

**OPINION 6**

THE UNYIELDING SPIRIT OF MILITARY FAMILIES

**WORLD 8**

STRIKES ON GAZA KILL 18; TWO DEAD IN TEL AVIV

**MONEY 10**

RBI LIKELY TO KEEP INTEREST RATE UNCHANGED AT 6.5%: EXPERTS

Published From  
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR  
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH  
DEHRADUN HYDRABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol.20 Issue 213  
\*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

BHUBANESWAR, MONDAY AUGUST 5, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4

Established 1864

# the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

SEN FALLS TO AXELSEN IN SEMIS  
12 SPORTS



## Fresh violence rocks Bangladesh



People participate in a rally against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Government demanding justice for the victims killed in the recent countrywide deadly clashes, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Sunday AP/PTI

**PTI ■ DHAKA**  
At least 91 people, including 14 policemen, were killed and hundreds injured on Sunday in fierce clashes between protesters demanding Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation and the ruling party supporters in different parts of Bangladesh on the first day of the non-cooperation movement over a Government jobs quota system. The clashes broke out this morning when protesters attending the non-cooperation programme under the banner of the Students Against Discrimination with the one-point demand of the Government's resignation faced opposition from the supporters of the Awami League, Chhatra League, and Jubo League activists. So far, 91 people have been killed in day-long clashes across the country, the leading Bengali-language daily Prothom Alo reported. According to the police headquarters, 14 policemen have been killed across the country. Of them, 13 were

cooperation programme under the banner of the Students Against Discrimination with the one-point demand of the Government's resignation faced opposition from the supporters of the Awami League, Chhatra League, and Jubo League activists. So far, 91 people have been killed in day-long clashes across the country, the leading Bengali-language daily Prothom Alo reported. According to the police headquarters, 14 policemen have been killed across the country. Of them, 13 were

in the name of protest are not students but terrorists and asked people to suppress them with a firm hand. "I appeal to the countrymen to suppress these terrorists with a firm hand," she said. Hasina called a meeting of the National Committee on Security Affairs at Ganabhaban, the paper reported citing sources from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). The meeting was attended by the chiefs of the Army, Navy, Air Force, police, RAB, BGB, and other top security officers. The meeting came as renewed violence spread to several parts of the country. The Government has announced a three-day general holiday on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday to ensure public safety amid the ongoing violent protests across the country. Giving details, the paper said at least five people were killed in Feni, 22 including 13 policemen in Sirajganj, four in Kishoreganj, four in Dhaka, four in Bogura, three in Munshiganj, four in Magura, three in Bhola, four in Rangpur, three in Pabna, four in Sylhet, three in Cumilla, one in Joypurhat, one in Habiganj and one in Barisal. Six Awami League leaders and activists were beaten to death and several others injured in a clash between the ruling party supporters and protesters in Narsingdi, the paper reported.

## Team Hockey keeps India's Olympics Gold dream alive

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
If Tokyo 2020 was a resurrection, Paris 2024 is turning out to be a reaffirmation that the Indian hockey team is well and truly on its way to becoming a global giant again. Down to 10 men for close to 40 minutes in a 60-minute game, Harmanpreet Singh's men didn't just hold off Britain 1-1 in regulation time, they outplayed the old foes 4-2 in the ensuing shootout to enter the Olympic semifinals for a second successive edition. The win was special in more ways than one because an average hockey fan in India is not used to seeing the team show such tenacity in a high-pressure situation. The bronze that these men pulled off in Tokyo was a first in 41 years. It was an emotional revival for a sport, whose glorious past of eight Olympic gold medals, the last of which came in 1980, had become a source of nostalgia and grief in equal measure. The win in Paris is a reassurance that the side is on the right track. Little wonder then that the hockey fraternity as well as the average man on the street was left in awe of mental toughness and unity that India showed on Sunday. "Words cannot express the sort of tenacity, fighting spirit and unity these players have displayed today. Every



India's captain Harmanpreet Singh (C) celebrates a goal with others during the Hockey Men's Quarterfinal match between India and Great Britain at the 2024 Summer Olympics, at Yves-du-Manoir Stadium, in Colombes, France, on Sunday PTI

pitch, India could not play scoop balls, a strategy that worked for the side in previous matches, but it managed to escape without getting hurt. It all boiled down to how Sreejesh would perform and the veteran goalkeeper did not disappoint, blocking the third and fourth attempts by Connor Williamson and Phillip Ropper after the score was tied 2-2 in the shootout. James Albrey and Zach Wallace had scored earlier for Great Britain while skipper Harmanpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Lalit Upadhyay and Rajkumar Pal sounded the board for India. "We had no option but to keep the score tied till the end. We focussed on defence, we played to a structure and today communication between the players was pretty good. It was a team effort," Harmanpreet said. The skipper said they had to forget the red card and move forward. "We could not change what had happened. It was a team effort, it was our best defence, playing with 10 men, that was a hard part." "At this stage, we can't afford to be nervous, no matter who we play or we play extra man or not. That mind-set will remain in the next match." Harmanpreet acknowledged Sreejesh's role in the win but insisted that it was not a one-man show.



Officials and others during a search and rescue operation following a recent cloudburst, in Shimla, on Sunday PTI

## Death toll rises to 11 in Himachal cloudbursts

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SHIMLA**  
With the recovery of two more bodies from Mandi district, the death toll due to flash floods triggered by cloudbursts in three districts of Himachal Pradesh has increased to 11. Over 40 people are still missing after a series of cloudbursts occurred in Kullu's Nirmand, Sainj and Malana, Mandi's Padhar and Shimla's Rampur subdivision on the night of July 31 and wreaked havoc. The bodies of Sonam (23) and three-month-old Manvi were recovered from Rajbhan village in Padhar area of Mandi district, officials said. The rescue operations are still underway and sniffer dogs, drones and other equipment are also being used to locate the missing people. According to officials, 410 rescuers from teams of the Army, NDRF, SDRF, ITBP, CISF, Himachal Pradesh Police and home guards are involved in the hunt. Over 30 people are missing in Samej village in Gram panchayat Sarpara in Rampur subdivision. More machines have been deployed and the rescue operations are going in full swing. As the flow of water has reduced, now machines have reached the spot where the missing persons could be possibly found, Up-pradhan Sarpara C L Negi said. The State Government on Friday announced an immediate relief of ₹50,000 for the victims and said they would be given ₹5,000 monthly for rent for the next three months along with gas, food and other essential items. The State has suffered a loss of ₹662 crore since the onset of monsoon on June 27 till August 3.

## In BBSR 2 cars of conman who cheated multiple women seized

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
The Commissionerate police have seized two more cars of fraudster Satyajit Managovind Samal, who has been arrested for allegedly duping multiple women on the pretext of marriage. The two vehicles were seized from Koraput. The accused had lent out these cars to a travel agency there, city DCP Prateek Singh said on Sunday. The 34-year-old scamster from Jajpur district was allegedly wooing 49 women on a matrimonial site under different identities. He duped a working professional of Rs 36 lakh (27 lakh cash and Maruti Baleno worth Rs 8.15 lakh) and took Rs 8.60 lakh and a Royal Enfield Interceptor bike worth Rs 3.50 lakh from another woman in Bhubaneswar. "The focus of the investigation is on the victims and the money he took from them. Accordingly, the digital devices seized are being examined. We have so far contacted 11 women with whom he was in touch. We will also



seek data from all matrimonial sites on him," Singh said. The DCP said WhatsApp conversation as well as chats on a matrimonial site revealed that Samal had demanded Rs 40,000 and a loan for purchasing a vehicle. "The accused impersonated as a pilot of Riyadh Air, sales manager at Costa Coffee, Saudi Arab, a CBI Inspector and a Delhi Crime Branch Inspector," the DCP said.

## Boat mishaps: NHRC seeks report from Odisha CS

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has sought an action-taken report (ATR) from the Odisha Chief Secretary (CS) regarding the boat capsizing incidents in the State, including the one in Mahanadi river in Jharsuguda district on April 19, 2024. The commission passed the direction taking cognisance of a petition filed by lawyer and human rights activist Radhakanta tripathy. The NHRC also asked the Chief Secretary to direct all district Collectors to check the fitness of all the registered ferryboats in their jurisdictions. The commission also directed the State Government to send a report on the officials responsible for failure to supervise and ban the operationalisation of unlawful and unfit ferryboats in Jharsuguda district; and if no such action was initiated yet, then the reasons for not taking lawful action. The petitioner contended that the boat carrying about 50 passengers which capsized in the Mahanadi in Jharsuguda district was overcrowded, operated without a valid licence and not having fitness certificate issued by the concerned authorities. This led to the death of seven persons, including two women and two children, Tripathy alleged.

## BJP plans big for its long rule in Odisha

- Party leaders to adopt constituencies
- PESA Act to be implemented soon

**NALILI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJD), which had a startling victory in the last Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in Odisha largely due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's aggressive campaign across the State, seems to be working on a specific agenda to continue in power in the State for a long period. This was evident when Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Sunday called for winning all the State's 33 Assembly and five Lok Sabha seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribes (STs). Addressing newly-elected ST MLAs and MPs at the Jayadev Bhawan here, Majhi said the



ther towards strengthening of party's tribal vote bank when he announced that the State Government would soon implement the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996. Popularly known as PESA Act, the law ensures self-governance through traditional

Gram Sabhas for people living in the Scheduled Areas of India. The Scheduled Areas are the regions identified by the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India and are in ten States, including Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. "We will soon implement the PESA Act which will protect tribals against exploitation,

land-grabbing bids and ensure better living for them," the minister said. He claimed that the population of the tribals was declining. Of the 4.5 crore population of Odisha, 22.85 per cent belongs to tribal communities. Union Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram called upon the

## Friendship Day: Bonds also shared with pets

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
Friendship is a universal language spoken through gestures, loyalty and shared moments. However, when we think of friendship, we often imagine human interactions. Yet, some of the most profound and unconditional bonds are shared with our pets. As Friendship Day was celebrated on the first Sunday of August, meet Arijit Pattnaik, a Class-IX student from Rasulgarh in Bhubaneswar who shares an unconditional bond with his horse 'Tuff' and dog 'Mac'. "I have a Rottweiler and a horse as my pets. While I have grown up with my furry friend, the horse is the new



addition to our family. Even though they are animals, they never fail to understand my emotions and usher unconditional love," said Arijit. Arijit said, "I and my pets are two sides of a coin and we complete each other. When I am in stress, I always love to spend time with them. They are not only my stress busters

but true companions." Arijit, who also loves to ride his horse, said, "Tuff is so obedient and caring that it is a joy to learn horse riding with it. Every time I get on to its back for a ride, it supports me." Raj Kamal Singh from Cuttack is also an avid animal lover and shares an unconditional bond with his pets that

include dogs and horses. Raj Kamal is a proud pet parent to three horses, Chetak, Raftar and Sultan, and four dogs, Pitbull, Rottweiler, American Bully and French Mastiff. He said, "Managing three horses and four dogs is not an easy task. However, I leave no stone unturned to make sure my animal friends get proper care and affection." "No matter how tight is my work schedule, I always find time to spend with my horses and dogs as they don't expect anything from me other than some love and affection. Last year, I had a severe accident and they were my great healer at that point of time," Singh added.

# OES seminar: 'Organic farming is beneficial for all'

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
Recent revolutionary advancements in agriculture have played a significant role in strengthening the food security of the exploding human population. The Green Revolution brought about in agriculture sector of our country during the 1960s played a decisive role in greatly solving the problem of malnutrition in a developing country like India. The process involved the use of high-yielding varieties of seeds developed through bioengineering techniques, which led to growth in agricultural production through the use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and increased irrigation.



mentally affected environment, increased health problems of humans and other animals and degraded the soil fertility. Hence, such agricultural practices are untenable and their long-term sustainability is also uncertain.

In this connection, India's traditional organic agriculture has once again become a topic of discussion and adaptation. It reduces the cost of agricultural production and also improves soil health while maintaining the quality and reduc-

ing pollution. The demand for organic agricultural products is steadily increasing in the global markets.

Experts have expressed such views on the issue in a seminar titled 'Organic Farming - The Way Forward' organised by the Orissa Environmental Society (OES) in a hybrid mode.

The seminar held under the chairmanship of OES president Dr Sundara Narayana Patro had Prof Bama Shankar Rath, former Dean of the Col-

lege of Forestry, OUAT, Bhubaneswar, as the chief speaker. Prof Rath explained the merits of organic farming, saying that it preserves the sustainability of agricultural production, maintains the biological composition of the soil, eliminates chemical pollution, conserves genetic diversity, controls pests by natural methods and reduces the cost of production. In this process, the farmers adopt traditional methods of cultivation using organic substances, which do

not utilise any harmful, unnatural materials and were widely practised earlier. Dr Patro stated that human society is moving through ecological disasters at the present juncture. In such a scenario, it should be everyone's objective to popularise more and more ecologically-sound, health-protecting practices like organic agriculture. In his welcome speech, OES secretary Dr Jayakrushna Panigrahi stated that in the

current times when the quality of environment and conservation of natural resources have become the top priority for mankind, the adoption of organic farming would be highly beneficial for both mankind and nature.

Vice-president Dr Lala AK Singh introduced the guests and former PCCF Dr Bijay Ketan Patnaik presented a vote of thanks. Presenting his expert opinion, agronomist Ekadashi Nandy laid emphasis on increasing the organic matter content of the soil.

