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NEW DELHI

THE Indian men's football team slumped to its lowest ranking in nine years as it dropped six places to 133rd

INDIA 133RD IN FIFA RANKINGS, WORST IN NINE YEARS

in the FIFA chart issued on Thursday, courtesy two losses in June.

India lost to Thailand (0-2) in an international friendly on June 4 before suffering a defeat to lower ranked Hong Kong (0-1) in an Asian Cup qualifying round match, leading to head coach Manolo Marquez's parting of ways with

the All India Football Federation (AIFF).

The last time the Indian team had a worse ranking was in December 2016 when it was placed at 135. India's best ever ranking was 94 in February 1996.

The Indian team currently has 1113.22 rating points as against 1132.03 previously. It occupies the 24th place

among 46 Asian countries led by Japan (17th rank).

Nothing has been going right for the Indian men's team. The loss against Hong Kong has put the side in a difficult position in its bid to qualify for the 2027 Asian Cup.

The team logged just one win from its last eight matches under Marquez's

tutelage, the lone victory coming against Maldives in March. This year, India have so far played four matches, out of which they have won one, drew another, and lost two. The poor results prompted the return of former skipper and iconic striker Sunil Chhetri to the squad but that has done little to improve the team's

fortunes. India's next scheduled international match is an away fixture against Singapore in the third round of Asian Cup qualifiers in October. World champions Argentina leads the overall chart of 210 countries, followed by Spain, France, England, Brazil, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Croatia.



Double strike from Nitish leaves England at 83 for 2

Ollie Pope could have been dismissed in the very next ball but Gill could not latch on to a tough chance at gully

LONDON

INDIA all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy struck twice in an eventful over to leave England at 83 for two at lunch on day one of the Lord's Test here on Thursday.

On expected lines, Prasidh Krishna made way for Jasprit Bumrah as the sole change in the Indian playing eleven.

Ben Stokes, only for the second time in the Bazball era, opted to bat in a home game.

The trio of Bumrah, Akash Deep and Mohamed Siraj did ask a few questions but England opening duo of Ben Duckett (23 off 40) and Zak Crawley (18 off 43) survived the first hour of play, reaching 39 for no loss in 13 overs.

Due to the unique slope, the Indian bowlers understandably took some time to get used to the up and down nature of the ground while running in.

Bumrah bowled from both Pavillion End and Nursery End while Akash Deep, who took a match haul of 10 at



Edgbaston, bowled with the new ball from Nursery End.

Captain Shubman Gill could have brought back Akash Deep after the first hour, instead he gave the ball to Reddy from the Nursery End and he did not disappear.

The first breakthrough was a rather lucky one with Duckett gloving a short ball on the leg side to wicket-keeper Rishabh Pant.

Ollie Pope could have been dismissed in the very next ball but Gill could not latch on to a tough chance at gully.

The last ball of the over produced the wicket of

Crawley. It was a beauty that seamed away from length, inducing an outside edge on the way to the keeper.

Though the crowd capacity at the hallowed ground is little over 30,000, it seemed the whole of London was flocking to the venue with a sea of fans emerging from the St. John's Wood tube station close by.

Test cricket may be struggling for a regular attendance in some nations, but the sell out crowd in this series so far has reaffirmed the fact that the traditional format continues to thrive in this country.

Novak reaches a record 14th Wimbledon semifinal

LONDON: At least Novak Djokovic could laugh about it immediately afterward.

Yes, he took what he called a "nasty" and "awkward" fall on his second match point at Wimbledon on Wednesday. Yes, he slid into the splits and ended up face-down on the Centre Court grass. And, yes, those sorts of things aren't ideal for a 38-year-old seeking an unprecedented 25th Grand Slam title.

Still, Djokovic dusted himself off and took the next two points, reaching the semifinals at the All England Club for a men's-record 14th time with a 6-7 (6), 6-2, 7-5, 6-4 victory over No. 22 seed Flavio Cobolli to set up a showdown against No. 1 Jannik Sinner.

"Obviously, (my) body is not the same today like it was before," Djokovic said at his news conference, "so I guess the real impact or effect of what happened, I will feel tomorrow. So let's see. I'm hoping in the next 24, 48 hours, that the severity of ... what happened is not too bad, that I'll be able to play at my best and free of pain in two days."

That's when he will take on three-time major champion Sinner, who didn't play like someone dealing with an injured right elbow while using terrific serving and his usual booming forehand to beat 10th-seeded Ben Shelton 7-6 (2), 6-4, 6-4.

"It's going to take the best of me at the moment to beat Jannik. I mean, I know that," said Djokovic, who has lost his last four meetings with Sinner, including in the French Open semifinals last month.

Djokovic is 2-0 against Sinner at Wimbledon, eliminating him in the 2023 semifinals and 2022 quarterfinals.



