he scored his only goal in the tournament in the 2-0 win. With a limp, Messi celebrated his second Copa title in modest fashion on the field. The injury still hurt the star on Monday. "One more," he said on his social media

channels. Messi did not speak to the media after the injury, and Argentina did not give details about the damage. Messi's farewell to the national team is still on hold, but there's other players aged above 35 who are likely to have played their last major international tournament; winger Ángel Di María (36), defender Nicolás Otamendi (36), and substitute goalkeeper Franco Armani (37).

Argentina does have up-and-coming players and a squad averaging 28 years of age when the veterans are not counted. That is partly why it held strong against Colombia despite the absence of its star for 56 minutes of play. "I don't know whether we marked an era, but this team never ceases to surprise. It recovers from difficulties," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "When (Messi) leaves, the team multiplies with the one that comes in and we play better in a different way." Young talents such as Alejandro Garnacho, Valentín Carboni, Thiago Almada, Claudio Echeverri and Valentín Barco are not to be compared with the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner, but they can help Argentina remain competitive when it defends the World Cup in 2026. Key squad members such as goalkeeper Emiliano Martínez, defender Cristian Romero, midfielder Rodrigo de Paul and striker Lautaro Martínez are likely to remain. Argentina will return to action in September in World Cup qualifying against Chile and Colombia. The Argentines lead South America. That international window will give more hints about whether Messi's legend will go on or stop at Sunday's title.

Nagal attains career-high ATP ranking of 68

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympic-bound Sumit Nagal continued his ascent in the ATP singles chart, climbing to a career-high ranking of 68. The 26-year-old rose five spots in the latest ATP ranking list released on Monday. His previous best was 71. Nagal thus moves past former world No. 71 Sashi Menon to become the fourth highest-ranked Indian man since 1973. Vijay Amritraj (ranked 18th in 1980), Ramesh Krishnan (ranked 23rd in 1985) and Somdev Devvarman (ranked 62nd in 2011) are the only other Indian players who have



held a higher rank than Nagal. A string of impressive results in recent times has not only helped Nagal improve his ranking but also make the cut for singles event at the Paris Games. Nagal, who will be the sole Indian in the men's singles

event at the Paris Olympics, has so far logged 779 ATP points. The year began with a win against Alexander Bublik, the 31st seed from Kazakhstan at the Australian Open. He also competed at the French Open and Wimbledon. He had won the men's singles crown at the Heilbronn Neckarcup 2024 Challenger event in Germany earlier this month and the Chennai Open in February. Nagal, who is currently the best-ranked Indian singles player, has won four ATP Challenger titles since 2023 and Heilbronn was his fourth title on clay.



Gareth says he will step down as England manager

AP ■ LONDON

After eight years, four tournaments and two finals, Gareth Southgate announced he was stepping down as England manager on Tuesday, saying it was "time for change." Sunday's 2-1 loss to Spain in the European Championship final proved to be his last game in charge of the national team. "As a proud Englishman, it has been the honour of my life to play for England and to manage England. It has meant everything to me, and I have given it my all," he said. "But it's time for change, and for a new chapter." Southgate's contract was due to expire this year and his announcement comes after months of uncertainty surrounding his future. Mikel Oyarzabal's 86th-minute winner in Berlin was a painful way to end his reign after he transformed the fortunes of England's underperforming national team. Hired in 2016, he led England to back-to-back finals at the Euros and to the semifinals of the World Cup in 2018. But, ultimately, he was unable to end the nation's decades-long wait for a first major trophy since the World Cup in

1966. "Gareth has made the impossible job possible and laid strong foundations for future success. He is held in the highest regard by the players, the backroom team, by everyone at the FA and across the world of football," said Mark Bullingham, chief executive of the English Football Association. Southgate said before the European Championship that it would likely be his last tournament if England did not win. During it, he faced fierce criticism for the team's early performances and some fans throw plastic beer cups towards him at the end of the 0-0 draw with Slovenia in the group phase. But he achieved what no other England manager has by leading his team to two finals, including the first final on foreign soil. "We look back at Gareth's tenure with huge pride - his contribution to the English game, including a significant role in player development, and in culture transformation has been unique. However, it is his record of winning tournament games which is most extraordinary," Bullingham said.

On incredible day, Mbappé welcomed by Real Madrid fans at packed Santiago Bernabeu

AP ■ MADRID

Kylian Mbappé finally put on a Real Madrid jersey on Tuesday, fulfilling his childhood dream in front of a packed Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. Nearly 80,000 fans were in hand at the Bernabeu to welcome the 25-year-old France star during his official presentation as the club's newest player. After signing his five-year contract with the Spanish powerhouse alongside club president Florentino Pérez, Mbappé entered the stage set up at the Bernabeu to loud

cheers by the Madrid fans. Wearing the No. 9 jersey, Mbappé smiled broadly and waved to the fans who chanted his name, then embraced Pérez and former Madrid player and coach Zinedine Zidane, who invited Mbappé to visit the Spanish club for the first time when he was just a teenager. "It's incredible day for me," Mbappé told the crowd, in Spanish. "Since being a kid I dreamed about playing for Madrid and today I'm here. It means a lot to me." Mbappé's relatives, club officials and several former players were by the stage at the



Bernabeu, which had its roof closed for the midday ceremony in the Spanish capital. Kids linked to

Mbappé's foundation were also on hand. The record-15 European Cups won by Madrid were also on display on the stage where Mbappé was introduced. The message "Welcome, Mbappé" was shown on the large video boards at the newly revamped Bernabeu. Some of the club's most iconic moments were also shown while the song "Nessun Dorma" was played on the loudspeakers. Images of Mbappé's career were also displayed, as well as photos including Mbappé wearing Madrid's uniform as a kid and

posing alongside former club star Cristiano Ronaldo. Pérez called Mbappé's presentation a "historic act" for the club. "Today we welcome an exceptional player who today is fulfilling his childhood dream," Pérez said. "Today you are here because it's something that you wanted. Thank you for making a great effort to be able to wear this white jersey." Mbappé's presentation came after he played at the 2024 European Championship, where France lost to eventual champion Spain in the semifinals.