Among others, Prof Shiba Prasad Adhikary, Dr Dillip Ray, Dr Sudhakar Kar, Dr Hemant Kumar Mishra, Dr Chitta Ranjan Mishra, Dr Suravi Jain and Bikash Mohanty participated in the discussion and presented their views on the theme.

## In Kendrapada Rs 1.59L cleaned off from farmer's bank account

**Police complaint lodged**

**PNS ■ KENDRAPADA**

In a case of bank fraud, Rs 1.59 lakh was allegedly withdrawn from the account of a farmer without his knowledge in Kendrapada district.

The matter came to light after the victim went to withdraw his money.

The incident has been reported from the Cuttack Central Cooperative Bank in Rajkanika in the district. Based on a complaint by the farmer, police have lodged a case against the bank's Branch Manager and the cooperative society's Secretary.

According to sources, Dharanidhar Nayak of Patuli village had taken a loan of Rs 1.59 lakh. The loan amount was credited directly to his account number at the cooperative bank. However, he learnt that the money was already withdrawn from his account.

Nayak approached the Branch Manager, who failed to give a satisfactory answer, following which the farmer lodged an FIR in this connection.

In his complaint, Nayak accused the Branch Manager



and the cooperative society Secretary of embezzling his money without his knowledge.

"I had taken a loan of Rs 1.59 lakh when Ashish Behera was the society Secretary. He passed the loan; and so, I went to withdraw it. However, they stated that I could not withdraw the whole amount at one time. I was shocked to see that the whole amount had been withdrawn without my knowledge. Now, they are threatening me by sending people to sign unwanted documents," alleged the farmer.

Branch Manager of the Cuttack Central Cooperative Bank in Rajkanika Sanjib Mohapatra said, "We have received a complaint. But the document shows that it was his cheque, his signature and he withdrew the amount himself. The matter will be revealed only after an investigation."

## CM to hear public grievances today 'Economic empowerment crucial for every woman'



**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi will resume public grievance hearing in Bhubaneswar on Monday.

According to the General Administration and Public Grievance (GA&PG) Department, the hearing of public

grievances will be held in the Chief Minister's Grievance Cell at Unit-V in the capital city. The Chief Minister is slated to attend the hearing from 11 am.

The registration for the hearing of the grievance will be held at the same place from 8 am to 12 noon Monday.

Interested individual can register their complaints and report them to the Chief Minister by physically attending the hearing during the prescribed time schedule.

Notably, the Chief Minister's Grievance Cell did not function during the Budget Session of the Odisha Assembly.



**UCCIL Ladies Forum holds Foundation Day,**

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Economic empowerment is crucial for every woman to achieve self-reliance and fulfil their aspirations and contribute to the holistic growth of the society," said Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi, while attending the foundation day event of UCCIL Ladies Forum.

"The UCCIL Ladies Forum," the women wing of Utkal Chamber of Commerce and Industry Limited, hosted the annual event on August 3. The guests appreciated the efforts of the forum towards supporting the marginalised communities and promoting women in entrepreneurship.

"Feminism is not about competing with our counterparts; it's about complimenting each other. When we support one another,

we create a stronger and better society," Sarangi said while appreciating the role of women members under the forum.

At the beginning of the UCCIL Ladies Forum, president Pranati Parida welcomed the guests and members to the function. Former MLA of Bhubaneswar North, Priyadarshi Mishra, veteran actress Tandra Ray, CEO, Bhubaneswar City Knowledge Innovation Cluster (BCKIC) Dr Namrata Misra and president-in-Charge, UCCIL Tarini Prasad Mohanty graced the event as guests of honour.

"Odisha boasts a rich reserve of global skills, intellectual capacity, and a determined new generation. By blending our trade and business heritage from the maritime age, with modern knowledge and entrepreneurial will, we can foster an environment to incubate the future businesses. We should open the canvas for the

women of the region who can paint their dreams and prove themselves as effective business leaders," said forum president Parida.

The forum felicitated prominent women figures from various fields, namely, Shailaja Kumari Aparajita Mohanty (writer and social leader), Mousumi Mohanty (senior TV journalist), Sushama Nanda (State-level volleyball coach) and Asha Bahadur Gurum (Visually impaired singer). The board members of UCCIL were also felicitated on the occasion.

The forum's annual souvenir, 'Siddhi', was released at the event. Vice President of the UCCIL Ladies Forum Sweta Das and Sunshine Anand Swain, hosted the programme. Secretary Archana Malla presented the activity report, while treasurer Swetapadma Rath, presented the vote of thanks.

## In Pipili Close shave for occupants as car catches fire

**PNS ■ PURI**

Four persons, including an infant, had a narrow escape when the car by which they were travelling caught fire after skidding off the road at Pipili in Puri district on Sunday.

As per reports, the incident took place at Bahabaja Chhak in Pipili in the morning. Sources said the car sud-



denly veered off the road and rammmed into an electric scooter. The mishap occurred after the car driver swerved to

save a stray bull on the road. Following the collision, the car and the electric scooter went off the road. The car caught fire within minutes, triggering panic among the occupants and commuters.

However, occupants of the car and the scooter rider escaped with minor injuries.

Getting information, Fire Service personnel reached the spot and doused the flames.

# CONTEMPORARIES

## SC verdict on sub-classification of Scheduled Castes: A summary

On August 1, 2024, a significant ruling by a seven-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India, led by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, upheld the validity of sub-classification within Scheduled Caste (SC) categories. This 6:1 majority decision overruled the 2004 five-judge bench decision in *EV Chinnaiah v. State of Andhra Pradesh*. The judgement, marked by six distinct opinions, highlights the nuanced perspectives of the justices on this contentious issue.

**The judgement: Diverse opinions**

Chief Justice Chandrachud, writing on behalf of himself and Justice Manoj Misra, laid down the criteria for sub-classification, emphasising the need for empirical data and judicial review. Justices BR Gavai and Pankaj Mithal concurred, offering separate opinions. Justices Vikram Nath and SC Sharma also agreed with the Chief and Justice Gavai. Justice Bela Trivedi, however, dissented, asserting that the Chinnaiah ruling was sound and had been inappropriately revisited without substantial



**S JYOTIRNANJAN**

reasoning.

Justice Gavai advocated for the application of the 'creamy layer' exclusion to SCs while Justice Mithal underscored the historical absence of a caste system, suggesting instead a varna system based on profession and qualities. Mithal highlighted that sub-classification is necessary due to persistent inequalities, noting that only children from affluent or urbanised castes access higher education and benefit from reservations. He suggested that reservations be limited to the first generation within a family.

**Key findings and observations:**

**Does Article 14 permit sub-classification?**

Chief Justice Chandrachud asserted that Article 14 of the Constitution allows for sub-classification within reserved categories, recognising SCs, Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) as distinct backward classes of citizens. Article 14 embodies two principles: equality before the law and equal protection of laws, which do not imply identical treatment for all but equitable treatment for those similarly situated. The Chief Justice argued that sub-classification is an aspect of equality, allowing for further classification within a legally defined class if it is heterogeneous.

The test for permissible sub-classification involves 'intelligible differentia' (a clear and understandable distinction) and 'rational nexus' (a logical connection between the classification criterion and its intended outcome). Sub-classification is justified if the class is not homogeneous, ensuring substantive equality through parity of treatment under similar conditions.

**Are Scheduled Castes a homogeneous group?**

The Chief Justice refuted the Chinnaiah decision that held SCs as a homogeneous group based on their inclusion in the Presidential List of 1950. He emphasised historical and empirical evidence demonstrating the heterogeneity and varying degrees of backwardness within SCs. Justice Gavai concurred, noting the differing hardships among SC categories. Conversely, Justice Trivedi, in her dissent, maintained that SCs form a homogeneous class, protected under Article 341.

**'Legal fiction' and Scheduled Castes**

Addressing the argument that SCs constitute a 'legal fiction' under Article 341, Chief Justice Chandrachud clarified that the Presidential List's purpose is to identify SCs, not to imply homogeneity or varying degrees of backwardness. The list confirms that only included castes receive constitutional benefits as SCs.

**Interpretation of NM Thomas**

Chinnaiah interpretation of NM Thomas v. Union of India (1976), clarifying that the latter did not establish SCs as a homogeneous group but recognised them as a unique class eligible for affirmative action. Justice Gavai agreed, highlighting that NM Thomas and *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India* (1992) collectively affirmed that caste constitutes a class.

**Indra Sawhney and sub-classification**

The Chief Justice clarified that *Indra Sawhney's* principles apply to SCs if their social positions are not comparable. Justice Gavai concurred, noting that *Indra Sawhney's* scope was restricted to OBCs but did not preclude sub-classification within SCs.

**Sub-classification and the Presidential List**

The Chief Justice ruled that sub-classification does not alter the Presidential List as it does not entail including or excluding castes. Justice Gavai echoed this, emphasising that preferential treatment does not amount to 'tinkering' with the list. In dissent, Justice Trivedi argued that

States lack the authority to sub-classify SCs as Article 341(1) and (2) confer this power exclusively to Parliament.

**Criteria for sub-classification**

The Chief Justice stipulated that sub-classification must be based on social and economic backwardness supported by empirical evidence. The state must demonstrate varying degrees of backwardness and inadequate representation within the SC category to justify sub-classification. The Chief Justice highlighted that adequate representation encompasses qualitative aspects, not merely numerical representation.

**Limits and models of sub-classification**

Two permissible models for sub-classification emerged; they are the preferential and exclusive models. The Chief Justice outlined scenarios for each, noting Constitutional limits. Both models must avoid excluding SCs from benefits in a given year subject to judicial review.

**Creamy layer exclusion**

Justice Gavai endorsed the 'creamy layer' exclusion for SCs, urging the state to develop criteria

distinct from those for OBCs. Justices Nath and Sharma concurred. Chief Justice Chandrachud did not address this issue in his opinion.

This judgement underscores the Supreme Court's commitment to nuanced and empirical approaches to affirmative action. By permitting sub-classification within SC categories, the court aims to address inequalities and ensure that the most disadvantaged groups benefit from reservations. The ruling reflects a significant step towards achieving substantive equality, balancing historical context, empirical data and Constitutional principles, but it remains to be seen how the policy for implementing the judgement on the ground unfolds.

*(The writer is an advocate, Orissa High Court, Addl. Central Government Standing Counsel, CAT, Cuttack Bench, Consulting Editor-Legal Affairs and Public Policy, The Pioneer and a Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Law and Media Studies, School of Mass Communication, KIIT University. Views are personal)*

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/India only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group's will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.

# 2 GPs to NAC, 3 NACs to Municipality upgrade in Ganjam BJD govt's announcements yet to be honoured by BJP govt

**RAJEEV RATHAN ■  
BRAHMAPUR**  
The past BJD Government had announced a significant administrative decision for Ganjam district, by declaring that three Notified Area Councils (NACs) would be upgraded to municipality and two panchayats to NACs. However, two months after the general elections, there has been no progress towards implementing these changes, leading to widespread public concern.

In the lead-up to the general elections, former CM Naveen Patnaik had announced that Chhatrapur, Aska and Bhanjanagar in Ganjam district would be upgraded to municipalities. Additionally, Shergarh in the Hinjilicut constituency and Kukudakhandi panchayat in the Dagapahandi constituency were to be given NAC status. Despite these promises, no efforts have been made to demarcate the new urban areas or publish the necessary gazette notifications, leaving the announcements unfulfilled.

Residents and local leaders are now questioning whether the BJD Government's announcements will be honoured by the new BJP Government. The lack of progress has sparked discussions among the public, with many expressing disappointment over the unkept promises.

With 14 wards and a population of around 30,000, Chhatrapur meets all qualifications for municipality status. "If Chhatrapur gets municipal status, the long-time dream of the people of the region will be fulfilled," Chhatrapur NAC Vice Chairman G Papa Rao said.

# MLA reviews Budhi Thakurani shrine renovation

**PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR**  
Brahmapur MLA K Anil Kumar reviewed the progress of the ongoing renovation project of the Maa Budhi Thakurani temple here on Saturday. The visit was part of his broader agenda to ensure timely completion of key development projects in Brahmapur.



The renovation work at the temple commenced on January 18 and is slated for completion by June 2025. The MLA emphasized the importance of finishing the project before the temple's biennial festival, which is scheduled for April next year.

The festival attracts thousands of devotees from across the region, making it essential for the temple to be fully prepared and aesthetically pleasing for the occasion.

The renovation, estimated to be Rs 20.75 crore, is divided into two phases. The first phase includes significant upgrades to the temple and its surroundings. This involves constructing a new entrance, enhancing the temple foundation, building a multipurpose hall, and establishing a sacrificial altar. Additionally, improvements to access paths, landscaping, and lighting are part of the project to enhance the temple's overall appeal.

# NH damaged by rain in Pallahara



**PNS ■ PALLAHARA**  
Due to continuous rainfall, NH-149 (Pallahara-Talcher) road has been damaged severely. Many big and deep potholes have been created.

The motor cycle riders and the other travellers are facing accident daily and getting injured seriously. Under the leadership of Dr Santosh Dehury, president, Citizen Forum, Pallahara, a meeting was held for discussing the issue. While raising concerns over the apathy of the NHAI, the members of the forum demanded immediate repairing of potholes. It was decided to submit a memo in this regard before the Sub-Collector, Pallahara.