Against Cobolli — like Sinner, a 23-year-old from Italy — the late-match tumble was not the only thing that was far from smooth for Djokovic. He served for the opening set at 5-3 but got broken at love.

He later was a point from owning that set before first-time major quarterfinalist Cobolli came through.

Djokovic did stretches and breathing exercises at changeovers. He whacked his shoe with his racket after one miss in the fourth set. He seemed bothered at times by the bright sun above Centre Court.

He also showed off all of his considerable skills, accumulating 13 aces, holding in 19 of 21 service games, using a drop-shot-lob-drop-shot combination to take one point and limiting his unforced errors to 22 — half as many as Cobolli.

On Friday, Djokovic will try to reach his seventh consecutive final at the All England Club and get closer to equaling Roger Federer's men's mark of eight trophies there. The other men's semifinal is two-time defending champion Carlos Alcaraz, who defeated Djokovic in the 2023 and 2024 finals, against Taylor Fritz.

Sachin's portrait unveiled in MCC Museum at Lord's

LONDON: A portrait of the legendary Sachin Tendulkar was unveiled in the MCC Museum at Lord's before the start of the third Test between India and England here on Thursday.

The portrait, which has been painted by Stuart Pearson Wright from a photograph taken by the artist at his home 18 years ago, will remain in the MCC Museum until later this year and will then be relocated to the Pavilion.

"As the work progressed, so did Pearson Wright's approach, eventually ending with oil on abraded aluminium. The abstract background illustrates Tendulkar's timelessness, unrestricted by any era or specific location," a release said.

Pearson Wright has previously painted portraits of Kapil Dev, Bishan Singh Bedi, and Dilip Vengsarkar.

Tendulkar was quoted as saying, "It's a huge honour. In 1983, when India won the World Cup, it was my first introduction to Lord's."

"I saw our captain, Kapil Dev, lift the trophy. That moment sparked my cricketing journey. Today, with my portrait going up inside the Pavilion, feels like it's come full circle. When I reflect on my career, it brings a smile to my face. This is truly special." "Unlike the previous paintings, which were full-length, the portrait of Tendulkar is a larger-than-life image of his head and shoulders," the release added.

"The Lord's Portrait Programme has been running in its current



form for three decades, but MCC has been collecting art and artefacts since the Victorian period, opening a dedicated museum in the 1950s making it the oldest sporting museum in Europe.

"The Long Room Gallery is the oldest and most iconic gallery in sport. The Club currently houses around 3,000 pictures, nearly 300 of which are portraits."

Pearson Wright said: "It was clear that MCC didn't want this portrait to be in the same format as the previous Indian cricket portraits I made, so a fresh approach was taken with this one." "I decided on a composition which focused more on Sachin's head and also using a heroic larger-than-life size scale to give the painting a sense of gravitas and power."

"I have often painted a portrait with an abstract background, often a plain colour, rather than paint a rendition of an interior or exterior space. This is largely to give focus to the subject's features and to minimise a context which might define the subject in some way."

Principal, staffer held for menstrual check of students

MUMBAI

MAHARASHTRA Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has issued directives for stringent action against those responsible for the alleged stripping of girl students at a school to check if they were menstruating, Minister Girish Mahajan said on Thursday.

The minister told the legislative assembly that the CM has ordered a probe into the incident that took place at a private school in Thane district.

Mahajan said strict action will be taken against the guilty.

One-fifth of women, girls in south Asia abstain from daily activities while menstruating: Lancet study test

Congress' Nana Patole raised the matter in the Lower House, expressing concerns that such an incident could take place in a progressive state like Maharashtra.

Jitendra Awhad of NCP (SP) said the school principal involved is herself a woman. The police have arrested the principal and another staffer over the alleged stripping of

Maha CM Fadnavis orders probe after Thane school staff allegedly strip girl students to check for menstruation



the girls. Stressing that the police have already acted in the case, Mahajan assured the House that a probe would

be conducted into the incident and strict action would be taken.

Congress legislator Jyoti Gaikwad also demanded that those guilty should not be spared. She said facilities like sanitary napkin vending machines and water are necessary in schools.

The incident took place at the school in the Shahapur area of Thane district on Tuesday after bloodstains were found in its toilet, according to the police.

It sparked outrage among the girls' parents, who protested on the school premises on Wednesday and sought action against the management and teachers involved in the episode.

The police on Wednesday night arrested the school's principal and a woman attendant who allegedly stripped the girls, studying in Classes 5 to 10, and checked their private parts for menstruation, an official from Shahapur police station said.

A case has been registered against eight persons under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections 74 (assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) and 76 (assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to disrobe) and provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act

Six Naxalites held from Chhattisgarh's Sukma

The four told police that they planned to plant an IED in the jungles between Kottacheru and Gorkha villages to target security personnel but failed to do so due to increase in patrolling

SUKMA

SIX Naxalites were arrested from separate places in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district, a police official said on Thursday.