# NextGen Packaging Conclave 'Odisha has got immense potential'

**SUDARSHAN CHHOTORAY ■  
BHUBANESWAR**  
Speakers at a Conclave on NextGen packaging - Navigating through tastes and standards being organised by Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industries here on Friday outlined that packaging is a priority sector for Odisha.



They attached importance on the plastic and packaging industry as very important for sectors such as food processing, agri-retail, beverages sectors, chemicals and petrochemicals industries. Without a robust plastic and packaging sector, these sectors cannot function well.

# Mo Bus drivers stage protest in Sambalpur

**PNS ■ SAMBALPUR**  
The Mo Bus services in Sambalpur were affected as the drivers and conductors of the public transport bus service launched a protest on Sunday.

The drivers and other staffs alleged that the Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT) management has turned a deaf ear to their plight. The drivers and conductors also threatened to continue the protest for an indefinite period if their demands are not met at the earliest.

# BDO walks 4 km to remote village in Gajapati



In an unfortunate incident, a woman recently delivered a baby in the middle of a road when she was being carried to a hospital in a sling due to lack of a motorable road at Gubel village, a remote area in Gajapati district.

Following a report about the plight of the woman, the Mohana BDO and the Executive Engineer of the Rural Development Department reached Gubel village after trekking a four-kilometre-long rocky and ghat road to take stock of the situation.

IPICOL Executive Director KC Mohanty highlighted that investments are coming from both MNCs and Indian investors in these sectors in Odisha; so, there is a huge demand for Nextgen packaging companies in the State.

Mohanty mentioned that for investment facilitation in the plastic and packaging sector, the State Government is providing many incentives like land at concessional rates, exemptions on electricity duty, SGST reimbursement.

In a fireside chat on the theme "New Age Packaging & Printing: Technology, Trends, Design and Cross Border Standards", Essel Propak Ltd AMESA region president Shrihari K Rao stated that the young Indian buyers are very conscious of sustainability, aesthetics and functionality.

As Gen Z and Covid changed the whole face of the packaging and printing sector, Rao also explained the disruptions, disturbances and the expected changes in the packaging and printing industry.

# Cuttack Youth Red Cross meeting held



**PNS ■ CUTTACK**  
A District Working Committee meeting of the Cuttack Youth Red Cross was convened at the Stewart Science College here. The session was attended by Dr Ramesh Chandra Behera, Joint Secretary, and Youth Red Cross Officer, as the chief guest and Dr Deepa Nag, Principal of Stewart Science College.

The meeting commenced with a tree plantation initiative led by Dr Behera. The primary focus of the meeting was to review the annual activity report of the Cuttack Youth Red Cross and discuss strategies for future operations.

# KVK Khordha holds training, input distribution

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
The Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Khordha under the ICAR-CIFA, Bhubaneswar organised a training-cum-input distribution programme for strengthening livelihood support of farming community under SCSP Scheme of the Government of India.



Director, ICAR-CIFA, Bhubaneswar, handed over the agri-inputs such as finger millet seed (Var.Arjun and VL Mandua 376), vermicompost bed, Azolla bed, fish dragnet, floating fish feed, mushroom spawn and knapsack sprayer to 28 women SHGs belonging to Schedule Caste category from Begunia, Bolagarh, Jatni, Baliaanta and Balipatna Blocks.

plauded the efforts of KVK-Khordha in promoting integrated farming system for enhancing the farm income and providing nutritional security among the farm families of Khordha district.

He also advised the farmers/farm women to adopt scientific package and practices of the technology for enhancing the production and productivity of the crops. He also enlightened the farming community on use of agri-drones in agriculture and aquaculture. A demonstration on use of drone for aquaculture was also organised for the trainees by Dr PR Sahoo, SMS (Fishery

# Aug 4 is Odia Journalism Day An account of history, significance of the vernacular Press

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Celebrating the 158 years of its journey, Odia journalism appears to have traversed a long and arduous path playing a significant role in the socio-political and economic spheres in the State over the years.

Launched on this day in 1866, 'Utkala Deepika' is regarded as the first Odia newspaper. The weekly publication was started by Gouri Shankar Ray and Babu Bichitranda Das. To mark this momentous event, August 4 is also celebrated as Odia Journalism Day in the State.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi extended his greetings to Odia journalists on this occasion. The contribution of journalists in maintaining democratic values as the fourth pillar of the constitution is unique and incomparable, he said in a post on 'X' handle.

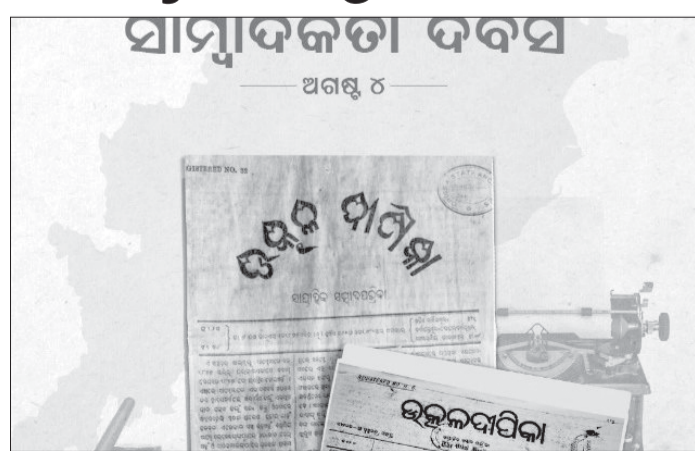
The journey of Odia journalism started with the publication of 'Utkala Deepika', he said. Notably, Bichitranda Das had established the Cuttack Printing Press in 1866 and 'Utkala Deepika', edited by Gouri Shankar Ray, was published from there. Ray continued to be the editor of the publication till his death in 1917. The weekly newspaper played a pivotal role in the fight for bringing all Odia-speaking tracts under a single province in India.

Though 'Utkala Deepika' is popularly accepted to be the first Odia newspaper, the publication of 'Kujibara Patrika', which was published by Sadhu Sundar Das, a saint, predated it. Its publication started in 1769. In 1861, five years before the catastrophic famine of Odisha of 1866, the first Odia magazine 'Bodha Dayini' was published from Baleswar. The main objective of this magazine was to spread the Odia literature and to point out the administrative lapses.

Publication of 'Utkala Deepika' commenced at a time when Odisha was facing a host of problems and it played a significant role in the social and political life of the State. The newspaper effectively brought to the fore the common people's plight and drew the attention of the then administration. When Odisha was hit by a severe famine, miseries to the people caused by it were extensively covered in the journal. The weekly also offered a host of suggestions on how the administration could mitigate the plight of the starving people. Published for seven decades till 1936, the journal made sincere efforts for the integration of the Odia-speaking areas. On March 6, 1920, 'Utkala Deepika' published a news on how

the Raja Saheb of Kanika in the Central Council delivered an interesting talk on the unification of Odia-speaking areas under one administration. On February 19, 1927, it published a report on the proposal given by Pandit Nilakatha Das in the Central Council for the union of Odia-speaking areas where he said that there would be no rest to the Odias till they achieve this objective and mentioned about the launch of a wide-spread movement for that purpose.

After the publication of Utkala Deepika, Odia journalism continued to grow steadily. Only two years later, in 1868, Fakir Mohan Senapati established another printing press in Baleswar. In 1869 late Bhagavati Charan Das started 'Utkal Subhakarini' to propagate Brahmo faith. Another weekly paper 'Sambad Vahika' was published from Baleswar in 1868. The Utkal Society of Cuttack published 'Utkal Hiteisini' in 1869.



Another press was set up in Baleswar in 1873. Between 1873 and 1899, publication of different journals and newspapers got momentum.

In the last three and a half decades of the 19th century a number of newspapers were published in Odia, prominent among which were 'Utkal Deepika', 'Utkal Patra', 'Utkal Hiteisini' from Cuttack, 'Utkal Darpan' and 'Sambada Vahika' from Baleswar, 'Sambalpur Hiteisini' (May 30, 1889) from Deogarh. In 1879, an Odia fortnightly newspaper called 'Mayurbhanj Pakshika Patrika' was published from Baripada. It was

edited by Haraprasad Das with the financial help of Maharaja Krishna Chandra Bhanja Deo. The main objective of the paper was to review the political matters of Mayurbhanj in simple 'Odia' language.

In April 1891 a literary magazine titled 'Utkal Prabha' was published from Baripada with the financial help of Maharaja Ramachandra Bhanja Deo. In 1880 Dina Banerji edited a paper called 'Bidishi' from Cuttack.

# Goa Assembly ST quota Bill likely in LS this week

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A Bill to provide reservation to Scheduled Tribes in the Goa Legislative Assembly is likely to be introduced in the Lok Sabha this week. As of now, the ST community has no seats reserved in the Goa assembly. Amid demands from the community, the Readjustment of Scheduled Tribes Bill, 2024 has been listed in the Government business for the remaining part of the Parliament session. The session is scheduled to conclude on August 12. The law Ministry Bill will empower the census commissioner to notify the population of STs in Goa. Based on it, the Election Commission will amend the Delimitation of Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies Order, 2008, to make way for ST reservation in the 40-member Goa Assembly.



The Election Commission will take into consideration the revised population figures of the Scheduled Tribes and readjust the Legislative Assembly constituency once the Bill becomes a law. The proposal to bring the Bill was cleared by the Union Cabinet in March this year days before the schedule for the Lok Sabha elections was announced on March 16. As

of now, no seat in the 40-member Goa assembly is reserved for the ST community while one seat is reserved for the Scheduled Castes. The ST community has been demanding that four out of the 40 seats in the Goa assembly be reserved for them. It is estimated that Goa has an ST population of 1.5 lakh.

# Main reservoirs' level less than 2023, but above decade's average: CWC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Despite significant rainfall across India, the average water level in the country's 150 main reservoirs is currently lower than last year's levels but remains above the average for the past decade, according to the Central Water Commission (CWC). The total live storage across the 150 monitored reservoirs is at 91,496 billion cubic meters (BCM), which represents 51 per cent of their total capacity. This is 94 per cent of the storage recorded during the same period last year and 107% of the average storage for the last decade. According to a CWC report, the live storage available in these reservoirs stands at 91,496 BCM, or 51 per cent of their total capacity. This is 94 per cent of the storage levels recorded during the same period last year and 107 per cent of the normal storage based on the last decade's average. Last year, the live storage during the same period was 83,987 BCM, and the normal



storage was 72,411 BCM. Thus, the storage levels this week represent an increase from the previous week but remain lower than both the corresponding period last year and the normal storage. In the northern region, which includes Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Rajasthan, there are 10 reservoirs with a total capacity of 19,663 BCM. Currently, they hold 6,532 BCM, which is 33 per cent of their capacity, significantly lower than last year's 76 per cent and the normal storage of 53 per cent for this period. The eastern region, comprising Assam, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura, Nagaland, and Bihar, has 23 reservoirs

with a combined capacity of 20,430 BCM. The western region's Gujarat and Maharashtra -- 49 reservoirs have a total capacity of 37,130 BCM. They are at 19,863 BCM, or 53 per cent of capacity, down from last year's 63 per cent but better than the normal storage of 48 per cent. This week's storage shows an increase from the previous week's 15,274 BCM (41 per cent of capacity). The central region, which comprises Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, has 26 reservoirs totalling a capacity of 48,227 BCM. They are currently storing 23,102 BCM, or 48 per cent of capacity, less than last year's

55 per cent and the normal storage of 50 per cent. This week's storage marks an increase from the previous week's 16,042 BCM (33 per cent of capacity). The southern region, covering Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, has 42 reservoirs with a total capacity of 53,334 BCM. They currently hold 35,010 BCM, or 66 per cent of capacity, which is better than last year's 50 per cent and the normal storage of 47 per cent. This week's storage shows an increase from the previous week's 26,538 BCM (50 per cent of capacity). Some States like Assam, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura, Nagaland, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu showed improved storage levels compared to last year. Conversely, States like Rajasthan, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh have reported lower storage levels.



# CDS to chair tri-service finance conference

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan will chair an apex level tri-service financial conference on Monday here. The meet is aimed to enhance cohesion and synergy in financial issues of the Armed Forces, Defence Ministry said here on Sunday. Giving details, officials said the conference will see the participation of senior officials from MoD, MoD (Fin), Controller General Defence Accounts, Integrated Financial Advisers of Services, Government e-Marketplace, Service Headquarters, and Indian Coast Guard Headquarters. The CDS will also deliver the keynote address. The conference, aligned with the objectives set for the ongoing drive on integration and jointness in the Armed Forces, is being coordinated by HQ IDS to enhance cooperation and have greater synergy on financial issues. Discussions are scheduled on aspects of Understanding the Perspectives of various stakeholders in Defence Finance and Finding Solutions to challenges faced in defence procurements. The Financial Advisor (Defence Services) and Director General (Acquisitions) will also give specific talks on the roles and actions undertaken by their organisations in expeditious procurement.

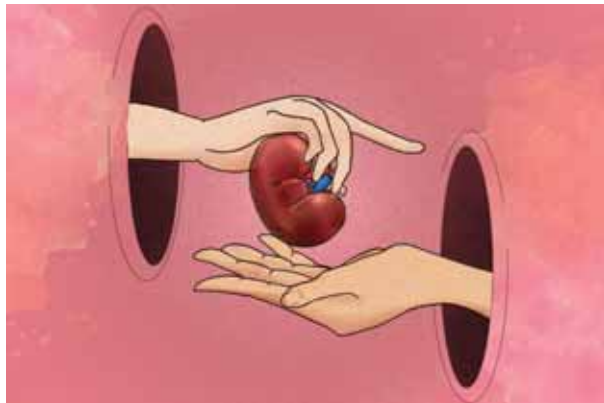
# India ranks third globally in organ transplants

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India's organ transplants have more than tripled over the past decade, reaching 18,378 in 2023, up from 4,990 in 2013. The country now ranks third globally in overall transplants and second in corneal transplants. Key figures include 13,426 kidney transplants and 4,491 liver transplants. Among the States, Telangana accounted for the highest number of deceased donors in the year at 252, followed by both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka at 178, Maharashtra at 148, Gujarat at 146 and Delhi at 66. The num-

ber of transplants to foreigners was recorded at 1,851 with most of them being in Delhi at 1,445. Despite these advances, the organ donation rate remains under 1 per million. Highlighting the need for increased awareness and improved donation rates, according to a report by the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO). It calls for stepping up efforts to promote organ donation from deceased persons to take care of the huge organ requirement due to the increasing burden of non-

communicable and lifestyle diseases. Such conditions are leading to a high number of patients suffering from end-stage organ failure disease, the report stated. On the positive side, the number of deceased-donor transplants has increased from 837 in 2013 to 2,935 in 2023. According to data, the number of kidney transplants in 2023 stood at 13,426 while liver transplants were at 4,491, heart transplants at 221, lung transplants at 197 and pancreas transplants at 27. Among living donors, the number of females (9,784)



was almost double the number of males (5,651) in 2023. However, among

deceased donors, males outnumbered females at 844 compared to 255.

The total number of living donors in 2023 was 15,436 while deceased donors stood at 1,099. The number of heart transplants increased from 30 in 2013 to 221 in 2023. Heart transplants were higher in 2018 at 241. Tamil Nadu topped the deceased donor transplants at 595 followed by Telangana (546), Karnataka (471), Maharashtra (426) and Gujarat (421) in 2023. Delhi-NCR has the most number of living-donor transplants at 4,275, followed by Tamil Nadu (1,833), Maharashtra (1,493), Kerala (1,376) and West Bengal (1,021).

Organs are best donated from brain stem dead persons before the heart stops beating and there are many myths and misconceptions regarding organ donation which need to be taken care of, it said. Standard Operative Procedures have been drafted, which prescribe that every concerned Ministry will have a nodal officer and State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (SOTTO) will coordinate with a nodal officer to facilitate organ transport, it said. No screening of organs will be done at the airport, the report added.



# Experts raise alarm on vapes, e-cigarettes' promotion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With traditional tobacco products under scrutiny for their severe health impacts, the tobacco industry is now promoting e-cigarettes and vapes as healthier alternatives, health and child rights experts have raised alarms, urging the Government to address this growing threat on an urgent basis. They warned that despite being banned these products are being strategically marketed to attract and entrap the young population, especially those aged 10 to 19 years. "E-cigarettes and vapes are as dangerous as tobacco and drugs for our country. Once a child is addicted to these products, they can easily be drawn to other forms of tobacco," said Priyank Kanoongo, Chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), at a webinar organised by Tobacco Free India, a citizens' initiative, recently. Kanoongo highlighted the urgent need for vigilance while Dr Naveen Thacker, President of the International Pediatric Association (IPA), voiced serious concerns about the tobacco industry's tactics. "The industry is falsely promoting e-cigarettes and vapes as 'healthy' and harmless alternatives to traditional tobacco, with a relentless focus on targeting the youth. This is a blatant lie. These products are just as harmful, and their deliberate targeting of children is unmistakable," he stated.

# WII launches first-ever Master's course in freshwater ecology, conservation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Aiming to bridge gaps in scientific understanding and conservation planning for freshwater ecosystems—an area that has been relatively overlooked despite the increasing pressures from energy projects, agricultural demands, and domestic use, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has launched the first-ever much-needed two-year Master's Degree Course in Freshwater Ecology and Conservation in the country, starting this academic year. Dr Ruchi Badola, Dean of WII, emphasised the course's role in developing a new generation of professionals capable of understanding and managing freshwater ecosystems effectively. With several water resource project coming up to address the energy security, water demand for agriculture and domestic use in the country and with 82 wetlands of International importance



(Ramsar wetland) in the country the need for trained human resources for conservation of freshwater ecosystem in India was felt, she said talking about the need to launch such a course. A batch of 14 students has already been enrolled with the course. Director Virendra R Tiwari highlighted the course as a significant step in line with the Institute's new vision plan, marking a milestone in the development of human resources for managing the country's freshwater biodiversity.

# Good diet with yoga boosts physical, mental health, say AYUSH experts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Integrating a well-considered diet with yoga practice not only supports physical health but also enhances mental clarity and spiritual progress, ayurveda and yoga experts said here at a recent event organised by the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY), an autonomous body under the Union Ayush Ministry. Vaidya Kamlesh Kumar Sharma from Jaipur's National Institute of Ayurveda emphasised that diet is integral to balancing the body's five elements ('pancha bhutas') and affecting both the conscious and unconscious mind. He stressed that proper dietary habits are crucial for achieving harmony in yoga practice, as they align with the principles of 'yama' and 'niyama' (ethical and personal conduct). Sharma noted that adhering to a diet that suits one's 'dosha' (body constitution), weather, and geographical conditions can help prevent many disorders and enhance yoga's effectiveness in alleviating



sorrow and fostering happiness. Dr Kashinath Samagandi, MDNIY Director, highlighted that according to the Bhagavad Gita, focusing on proper diet and conduct (Achaar-Vichaar, Ahaar-Vihar) is essential for successful yoga practice. He recommended consuming two meals a day to align with the digestive cycle. He elaborated that the morning meal should be substantial and nutritious, eaten approximately 1.25 hours after sunrise while the evening meal should be lighter and half the size of the morning meal, ideally between 7:30 and 8:15 p.m.,

or before sunset. At the same time, Dr Arpit Kumar Dubey of MDNIY discussed the concept of 'Yuktahara' from the Bhagavad Gita, which emphasises a balanced diet as key to achieving yoga goals. "If we pay attention to the food habits in terms of what to take, when to take, how much to take and how to take, then the Yoga Sadhana becomes the Samadhi (the ultimate goal). As has been said in Changogyia Upanishad - whatever we consume through our five Gyanendriyas, the same helps us in the growth of our personality," he added.

# SC verdict today on AAP plea against LG's order on MCD alderman

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to pronounce its verdict on August 5 on a plea of the Aam Aadmi Party-led Delhi Government challenging the Lieutenant Governor's decision to nominate aldermen in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi without the aid and advice of the council of Ministers. A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices PS Narasimha, JB Pardiwala had reserved its verdict in the matter on May 17, last year. As per the apex Court's website, a bench headed by Justice PS Narasimha will be pronouncing the verdict. On May 17, last year the top Court said giving the Lieutenant Governor the power to nominate aldermen to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) will mean he can destabilise an elected civic body. The MCD has 250 elected and 10 nominated members. In December, 2022, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) defeated the BJP in the civic elections, winning 134 wards and ending the saffron party's 15-year run at the helm of the MCD. The BJP won 104 seats and the Congress finished a distant third with nine. "Is the nomination of specialised people in MCD of that much concern to the Centre? Actually, giving this power to the LG would effectively mean that he can destabilise the democratically elected Municipal Committees because they (aldermen) will have voting powers also," the top Court had said. Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the Delhi Government, had contended that no separate powers have been accorded to the State Government to nominate people to the MCD, and for the past 30 years, the practice of the LG nominating aldermen on the aid and advice of the city Government has been followed. Then Additional Solicitor General Sanjay Jain, appearing for the LG's office had submitted that just because a practice has been followed for 30 years



does not mean it is correct. The bench had observed that giving the LG the power to nominate aldermen will effectively mean that he can destabilise a democratically-elected MCD because these aldermen get appointed to the standing committees and have voting power. Earlier, the top Court had asked about the "source of power" of the LG under the Constitution and the law to nominate aldermen to the MCD without the aid and advice of the elected Government. The ASG had referred to the reply filed by the office of the LG and the constitutional scheme to assert the concept of 'aid and advice', in the context of the administrator's power to nominate members to the MCD, is different from the one which has been projected by the Delhi Government here. He had argued that the file pertaining to nominations to the MCD come directly to the office of LG as he is the administrator, and the concept of aid and advice is not applicable in this case. Singhvi had referred to the 2018 constitution bench judgement of the apex Court and its recent verdict on control over services to claim the LG has to act as per the aid and advice of the Government. The senior lawyer contended the LG should have taken back the nominations by now. "There are 12 zones, 12 ward committees and aldermen can be appointed to any committee... For the first time in the last 30 years, the LG has directly appointed members in the MCD and earlier it was always based on aid and advice (of the Government)," Singhvi had said in this arguments.

# Govt to revoke Nicholson statue's national monument status

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a dramatic twist, the Government has launched the process to strip the Nicholson Statue of its status as a Monument of National Importance, revealing a striking lapse in historical oversight. The statue, once proudly standing at Kashmiri Gate in the national capital to honor John Nicholson—a British officer notorious for his role in the 1857 Mutiny—was clandestinely shipped to Northern Ireland in 1958. Despite its absence for so many years, it remained on India's list of significant monuments until now. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has however moved to issue a draft notification proposing the removal of the statue from its prestigious list. Nicholson, who led the British forces in recapturing

Delhi during the mutiny, had been celebrated for his controversial role. However, the official stance now acknowledges the statue's non-existence at its original location. "The statue's removal and its absence from Kashmiri Gate necessitate its declassification as a monument of national importance," admitted an official from the ASI. The draft notification issued on July 25 and signed by Yadubir Singh Rawat, Director General says, "whereas, the Central Government is of the opinion that monument namely Nicholson Statue and its



platform, and the surrounding gardens, paths and enclosure wall, outside the Kashmiri gate, Delhi, declared protected vide notification..... in 1913, in

the Gazette of India, Calcutta... have ceased to be of national importance." "Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by section 35 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (24 of 1958), the Central Government hereby gives notice of its intention to declare that the said monument has ceased to be of national importance for the purposes of said Act." The draft notification opens a 60-day window for public objections, inviting feedback to the Director General of ASI. What is more intriguing

is that the ASI's move to delist the statue from the list of monuments of national importance follows a scathing report from the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), which exposed the ASI's shocking oversight. The CAG highlighted that several monuments, including Nicholson's, were listed as important despite being missing. The report disclosed that, out of 1,655 protected sites, 92 were unaccounted for, underscoring a severe lapse in the ASI's records. The CAG report also said that on more than one occasion the culture Minister has told Parliament that 35 of its monuments have gone missing. When the CAG checked about 1,655 protected monuments and sites—comprising 45 per cent of the total—they found 92 monuments missing.

# Wayanad death toll crosses 370

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Sunday, the sixth day of the landslide and deluge in Wayanad district, turned out to be a heart-rending day as the district administration performed mass burial of eight unidentified bodies out of the 40 retrieved by the rescue team National Disaster Response Team. Unconfirmed reports said that the death toll in Tuesday's landslide and deluge crossed 370 by Sunday though the district administration remained tight-lipped about the number of lives lost in the disaster.

It is believed that the bodies belonged to the residents of Mundakkai and Chooralmala villages that perished in the landslide. There were parts of human bodies like hands, legs etc which were accorded the status of a human body for last rites. Nearly 60 cents of the Harrison Plantation was earmarked for the burial, since 35 bodies are yet to be identified, the district administration has held back the burial for collecting the DNA samples for future needs. The last rites of the eight unidentified bodies



were performed with all-religion prayers. The function was attended by hundreds of people from the other parts of the district and those who had lost their near and dear ones in the mishap. The State Government announced that a new and secured township would be developed at a safe location for those who lost their houses. V Sivankutty, the education minister, declared that he would undertake the reconstruction of a higher secondary school in Mundakkai which was washed away in the deluge. Arif Mohammed Khan, the

governor of the State, who had been to the national capital to attend the Governors' Conference convened by the President, told reporters that the Centre would do everything that is needed for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the disaster stricken Wayanad district. Governor is closely monitoring the situation in Wayanad district on an hourly basis. Governor Arif Mohammed Khan was the first authority to reach the disaster site on Tuesday and spent a whole day supervising the rescue operations. It was taking a cue

from him the State cabinet and other political leaders reached the inaccessible terrain.

Officers and engineers of the Indian Army continue scanning the region with thermal imaging radar and scanners to find out whether any more persons remain trapped in the flood affected regions.

Two more dead bodies and remains of some persons were retrieved from the Chaliyar Puzha (River).

According to unconfirmed reports, 2250 persons have been accommodated in relief camps in Wayanad and Malappuram district. Kerala Finance Minister K N Balagopalan said on Sunday that funds would not be an issue for rebuilding a new Wayanad.