Kunjam Muka (37) and Madvi Muya (30), carrying rewards of Rs 1 lakh and Rs 2 lakh, respectively, were held on Tuesday from Pilavaya village under Konta police station limits, the official said.

"Muka was active as a Jananata Sarkar head under Konta Area Committee of the outlawed CPI (Maoist). Muya was its militia commander, he added. The two were involved in firing on security forces at Banda polling booth during assembly elections in 2023 and killing a civilian in Gangrajpad village in 2024," he added.

The other four were identified as Madvi Sukka (35), Sodi Chandru (28), Muchaki Lakhma (27) and Sodhi Deva (24), who are lower



rung ultras, the official said.

"They were nabbed on Tuesday between Etegatta and Gorkha villages in Bheiji area following a tip. We seized a tiffin bomb weighing 3 kg, five detonators, cordex wire and electric

wire. The four told police they planned to plant an IED in the jungles between Kottacheru and Gorkha villages to target security personnel but failed to do so due to increase in patrolling," the official said.

"Accidents have become a common occurrence in the country. Sometimes a train accident, sometimes a bridge developing cracks right after its inauguration. The country hasn't even recovered from the plane crash when news of a bridge collapse in Gujarat came yesterday. 12 innocent lives were lost," Kharge wrote on X.

"In the name of 'governance,' the BJP leadership and government, busy only with speeches and advertising, have crossed all limits of indifference. This is the result of a leadership crisis, rampant corruption, lack of capacity to run the government, and incompetence. We hope the people of the country are watching this and will give a fitting response when

Guj bridge collapse toll 15: Oppn glare on 'BJP's loot raj'

NEW DELHI: The collapse of the four-decade-old Gambhiram-Mujpur bridge in Gujarat's Vadodara district, which claimed 15 lives, has triggered a wave of criticism from Opposition parties.

Congress held the BJP-led state and central governments accountable, accusing them of negligence, corruption and misplaced priorities in governance. The party's president Mallikarjun Kharge condemned the BJP's handling of infrastructure safety.

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the time comes." The All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) also weighed in, demanding accountability and urgent infrastructure assessments across BJP-ruled states. "Every bridge, every road, every inch of infrastructure in Double Engine states must undergo immediate and thorough safety audits," the party posted on X.

Highlighting another incident in Rajasthan, AITC wrote: "After the deadly bridge collapse in Vadodara that claimed 11 lives, another glaring failure has surfaced. In Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu district, the road connecting Baghwali-Jahaj to NH 52 has been completely washed away by rain." The party alleged systemic corruption, saying: "Why does this keep happening? Substandard materials are used in critical infrastructure. Funds meant for public safety are siphoned off by local BJP leaders. Contracts are handed out not on merit, but in exchange for kickbacks.

Mukesh Ambani doesn't speak Marathi, try him: BJP to MNS

NEW DELHI: BJP MP Nishikant Dubey on Thursday slammed Uddhav Thackeray and Raj Thackeray amid the Hindi-Marathi language row, saying they only beat "poor people" for not speaking Marathi. Speaking to reporters, Nishikant Dubey said, "You beat up the poor. But Mukesh Ambani lives there, he speaks very less Marathi. If you have guts, go to him. Mahim has a large Muslim population. If you have guts, go there. SBI chairman doesn't speak Marathi, try hitting him."

Nishikant Dubey further clarified that his earlier statement regarding the economy of Maharashtra has been misinterpreted. He said, "There is something which I said and which has been destroyed - Maharashtra has a great contribution in the economy of this country... What I said was misconstrued by people. But what I am saying is that we too have a contribution in the tax paid by Mumbai or Maharashtra. This has nothing to do with the Thackeray family or Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha. What mines do you have? All semiconductor refineries are in Gujarat." Challenging the intent behind the aggression towards Hindi-speaking people, Dubey added, "If you have the courage to beat Hindi speakers, then beat those who speak Urdu, Tamil, and Telugu too. If you're such a 'boss', come out of Maharashtra—come to Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu. Tumko patak patak ke maarengi..."



remark. Raj had reportedly instructed his party workers to "beat but don't make a video," referring to individuals unwilling to speak in Marathi. In response, Dubey had said, "What are you doing, whose bread are you eating? You people are surviving on our money. What kind of industries do you have? We have all the mines in Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha. What mines do you have? All semiconductor refineries are in Gujarat." Challenging the intent behind the aggression towards Hindi-speaking people, Dubey added, "If you have the courage to beat Hindi speakers, then beat those who speak Urdu, Tamil, and Telugu too. If you're such a 'boss', come out of Maharashtra—come to Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu. Tumko patak patak ke maarengi..."

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