P A Mohammed Riyaz, minister for public works, who is the second-in-command of the Kerala Government, issued a stern warning to the people asking them not to visit the mishap site till further orders. "I will not allow the promotion of disaster tourism in Wayanad," said Riyaz, who is also the son-in-law of chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

# BJP, JD(S) continue protest march against Mysuru site allotment scam

PTI ■ RAMANAGARA (KARNATAKA)

The opposition BJP and JD(S), on Sunday continued their week-long protest march from Bengaluru to Mysuru for the second day, against alleged Mysuru Urban Development Authority site allotment scam, seeking to corner the Congress government and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. The 'Mysuru Chalo padayatre' against the alleged fraudulent allotment of sites to land losers by MUDA, including to Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi and demanding his resignation -- on the second day, began at Bidadi here and is scheduled to cover a distance of 22 km to reach Kengal.

BJP State President and MLA B Y Vijayendra, JD(S) State President and Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy, Opposition Leader in Legislative Council Chalavadi Narayanswamy, JD(S) leader Nikhil Kumaraswamy, several legislators, leaders and workers from both parties



took part. A large number of workers and leaders from both parties were seen marching, shouting slogans against Siddaramaiah and the Congress government led by him, holding BJP and JD(S) flags and placards, amidst drum beats. The stretch through which the march passed was decked up with flags of both parties, bunting and portraits of prominent leaders at several places. Kick-started on Saturday at Kengeri near Bengaluru, the march on its first day covered a distance of 16 km to reach Bidadi.

Addressing the gathering ahead of the march, Vijayendra said the ruling Congress, Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar are "trembling", following the opposition's protest march. "I have seen in the media that the CM and DCM are now questioning the opposition parties as we have begun the protest march, it is for the first time probably the ruling party is questioning the opposition. We are raising our voice against the corrupt Congress government, in favour of SC/STs, backward classes, poor and

downtrodden people," he said.

Alleging that the Congress after coming to power has indulged in loot, Vijayendra accused Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar of offering the looted money to the "Gandhi family" (Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi). "If we question them about the loot, they (govt) are running away from answering it. They are questioning us today." The Congress is holding public meetings to counter the BJP-JD(S) foot march to Mysuru, by targeting both parties and the Union government.

Kumaraswamy, in his address said, the day the Congress came to power in the state, it opened its "shop of corruption". He accused it of looting the money that was to be used for the welfare of the people of the state.

"There is competition among the Ministers, they are indulging in corruption. We have accused the government with records. But, they are making false allegations against the opposition without any document or proof," he said.

# Govt incorporated employee suggestions in revised Budget: Rajasthan CM Bhajanlal

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma on Sunday said keeping in mind the interests of the state's employees and pensioners, the government has made provisions by incorporating their suggestions in the revised state Budget 2024-25, he said. Sharma was addressing the thanksgiving meeting on budget announcements for state employees and pensioners at the chief minister's residence on Sunday. In a statement, he said the state government is committed to the interests of the employees and their families.

He said pensioners are a source of inspiration for society. The experience and knowledge of pensioners is an invaluable asset for the development of the state.

The chief minister said the state government has made many important announcements in this Budget for the welfare of employees and pensioners like salary discrepancy reform, increase in maximum gratuity amount, increase in pension, and improvement in medical facilities.

He said that in the state, there is a facility of pension at an increased rate for those above 75 years of age. Now, the state government has also announced an additional 5 per cent



allowance for pensioners between 70 and 75 years. Also, in accordance with the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules, 2021, family pension will be available at an increased rate for 10 years in case of death of personnel while in service after April 1, 2024. The chief Minister alleged the previous government made "tempting announcements" without Budget provision keeping only the elections in mind.

# Tipra MLA urges Shah to form infiltrator identification committee

PTI ■ AGARTALA

Tipra Motha MLA Ranjit Debbarma has written to Union Home Minister Amit Shah seeking his intervention to constitute a committee to identify foreigners who have entered Tripura illegally and to deport them to their respective countries.

Debbarma alleged that a large number of Bangladeshi nationals from Chittagong hill tracts entered Tripura and are residing in areas like Chawmanu and Gandacherra in Dhalai district and Karbook and Silcherri in Gumati district - all under Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) area and are a threat to the country's security.

"A large number of foreigners are entering Indian territory taking advantage of the weak security system in the Indo-



Bangla border. Infiltration has increased in the last few months," he wrote in the letter to Shah on Saturday.

"There are reports that Rohingyas have entered Indian territory using Tripura and are a threat to the country's security," the Tipra Motha MLA said.

Debbarma urged the Union Home Minister to constitute a high power committee

involving civil, police and judicial officers for identification and foreigners who have illegally entered Tripura and push them back to their countries.

Road crash in Rajasthan leaves four dead Jaipur, Aug 4 (PTI) Four members of a family were killed and five others injured when their car rammed into a truck on the Delhi-Mumbai

Expressway in Rajasthan's Sawai Madhopur district on Sunday, police said.

The deceased had gone to Rishikesh in Uttarakhand for a religious programme where a woman of the family died. After cremation, the family members were returning to Vikramgarh-Alot in Madhya Pradesh's Ratlam district when the accident occurred.

"Prima facie, the car driver dozed off due to which the car rammed into a truck moving ahead near Bhagwatgarh-Trilokpura Banas river falling under Surwal police station," Deputy Superintendent of Police Hemendra Kumar said. The bodies of the deceased and the injured were taken to a hospital of Sawai Madhopur by an ambulance.

The deceased were identified as Rajan (22), his sister Monica (24), Rekha (42) and her mother Dhapu Prajapat (60).



# GRP, RPF need valid tickets for train travel, rules tribunal

PTI ■ Ahmedabad

GRP and RPF personnel must obtain a travel authority or purchase a ticket for train travel and carrying only the ID card is not enough, the Railway Claims Tribunal ruled dismissing the plea for compensation filed by a constable who claimed to be on official duty when he fell off a train.

The Ahmedabad bench of the tribunal also underlined the "negligent attitude of Railway" regarding a circular on issuing duty card passes to Government Railway Police (GRP) personnel required to travel frequently. GRP constable Rajesh Bagul had moved the tribunal seeking Rs 8 lakh compensation with interest from Railway claiming he was on official duty on the day of the accident. Bagul went to Surat railway police station for official duty on November 13, 2019.

He was returning from Surat to Bharuch on the Surat-Jamnagar intercity train when he fell off at Palej station, causing serious injuries to his left leg, leading to its amputation above the knee, as per his petition.

Tribunal Member (Judicial) Vinay Goel dismissed the petition noting Bagul had failed to provide any valid travel authority to prove his official travel claims.



# Road crash in Rajasthan leaves four dead

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Four members of a family were killed and five others injured when their car rammed into a truck on the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway in Rajasthan's Sawai Madhopur district on Sunday, police said.

The deceased had gone to Rishikesh in Uttarakhand for a religious programme where a woman of the family died. After cremation, the family members were returning to Vikramgarh-Alot in Madhya Pradesh's Ratlam district when the accident occurred.

"Prima facie, the car driver dozed off due to which the car rammed into a truck moving ahead near Bhagwatgarh-Trilokpura Banas river falling under Surwal police station," Deputy Superintendent of Police Hemendra Kumar said. The bodies of the deceased and the injured were taken to a hospital of Sawai Madhopur by an ambulance. The deceased were identified as Rajan (22), his sister Monica (24), Rekha (42) and her mother Dhapu Prajapat (60).

# Court sentences 17 people for stripping woman in Rajasthan

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Nearly a year after a 20-year-old pregnant woman was stripped and paraded naked in Rajasthan, a district court has sentenced 14 men, including her husband, to seven-year imprisonment while noting that it was a "heinous crime" similar to the one committed in Manipur.

Chief Judicial Magistrate, Pratapgarh, Ramkanya Soni on Saturday also sentenced three women involved in the case to five-year imprisonment, Special Public Prosecutor in the case, Manish Nagar said.

While observing that women are revered in the country as goddesses and that the



ancient scriptures also mention honouring women, he said violence and atrocities are continuing on women in 'kalyug' (depraved and final age of Hindu world cycle).

"It was a serious crime committed against the woman by the accused. Similar heinous crime was committed in Manipur. Such crimes cause emotional hurt to the women. Strict steps are necessary to curb crime

against women then only crime will reduce," the judge said in the order.

He was apparently referring to two women being paraded naked in strife-torn Manipur last year.

Besides the victim's husband Kanha Meena, the court sentenced Khetia Meena, Motiya alias Motilal Meena, Punia Meena, Kesra alias Kesrimal Meena, Suraj Meena, Pintu Meena, Nathulal Meena, Manaram alias Veniya Meena, Netia Meena, Rupa Meena, Gautam Meena, Ramlal Meena, Ramesh Meena to seven-year imprisonment.

Three women --Indra Meena, Mirki Meena and Jhumli Meena -- were sentenced to five-year imprisonment.

# Coaching centres in basements will be sealed: Patna DM

PTI ■ PATNA

The Patna district administration on Sunday said that any coaching centre found to be running from the basement of a building in the district will be sealed forthwith.

Patna District Magistrate (DM) Chandrashekhar Singh, who has launched an inspection drive ever since three civil servant aspirants died in an institute in Delhi, said that so far no coaching centre here was found to be running from the basement. "Officials of the district administration have been given clear instructions to immediately seal those coaching institutes which are running from the basement. This is simply a violation of



the existing norms of running a coaching institute. However, so far district officials, who are conducting the inspection of coaching centres, have not found even a single institute in the state capital which is running from the basement," the DM told PTI on Sunday. The Patna district administration has given a month to coaching institutes to fully comply with the rules. They must obtain mandatory

registration to run coaching centres in the district. Strict action will be taken against those centres who fail to comply with the existing provisions after a month, the DM said.

"The district administration has so far (in the last six days) received applications from around 1,100 coaching centres in Patna for registration/renewal. Their applications are under process. The district administration has also decided to launch an online system of single Window Clearance' for all mandatory clearances/permissions to coaching institutes in the district ... A portal will be launched for the purpose within a few days," said the DM.

# Assam's 30-year-old fake encounter case closed with compensation payment

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

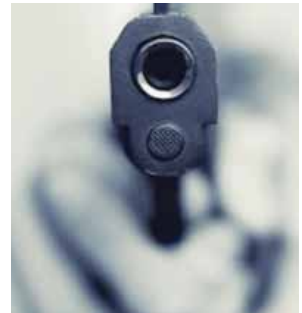
Thirty years after five youths were killed in an alleged fake encounter in Assam, their family members have been given a compensation of Rs 20 lakh each on court's direction, bringing to a close a long legal battle. Seven accused army personnel, including a Major General and two Colonels, escaped from any punishment even though a military court initially and a CBI inquiry found they were involved in the alleged crime.

A review of the case by Court Martial authorities later took some further evidence and announced that the army personnel were 'not guilty'.

All these army personnel are retired now.

Prabin Sonowal, Akhil Sonowal, Debajit Biswas, Pradip Dutta and Bhupen Moran were picked up by a team of army personnel of the 18th Punjab Regiment on February 17 and 19, 1994 from their homes or offices in Assam's Tinsukia district following the killing of a tea garden manager by the banned insurgent group ULEA a few days earlier.

On February 23, 1994, the bodies of the five youths were handed over to the local police station where the army claimed they were killed in an "encounter". "It was not an encounter but a fake encounter as all the



youths were innocent and had no connection with ULEA. As per the post mortem report, the victims were found with their eyes gauged out, nails removed and knees broken. Such things cannot happen in an actual encounter," said the then student leader Jagadish Bhuyan, who filed a habeas

corpus in the case in 1994 in Gauhati High Court.

After an inquiry, the CBI filed a change sheet in a local court in Guwahati in 2002 saying the agency had arrived at its conclusion that it is "disbelievable that the injuries that were found on the deceased persons were caused in any encounter".

Accordingly, the CBI held that five army personnel - the then Captain R K Shivrain (later Colonel), JCOs and NCOs Dalip Singh, Palwinder Singh, Shivender Singh and Jagdev Singh - were "responsible for the killing" of the five persons as they "had actually opened fire on them" and therefore, liable to be prosecuted for murder charges.

# Task force to clear encroachments, illegal resorts in forests, western ghats

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Forest Minister Keshwar Khandre on Sunday said the state government has constituted a forests and western ghats encroachment clearance task force to clear illegal resorts, home stays and all forest encroachments in the entire ghat regions of the state, including the western ghats, which covers 10 districts.

This task force has been formed under the leadership of Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Head of Forest Force, and it will carry out forest encroachment clearance operations in western ghats and other ghat areas from tomorrow itself, the Minister



said in a statement. Khandre had on Friday directed the forest department's additional chief secretary to issue orders for the removal of all forest encroachments that have sprung up after 2015 in the western ghats region, and to submit an action taken report in a month's time. Pointing to terrible tragedies caused by

landslides at Wayanad in neighbouring Kerala and Shirur in Uttara Kannada district, resulting in loss of lives, Khandre said hills that existed for thousands of years have disappeared, landslides are continuously occurring in the western ghats region of the state including Shiradi Ghat, Charmadi Ghat. He said, "if we do not wake up now, the next generation will not forgive us."

The Minister said clear instructions have been given to carry out clearance operations in all the cases where the 64A (of the Karnataka Forest Act) process has been completed with regards to the encroachment in the forests in the Ghat areas after 2015.



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

## On the brink of war

War clouds hover over West Asia as Iran-backed militias attack Israel following the assassination of a Hamas leader

As Iran-backed militias engage in conflict with Israel, a protracted war looms large over West Asia, one of the world's prominent flashpoints. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been a focal point of West Asian tensions, involving numerous state and non-state actors. Recently, the situation has dramatically escalated following the assassination of a senior Hamas leader, which has ignited a series of violent responses and counter-responses. The assassination of the Hamas leader, who orchestrated militant operations against Israel, was carried out in a covert operation attributed to Israeli forces. Hamas vowed retaliation, and their pledge quickly materialised in a barrage of rockets targeting civilian areas, prompting Israel to activate its Iron Dome missile defence system. The airstrikes and rocket attacks have resulted in significant casualties and damage on both sides. Compounding the situation, Iran-backed militias, primarily from Lebanon and Syria, entered the fray. Hezbollah, a powerful Shia militant group based in Lebanon and backed by Iran, launched a series of rocket attacks into northern Israel. Similar militias in Syria have also increased their operations, targeting Israeli military positions and border areas. These militias have a long-standing alliance with Hamas and other Palestinian factions, often receiving financial, logistical, and military support from Iran. The current escalation can be seen as an extension of Iran's broader strategy to challenge Israeli military dominance.



As a response, Israel has intensified its military operations. Airstrikes on Gaza have become more frequent and devastating, targeting not only military installations but also civil infrastructure. Northern Israel has also seen a ramp-up in military presence. The war's escalation has had dire humanitarian consequences. Civilian casualties are mounting, and the already dire conditions in Gaza are worsening. Indeed, the situation in West Asia is very volatile and a full-on war can break out anytime which would engulf the whole region. It is not the time to assess who is right and who is not, but to deescalate the tensions, and all must show restraint. It is high time the UN intervenes and the Security Council swings into action to ask all concerns to show restraint. If it is unable to stop the war, the UN would lose its standing and become irrelevant in the present world order. The international community must intervene to convince the two sides to come to the negotiation table. The United States has expressed support for Israel's right to defend itself while also urging caution to avoid a full-scale war. European nations have echoed these sentiments, calling for an immediate ceasefire and resumption of peace talks. The West must take a definitive stand against the war. On the other hand, Iran has condemned the assassination and justified the militias' responses as legitimate defence against Israeli aggression. Diplomatic efforts are urgently needed to deescalate the situation and prevent further loss of life and destruction. The world must put its act together before it is too late.

### PICTALK



A woman feeds a goat in her partially submerged house after heavy rains in East Bardhaman

# The unyielding spirit of military families



BHOPINDER SINGH

Military service comes with 'unlimited liability,' a reality underscored by the valour and ultimate sacrifices of the young soldiers who gave their lives for the country

Recent martyrdom of four Indian Army personnel i.e., Capt. Brijesh Thapa, Naik Rajesh, Sepoy Brijendra and Sepoy Ajay of the 10th Rashtriya Rifles (Rajput Regiment) are a continuing reminder of the price that a few pay for the entire country. Seemingly service in the Army does not come with a 'Limited Liability' like in a civilian organisation, but with 'Unlimited Liability'. Hardly had the news of Captain Abhimanyu's daredevilry played out in public discourse, earning him the Kirti Chakra, and the news of this Doda operation broke. Parallels in both cases are significant, even as one was a combat mission, and the other, a rescue mission. The real fire of the Indian Army is not necessarily in its weaponry, training, doctrines, senior leadership etc., but in the proverbial 'junior leadership' of its Young Officers and of Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) who ensure that the institution's youthful iron is tempered into steel. Both Capt. Thapa and Capt. Abhimanyu was from that 'junior leadership' fount, one a combatant and the other a doctor, but warriors in their ways. Both had headed that unsaid call of military leadership to 'lead from the front'. Officers of other militaries tend to lead relatively more entitled and safer lives, which manifests in the Indian Army having the highest 'Officer-to-Soldier fatality ratio'. This young leadership does not take the backseat of 'ordering' but walks first in harm's way, as this is what Capt. Thapa did, as did Capt. Abhimanyu, who answered his conscience to attempt to save his comrade-in-arms from a fire incident. Such stories are the norm in the Indian Army, but not so, in other militaries of the world. Interestingly, both belong to what is proudly called the 'Military Families', an age-old concept that has survived the vicissitudes and institutional diminutions of time, which would logically expect the end of this noble tradition. In the USA, the concept of multi-generational soldiers, who fight its bloody wars is a revered concept. Folks within these 'Military



Families' uphold the timeless promise of righteous defence that is passed down through generations. While this solemn tradition of sacrifice is recognised and valorised in the USA, sadly, not so in our Indian context. It is almost unknown and unrecognised. This is particularly surprising because India too has a culture of similar 'Military Families' that dot the mofussil hinterlands. Initially a legacy of the British 'martial caste' regimentation, it is no longer the reserve of any specific societal group, anymore. The rarefied air within these 'Military Families' still resonates with much-forgotten values like honour, valour, sacrifice, tradition et al, despite many far more compelling reasons to walk a safer and more financially-materially gratifying path. Both Capt. Brijesh Thapa and Capt. Abhimanyu was professionally qualified (the former got through engineering, and the latter, both engineering and medicine) to venture into the lucrative civilian world – yet, both opted for the 'Uniform', knowing what it entailed. They followed the militaristic footsteps of their respective fathers. Gut-wrenching images of Capt Thapa's parents, Col BK Thapa and his wife receiving their



THIS YOUNG LEADERSHIP DOES NOT TAKE THE BACKSEAT OF 'ORDERING' BUT WALKS FIRST IN HARM'S WAY, AS THIS IS WHAT CAPT. THAPA DID, AS DID CAPT. ABHIMANYU, WHO ANSWERED HIS CONSCIENCE TO ATTEMPT TO SAVE HIS COMRADE-IN-ARMS FROM A FIRE INCIDENT

son's coffin was a modicum of dignity, pride and unbearable pain all wrapped in controllable emotions. Col Thapa's moving words about his gallant son, "He always wanted to join the Army and would sometimes wear my uniform, saying one day he would own one", added incalculably to his family legacy, and on to the plans, and to the nation. Capt. Thapa stood tall till the very end as the third generation in service to India. Similarly, both Sepoy Ajay (third-generation soldier) and Sepoy Brijendra were from the traditional soldiering areas of Jhunjhunu District, again from 'Military Families'. The power of the Indian Army is a testament to these 'Military Families' who have defended the territorial integrity of the nation, for generations. One such typical family is of Mata Deen Singh who joined the Bengal Native Infantry in the early 1890's. He was later declared missing and believed killed in NWFP in 1901. Later four more generations of his served with much aplomb and distinction in the fiery Rajput Regiment. Befittingly, this family claims that there hasn't been a war that India has fought, where a member of the family has not fought! For many in the coun-

try, wars and insurgencies are either far removed or distant abstractions but for these families, the price to keep it 'distant' is personal, real, and never cheap. Col Thapa led the stirring fist-pumped salutation of Bharat Mata Ki jai with his son wrapped in a Tiranga. People in such 'Military Families' are cut from a different cloth, and the nation can never repay its gratitude to them, ever. Sadly, those in power who are responsible for much of the prevailing mess have very little skin in the game and only play politics ad nauseam. For them, each tragedy is still tradeable to score a partisan point. Beyond condescending exhortations and appropriations, the politicians (since independence, without any exception) have prioritised financials – what with 'austerity' measures, OROP, Agniveer (with pension bill concerns) et al, but always without adequately thinking about how much it would actually 'cost' to send soldiers in harm's way. The 'Military Families' have persisted, despite all this. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### ILL TREATMENT OF ELDERLY

Madam — There are two elements which confirm the government's loyalty and passion towards their people and growth. One the education of children and next comes the health of the elders. The very budget highlights the most dissatisfied segment of elders who are continuously penalized after the GST by levying 18% as tax on health policies. It was 15% prior to GST implementation. Even the heat of it has been felt by the colleague of the Finance Minister, Nitin Gadkari whose plea comes by asking for withdrawal of GST on life and health insurance premiums. There are many who by their fear either avoid taking up the insurance cover or give up when it comes to renewal by disappointing increase in tax rates. When something is being charged extra there needs to be a fair play by servicing the clients. Not only is the service absent and also a survey indicates that 43% of respondents who filed a claim in the last three years are struggling to get their claim settled. Even when the Minister for Road Transport feels this as a bigger toll levied by his colleague FM, the public outcry is obvious by this exorbitant collection by the government.

AP Thirvadi | Chennai

#### SC'S LANDMARK JUDGEMENT

Madam — The apex court has delivered a landmark judgement in case of reservations. The seven judge bench has clarified that the state governments can classify the list of scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes in to different groups to accord preferential treatment in applying quota. Till now some tribes are being considered as primitive tribal groups and are being given special financial assistance and attention by the Government, but such arrangement is not in case of education and employment. Now the judgement has made it possible to extend such preference in the reservations for education and jobs. Anyway the states have the onus to

#### Stop anthropogenic disaster



The devastating flood and landslides conditions of Kerala's Wayanad district, which have shocked the entire nation with the tragic count of surmounting death tolls and founding of body parts, has once again raised the heated debate of the Urban Flooding and manmade disasters. Kerala's vulnerability to these natural and anthropogenic disasters had lead to multifold trouble for the local residents. The climate change and Heavy rainfall due to uncertain changes in the Arabian ocean cause unnecessary climatic harassment for

the people. There is no doubt to the fact that Urban environment is purely concrete, well constructed, neatly build up with skyscrapers with adjusted greenery for pleasing eyes. But anthropogenic alterations are always hazardous for the environment and hard to heal and cherish naturally. The scenario of Kerala is nothing less than we had already seen in Uttarakhand. Repeated landslides, flashfloods have caused immense hardships for the local resident. Making strategies, policies and claims will not serve the purpose, if have to be attentive in our actions for healing the climate. Let's stop giving anthropogenic scars to our environment surrounding, our actions for healing climate will serve the cause. The incidence of Wayanad is a lesson for all of us, and we have to take combined responsibility for improve our climate by taking care of its well-being.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

act with care. The identification of groups should be based on unchallengeable evidence and reason. The categorisation should not be made or perceived to be made on political reasons.

DVG Sankar Rao | Vizianagaram

#### ISRAEL ESCALATING CONFLICT

Madam — It is clear from the assassinations of Hamas' top leaders Ismail Haniyeh and Mohammed Deif and Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukur against the backdrop of its genocidal war on Gaza that Israel is a law unto itself and crosses red lines at will and with impunity. The series of extraterritorial assassinations have dashed our hopes of a long overdue ceasefire deal in Gaza and fuelled fears of a wider war.

The nub of the matter is that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who oversees the assassinations and threatens the 'enemy powers' that 'there is no place that the long arm of Israel won't reach' is keen on escalating the war beyond Gaza to prolong his political career. Clearly, US' unconditional sup-

port and its amenability to being dragged into the war that emboldened Israel to conduct itself in gross violation of international laws and flagrant disregard of human life and increase the risk of a broader war.

It would be sheer folly if Israel deludes itself into thinking that its savage acts that are likely to result in a full-scale regional war constitute 'deterrence' and take it nearer to 'total victory', to use Netanyahu's phrase. Israel must end its illegal occupation of Palestinian territories, as told by the International Court of Justice, for the 'axis of resistance' to lose its relevance. The international community must apply enough pressure on Israel to stop the war on Gaza and its attacks elsewhere in 'the Middle East' inviting possible counterattacks and agree to a just peace deal and pull the region back from the brink of a full-blown armed conflict.

G David Milton | Kanniyakumari

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Green logistics is an environmental imperative

Minimising empty return trips through triangulation technology reduces carbon footprint and also underscores the economic benefits of green logistics



DHRUV TANEJA

Green freight transport is an important facet of sustainable logistics and enables the reduction of environmental damage and pollution caused by shipping and transportation. Central to enhancing economic efficiency in this domain is the optimization of container movements which can be achieved through innovative strategies such as triangulation solutions. The need for green freight transport sustainable logistics is crucial to mitigating the adverse environmental impacts of freight transport. Traditional logistics methods often result in significant greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation. By adopting cleaner vehicles, optimising routes, and using eco-friendly fuels, companies can not only reduce their carbon footprint but also enhance their operational efficiency. The business benefits of green logistics are manifold. Companies that invest in sustainable practices can realise substantial savings on fuel costs and improve their corporate reputation. These practices also appeal to



a growing base of environmentally conscious consumers, ensuring loyalty and enhancing brand image. Therefore, the shift towards greener logistics is both an environmental imperative and a strategic business decision. **Optimising container movements:** Effective container movement is essential for the economic efficiency of green freight transport. Inefficient container handling can lead to increased fuel consumption, higher operational costs, and elevated emissions. Optimizing these movements involves ensuring that containers are fully utilised and that their transport routes are as direct as possible. **Triangulation solutions:** It optimises container movements. This method involves coordinating the movement

of containers in a way that minimises empty return trips. Instead of returning an empty container to its point of origin, triangulation arranges for it to be loaded with cargo headed to a new destination, thus creating a triangular route. Using advanced data analytics, companies can identify routes where triangulation is possible. This involves analysing shipping patterns, cargo availability, and potential destinations. **Matching cargo with containers:** After the potential routes are identified, the next step is to match available cargo with containers that would otherwise return empty. **Implementation and monitoring:** After matching cargo with containers, the triangulated routes are implemented. Continuous monitoring ensures that the routes remain efficient and adjustments can be made as needed. By minimizing the distance containers travel empty, triangulation significantly reduces fuel consumption and emissions. A study by the European Commission found that optimizing container movements could cut emissions by up to

30%. **Cost savings:** Lower fuel consumption directly translates into cost savings for logistics companies. Additionally, more efficient container usage reduces the need for additional container purchases and maintenance. **Enhanced operational efficiency:** Triangulation streamlines operations, leading to better utilization of assets and resources. This enhances the overall efficiency of the supply chain. Advanced data analytics and machine learning algorithms can process vast amounts of data to identify optimal routes and cargo matches. Internet of Things (IoT) devices provide real-time tracking and monitoring of container movements, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of triangulated routes. For instance, AI can optimize routing in real time. IoT devices can monitor and manage energy use across operations. Governments can support these efforts by enacting policies and incentives that encourage sustainable shipping. (The writer is founder & CEO, MatchLog; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

### A HOLISTIC APPROACH FOR HEALING A TROUBLED MIND

Through spiritual practices and positive affirmations, one can find the peace



RAVI VALLURI

Recently I received a message on my cell, "I am the son of Lord Krishna, I keep visiting Tirumala, yet I take drugs. Why do I suffer? Kindly help me!" My response was, "Meet a psychiatrist, undergo counselling, and undertake a holistic programme of wellness." But the caller remained unsatisfied and kept pestering me with a flurry of such messages. This person was positively in a state of misery and fear. His crutch and lifeboat were Lord Krishna. The mind of the caller was both fragmented and deeply disturbed. He appeared to be in a state of imbalance. Patanjali Yoga Sutras have identified the following as root causes of miseries in life—Avidya, Asmita, Raga, Dwesha and Abhinivesha. 1) Avidya—This is nothing but a lack of knowledge or ignorance. Everything around us keeps changing constantly. It could be our cells, blood, stomach linings, and hair to name some. But we are oblivious to the change. 2) Asmita—This is our intellect and our self. We get stubbornly stuck to our opinions. The caller was fixated on the idea that he was the child of Lord Krishna and stayed put at Tirumala. Yet he was partaking in drugs. 3) Raga—This is nothing but craving. Normally craving arises out of certain pleasurable experiences of the past. It has a deep imprint on the mind. But such impressions only aggravate our wants and misery. 4) Dwesha—Is nothing but hatred. Hatred is antithetical to craving. Though it arises out of craving, the premise is an unpleasant experience. This could be because of certain trag-



ic moments in the past or unrealistic expectations which do not materialise. 5) Abhinivesha—This is fear of the unknown. An emotion that affects all of us. Only a clairvoyant sage through penance and austerity overcomes this barrier. The caller proclaiming to be the son of Lord Krishna was in obvious pain and agony. He could experience ecstasy only through scientific help that is, consulting a psychiatrist, taking proper medication and a wellness programme. The troubled individual's mind could have undergone say the Happiness Programme of the Art of Living or Vipassana to combat fear. But he remained an escapist by not attending either. This is how a fragmented and escapist mind reacts. The caller continued to escape and obviate the inevitable. It keeps hunting for excuses, and alternatives. Invariably the cloak of negativity and ignorance shrouds the mind from combating the problem. Exercising all love, caution, and care, I asked him to chant "Om Namah Shivay", 108 times thrice a day to purge his mind of all negative thoughts and by making positive affirmations through writing "I am happy, healthy and peaceful". This task was also to be done thrice daily 108 times, and the tapas was to be continued for 41 days. In case a day is missed for some reason, repeat the process for 41 days. Such signals to the mind are extremely useful and powerful. The mind then responds to positivity and discards negative feelings and emotions. He has not contacted me thus far. Presumably, he has embarked on the journey of tapas and hopefully has found support and a beacon of light in the dark tunnel. His Ishta Devata, Lord Krishna wielded Sudarshan Chakra wading through negativity and impurity. Sudarshan Kriya, Pranayama, Yoga and Meditation will certainly swathe through the cobwebs of his troubled mind and increase his Prana, Chi, or energy to obliterate the negativity. I am waiting for the 41 days to end so that he can be happy, healthy, and peaceful and lead a purposeful life.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

# The global crisis of over-tourism

Around the world, over-tourism is emerging as a big problem. The overwhelming influx of tourists causes significant hardships for local residents and destinations



ARCHANA DATTA



The growing problem of over-tourism across the globe! Archana Datta Recently, thousands of residents of Barcelona in Spain, protested against tourism, urging tourists to 'go home', waving placards and squirting water guns at outdoor diners, averring that tourists increased prices and put pressure on public services in Spain's most visited city. Not only Barcelona alone, Venice also introduced a five euro entrance fee to dissuade day-trippers from crowding into the city's limited space and public resources. Japan, too, has put up a giant screen to block views of Mount Fuji to discourage tourists from gatherings at the iconic spot. Closer home, in Chikmagalur, Karnataka, police resorted to a special drive at tourist destinations to curb the unruly behaviour of visiting tourists. Now, people have been travelling for centuries, and have traditionally been welcomed to visit countries. While, in India, the spirit of 'atithi devo bhava', treating guests as Gods, prevailed. Over the years, travel as tourism, has turned into one of the most important economic sectors. The ease in global air connectivity and people's increasing craze for exotic visits, adventure and leisure in the internet-connected world, created an unprecedented rise in the number of tourists, which, eventually, evoked a 'tourist phobia', an aversion and social rejection among the locals, as happened in Spain, and elsewhere. In 2019, when, 1.5 billion international tourist arrivals were recorded, a hike of 4% from the previous year, the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) called for managing 'such a growth of tourists responsibly to best seize the opportunities that tourism can generate for com-



ONE TOURIST PRODUCES FROM 1 TO 12 KG OF SOLID WASTE PER DAY WHEN VISITING A NEW PLACE, DEPENDING ON FACTORS LIKE LOCATION, THE TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION, PERSONAL PREFERENCES, AND THE CHARACTER OF THE STAY

munities around the world'. While, tourism has been described as 'the excessive growth of visitors in areas where residents suffer negative consequences such as permanent changes to their lifestyles, denial of access to civic amenities and damages in their general well-being' (Milano et al., 2019). It has a social dimension too that 'impairs the place-person interrelationships and induces changes in residents' attitudes towards tourism' (Gössling et al., 2020). Over tourism, also makes urban life 'more tense and stressful' and for women 'a concern for safety in public space'. (Maja Hristov, Nebojša Stefanovic, Nataša Danilovic Hristic, Serbia, 2021). However, the present-day discourses predominantly veer around the issue of sustainability (Gowreesunkar & Thanh, 2020), as tourist hotspots are mostly located in sensitive ecosystems. Water, a precious natural resource, gets seriously misused by the tourism sector affecting the water cycle of the area. In Zanzibar, an average household consumes a little over 93 litres of water per day, while, the average consumption per room in a guesthouse is 686 litres, 7 times more, which in a luxurious 5-star hotel room, rises to 3,000+ litres of water per day. Spain, an important producer of vegetables and fruits for Europe, struggles over water utilisation in two competing economic sectors, tourism and agriculture (Water Equity in

Tourism, 2012). While, a 2022 study said that in case of water scarcity, women are the most affected ones, as it worsens their daily life tasks. One tourist produces from 1 to 12 kg of solid waste per day when visiting a new place, depending on factors like location, the type of accommodation, personal preferences, and the character of the stay. If the present trend continues, there will be an increase of 251 per cent in solid waste production because of tourism by 2050 (UNEP). Cruise ships are among the top polluters, and their raw sewage affects the coral reefs. Sewage from Mexico's tourism industry threatens the Caribbean coast, and the Mesoamerican Reef has already lost 80 per cent of corals to pollution. In 2023, Santorini Island in Greece, which has a population of fifteen thousand, received around 800 cruise ships, which caused a layer of pollution around the caldera. Notwithstanding, tourism is an economic powerhouse. The Travel & Tourism sector (T&T) witnessed a boom in 2019, accounting for 10.5% of all jobs (334 million), and 10.4% of global GDP (US\$ 10.3 trillion). In India, in 2019, the T&T sector was worth about \$194.3 billion, added 6.8% to the GDP and employed 40 million people. By 2033, the tourism industry is slated to represent 11.6% of the global economy. While, women comprise 54% of the workforce, but, they are mostly in lower-

skilled, lower-paid and often in informal employment (UNWTO). Now, some cities have gone for new or revised taxation, fines, etc, to de-market tourism. However, tourism de-growth cannot be considered a remedy, which can push tourism-dependent local economies into crisis, as happened in Myanmar's temple city, Bagan, where people suffer to make ends meet for want of visitors, as the country is deep into civil wars. While, regenerative tourism as an antidote, was mooted in 1987 in the Brundtland Report, which set the tone for 'building back better', going beyond the concept of 'not damaging the environment'. The UN called for a holistic understanding of living systems in the entire tourism ecosystem, as everything is inter-connected, the government, private sector, voluntary sector, and the communities'. The tourism industries should also operate in a new way by discarding the 'make-use and dispose' linear extractive model and fit themselves into a circular economy model of 'reuse/no waste', the world body urged. Isn't it high time for the burgeoning tourism sector to follow the path of regeneration, and herald an era of intergenerational equity, without compromising the planet for future generations? (The author is former Director General, Doordarshan, All India Radio)

## Jammu and Kashmir post-Article 370: Tackling terrorism and ensuring integration

Recent terrorist attacks in Jammu highlight the necessity for a having deeper emotional connect with the people and addressing their concerns

This is a 'Stop Press' moment for Jammu and Kashmir after the significant and benefiting legislation of the abrogation of Article 370 - a step towards demystifying and demolishing the 'special status' of Jammu and Kashmir which was a hydra-headed invitation to the West to make a spectacle of India's extreme problems of terrorism as it was and is being transported from Pakistan and India's Foreign Minister Dr. Jai Shankar has often enlightened us on our Nation's self-interest. I say the 'Stop Press' moment because there has been a spike in terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir, especially in Jammu and has brought under the lens the



PRATIBHA CHOPRA

local support for Pakistan terrorists. So what does the 'Stop Press' moment signify? In this 'stop press' moment, we need to dig deep - the abrogation of Article 370- will not integrate into the body-politic on its own - it has to be integrated as a living experience to attain validation in the Being and Soul of Jammu and Kashmir and its people. The definition of the people

of Jammu and Kashmir is 'Indians' where Indians from the rest of the country also become an active agency. This calls for a few hardcore resolute living and active steps- the foremost being understanding the minds of the people of Jammu and Kashmir - a lot has been done - but we need to engage with this relentlessly and break the ice to pierce their 'special status', 'isolation' and 'exclusivity' which has not done them any good except for dragging them into the mindless narrative of asking for 'autonomy' and realizing it the hard way that Pakistan has always worked out of bounds, and still does so, to 'keep' them in a perpetual zone of con-

flict. This brings us to a preparation for working towards democratic strengthening and consolidation of institutional structures in consonance with the reality of Jammu and Kashmir as the Government of India wants to see it after the abrogation of Article 370. Needless to say, all those developmental questions that are normally addressed in any State or Union Territory of India need to be addressed, foremost being economic egalitarianism. The Congress Party must keep its mouth shut and let the present govt. led by the Prime Minister Modi do its work in Jammu and Kashmir with the infrastructure and development, as



Union Minister Nitin Gadkari would have it. The Congress has through the years mutilated all the Federal aspects of the Constitution of India to politically force a Centralised hegemony. The present Govt. does not intend to treat Kashmir as a communal cauldron and a battleground for Hindutva

and rightly so, therefore it is building infrastructure there. The whole idea of the abrogation of Art. 370 would bear fruit if religious and ethnic exclusiveness were not exploited negatively but used towards international trade and commerce in the best cultural parlance. In the same breath I would say that the Muslim majority

could suggest itself to confine its international commitments to religious brotherhood and political proximities within the respectful questioning bounds and press freedom, this press freedom not being an absolute right but subject to the upholding of the Sovereignty and Integrity of India and its Dignity as envisaged in the Constitution of India. As far as the question of 'Kashmiriyat' is concerned, nobody is stopping or stalling this journey as long as it is within the legitimacy of the Constitutional provisions and the artistic license that it provides. And there may be questions of class and caste here that cannot be ignored if we are

to sound and purport real. We will never forget the Indian Army, the soldiers who never fail us in the treacherous terrains of Jammu Kashmir, Ladhak & Siachen in the said region. We give them the space in our hearts for they do not hide behind any 'political' discourses and tricks and are the first agency of the Social Contract that a Nation State is based on. Their relentless invincibility and risk-taking bravado have no given path to tread but every day is a new challenge. Let all our actions as envisioned in the above paras be a tribute to the soldiers of the Indian Army and it is on us to do our duty now and here. (The writer is a lawyer; views are personal)

# Strikes on Gaza kill 18; two dead in Tel Aviv

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israeli strikes killed 18 people in Gaza early on Sunday, including four Palestinians in a tent camp inside a hospital complex, while a stabbing attack by a Palestinian killed two people in a Tel Aviv suburb. Tensions have soared following nearly 10 months of war in Gaza and the killing last week of a senior Hezbollah commander in Lebanon and Hamas' top political leader in Iran. Iran and its allies have blamed Israel and threatened retaliation, raising fears of an even more destructive regional war.

"The state of Israel is in a multi-front war," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a Cabinet meeting, and said the country was ready for any scenario in defence or attack. Jordan's foreign minister was making a rare trip to Iran as the United States and its Arab allies try to prevent a wider conflict. Already, Hamas says it has begun discussions on choosing a new leader. The stabbing attack in Tel Aviv



Palestinians react to fire from an Israeli strike that hit a tent area in the courtyard of Al-Aqsa Martyrs hospital in Deir al-Balah, Gaza Strip, on Sunday. AP/PTI

killed a woman in her 70s and an 80-year-old man, according to Israel's Magen David Adom rescue service and a nearby hospital, and two other men were wounded. The police said the attack was carried out by a

Palestinian militant, who was "neutralised."

In Gaza, an Israeli strike hit a tent camp for thousands of displaced Palestinians in the courtyard of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, killing four people,

including one woman, and injuring others, Gaza's Health Ministry said. An Associated Press journalist filmed men rushing to the scene to retrieve bodies while trying to extinguish the fire.

The Israeli military said it targeted a Palestinian militant in the strike, which it said caused secondary explosions, "indicating the presence of weaponry in the area."

The hospital in Deir al-Balah is the main medical facility operating in central Gaza as many others in the territory no longer function. A separate strike on a home near Deir al-Balah killed a girl and her parents, according to the hospital.

Another strike flattened a house in northern Gaza, killing at least eight people, including three children, their parents and their grandmother, according to the Health Ministry. A further three people were killed in a strike on a vehicle in Gaza City, according to the Civil Defense first responders who operate under the Hamas-run government.

Palestinian militants in Gaza fired at least five projectiles at Israeli communities near the border without causing casualties or damage, the military said. An Israeli strike on Saturday at a school-turned-shelter in Gaza City killed at

least 16 people and wounded another 21, according to the Health Ministry, which announced the toll on Sunday. Israel's military, which regularly accuses Palestinian militants of sheltering in civilian areas, said it struck a Hamas command center. The war in Gaza was triggered by Hamas' October 7 attack into Israel that killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 people hostage.

Israel's massive offensive in response has killed at least 39,580 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants. Heavy airstrikes and ground operations have caused widespread destruction and displaced the vast majority of Gaza's 2.3 million people, often multiple times.

Hezbollah and Israel have continued to trade fire along the Lebanon border since the war began, with the severity growing in recent months. The militant group says it's aimed at relieving pressure on fellow Iran-backed ally Hamas.

# 100 arrested as anti-immigrant clashes spread across UK

PTI ■ LONDON

Police forces across the UK have made at least 100 arrests as violent clashes and unrest involving anti-immigration far-right groups continued to spread over the weekend, with Prime Minister Keir Starmer offering his full support to officers to take firm action against the "extremists".

Bricks being hurled, fireworks thrown, windows of a hotel housing asylum seekers smashed, shops attacked and set on fire and several scuffles breaking out between mobs and the police were among the scenes of confrontation that played out in Liverpool, Hull, Bristol, Leeds, Blackpool, Stoke-on-Trent, Belfast, Nottingham and Manchester on Saturday.

UK Home Secretary Yvette Cooper warned the mobs they will "pay the price" for such "criminal disorder and violent thuggery".

"Addressing the scenes of disorder we have seen, the Prime Minister set out that the police have our full support to take action against extremists on our streets who are attacking police officers, disrupting local businesses and attempting to sow hate by intimidating communities," Downing Street said after a high-level meeting of ministers convened by Starmer on Saturday.

"The Prime Minister ended by saying the right to freedom of expression and the violent disorder we have seen are two very different things. He said there is no excuse for violence of any kind and reiterated that the government backs the police to take all necessary action to keep our streets safe," the statement added.

Groups that monitor anti-Muslim incidents across the UK have said there has been an increase in reports from British Muslims expressing concerns for their safety, with many scared to visit their local mosques. "People particularly are frightened because of the colour of their skin, and that cannot be right and that is something this government will take every action to deal with," UK Policing Minister Diana Johnson told the BBC.

"When I saw people looting some of the shops in the city centre, that's nothing to do with genuine protest or people having different opinions about immigration. That's about criminal behaviour that needs to be dealt with," she said, warning the culprits there are "sufficient prison places" for such "criminal behaviour".

Officials at the UK Ministry of Justice are said to be in discussions with the judiciary, as well as police chiefs and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for magistrates' courts to open longer hours to speedily process the expected surge in the number of people in custody for riot-related offences.

Wales-born Axel Muganwa Rudakubana, 17, from Lancashire, has been charged with the stabbing attack on the Taylor Swift theme children's dance workshop in Southport, north-west England, which was the first site of the unrest earlier in the week.

It was triggered after false claims spread online that the suspect, who is of Rwandan heritage, was an asylum seeker who had arrived in the UK on a small boat. Since then, misinformation has continued to spread across social media and resulted in violent demonstrations involving anti-immigrant chants by protesters in different parts of the country.

Merseby Police in Southport publicly identified the English Defence League (EDL) as a key factor — a group that does not exist in a formal sense but its founder, Tommy Robinson, is associated with using the social media space to whip up far-right sentiments. Stand Up to Racism, among the groups organising some of the counter-protests, has warned that the activities of the extremist mobs must not be "unopposed".

# Jordan's top envoy to make rare Iran visit

Tehran (AP): Jordan's foreign minister is expected in Iran on Sunday, as the United States and its Arab allies try to prevent a wider war after the back-to-back killings of top Iran-allied militants sparked vows of revenge against Israel.

Ayman Safadi would be the first senior Jordanian official to pay an official visit to Iran in over 20 years. Jordan is a close Western ally and helped intercept scores of missiles and drones fired by Iran toward Israel in April. Iran said it was retaliating for the killing of its generals in an Israeli strike in Syria.

Many fear Iran and its regional allies could launch a similar attack following the killing of a senior Hezbollah commander in an Israeli strike on Beirut last week and of Hamas' top political leader in an explosion in Tehran a day later.

Both attacks were widely blamed on Israel, which has acknowledged killing the

Hezbollah commander. Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas have vowed to avenge the killings.

Safadi "will deliver a message from His Majesty King Abdullah II to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on the situation in the region and bilateral relations," Jordan's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Safadi is expected to meet with his counterpart, Ali Bagheri Khan, and other senior officials in Tehran later on Sunday, Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported. The last time a senior Jordanian official traveled to Iran on an official visit was in 2004 when then-Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez went to Tehran. Last week, Jordan sent a lower-ranking official to the inauguration of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, who was also in Tehran to attend the ceremony, died in an explosion that Iranian authorities have said was caused by a short-range projectile.

# Suspected missile attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels hits container ship

AP ■ DUBAI

A suspected missile attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels struck a container ship traveling through the Gulf of Aden, authorities said on Sunday, likely the first assault by the group since Israeli airstrikes targeted them.

The Houthis have offered no explanation for the two-week pause in their attacks on shipping through the Red Sea corridor, which have seen similar slowdowns since the assaults began in November over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. But the resumption comes after the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor, amid renewed concerns over the war breaking out into a regional conflict.

The attack on Saturday happened some 225 kilometers (140 miles) southeast of Aden in a stretch of the Gulf of Aden that has seen numerous Houthi



Smoke rises after a strike in an area in Lebanon next to the Israeli-Lebanese border at the Galilee region on Sunday. AP/PTI

attacks previously. A security official on the vessel said a missile struck the vessel, but "no fires, water ingress or oil leaks have been observed", according to a statement from the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre, a clearinghouse for information on attacks in the Mideast. The UKMTO did not

immediately identify the vessel hit. The private security firm Ambrey also reported the attack. Details reported by the two organisations suggested the vessel targeted was the Liberian-flagged container ship Groton, which had left Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates bound for Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The Groton's Greek

managers did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The Houthis did not immediately claim the attack Saturday. However, it can take the rebels hours or even days before they acknowledge an assault.

The rebels have targeted more than 70 vessels by firing missiles and drones in their campaign that have killed four sailors. They have seized one vessel and sunk two in the time since. Other missiles and drones have been either intercepted by a US-led coalition in the Red Sea or splashed down before reaching their targets.

The Houthis maintain that their attacks target ships linked to Israel, the United States or Britain as part of the rebels' campaign they say seeks to force an end to the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. However, many of the ships attacked have little or no connection to the war — including some bound for Iran.

# Harris rejects Trump's offer to shift presidential debate

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris has rejected her Republican rival Donald Trump's offer to shift the presidential debate to the Fox News channel, media reports said on Sunday.

Trump, 78, and President Joe Biden — who was then in the race to the White House — agreed in May to participate in two presidential debates. The first was in June, hosted by CNN, and the second — to be hosted by ABC News — was scheduled for September 10.

Biden withdrew from the race last month, following which Vice-President Harris, who is of Indian and African heritage, was declared the 2024 presidential nominee of the ruling Democratic Party after she won enough votes from Democratic delegates in a virtual roll call. On Saturday, Trump said that he has agreed to an offer from

Fox News to hold a debate with Vice President Harris on September 4, shifting from the original plan, CBS News reported.

"I have agreed with FoxNews to debate Kamala Harris on Wednesday, September 4th. The debate was previously scheduled against Sleepy Joe Biden on ABC, but has been terminated in that Biden will no longer be a participant, and I am in litigation against ABC Network and George Slopodopoulos, thereby creating a conflict of interest," he said.

Meanwhile, Harris took to X to turn down Trump's debate offer on Fox News.

"It's interesting how "any time, any place" becomes "one specific time, one specific safe space." I'll be there on September 10th, like he agreed to. I hope to see him there," Harris said.

The Harris campaign also said it will stick to the original plan for an ABC News debate.

It said that "Donald Trump is running scared" hoping that Fox News will "bail him out" of the debate he had already agreed to with ABC News, according to the report.

"He needs to stop playing games and show up to the debate he already committed to on Sept. 10," the report quoted Michael Tyler, the Harris campaign communication director, as saying.

"The Vice President will be there one way or the other to take the opportunity to speak to a prime-time national audience," Tyler said, adding that the campaign is open to discussing further debates but only after the one both campaigns have already agreed to takes place. Last month, Harris challenged Trump to a debate, provoking him to say whatever he had "to say to her face".

Harris would face Trump in the general elections on November 5.

# Trump tears into Georgia's Republican governor

AP ■ ATLANTA

Former President Donald Trump picked a new fight with Georgia's Republican governor as he campaigned in the key swing state where he's looking to avenge his narrow 2020 loss — a defeat he continues to blame on Republican officials based on his false theories of election fraud.

The back and forth came just ahead of an afternoon rally, when thousands of supporters packed the same Atlanta arena as Vice President Kamala Harris' backers did four days earlier. Georgia is likely to see another closely contested election as both campaigns push hard in the state, with Democrats riding a new wave of enthusiasm after Biden dropped his reelection bid and endorsed Harris.

Trump's Republican allies have urged him to focus on issues where they see an advantage over Harris, notably the economy and immigration. While Trump attacked the likely Democratic nominee on both

not stopping a local district attorney from prosecuting him and several associates for his efforts to overturn the results.

On X, Kemp told Trump to "leave my family out of it" and urged him to stop "engaging in petty personal insults, attacking fellow Republicans, or dwelling on the past".

The back and forth came just ahead of an afternoon rally, when thousands of supporters packed the same Atlanta arena as Vice President Kamala Harris' backers did four days earlier. Georgia is likely to see another closely contested election as both campaigns push hard in the state, with Democrats riding a new wave of enthusiasm after Biden dropped his reelection bid and endorsed Harris.

Trump's Republican allies have urged him to focus on issues where they see an advantage over Harris, notably the economy and immigration. While Trump attacked the likely Democratic nominee on both

issues, he also again brought up his debunked claims about fraud in 2020 and suggested he regretted endorsing Kemp two years earlier.

And he tied crime in Georgia's capital city to Kemp's inability to turn around what Trump portrayed as lax crime reduction efforts supported by Harris.

"Your governor ought to get off his ass and do something about it," he said.

Biden beat Trump in the state by 11,779 votes in 2020. Trump pressured Georgia's Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to "find" enough votes to change the outcome. Trump was later indicted in Georgia for his efforts to overturn the election, but the case remains on hold while courts decide whether the Fulton County district attorney can continue to prosecute it.

Meanwhile, Kemp has proven to be the rare Republican nationally who could hold his ground against Trump



without sacrificing his power or popularity — and ultimately, he has expanded it. Kemp won the governor's office narrowly in 2018, after garnering Trump's endorsement. But Trump blasted him after the 2020 election when Kemp certified Biden's slate of electors, defying the then-president's demands to help overturn Trump's narrow loss in his state.

Trump backed a primary rival

against Kemp in 2022 — former Sen. David Perdue, who spoke at Saturday's rally — but the governor trounced him on his way to defeating Democrat Stacey Abrams, a national star in her party, by 7.5 percentage points, a veritable blowout in a battleground state.

Kemp will chair the Republican Governor's Association for the 2026 election cycle, when he is leaving office. And he's widely known to be national Republicans' top choice to take on Democratic US Sen. Jon Ossoff in that midterm cycle.

Erick Erickson, a prominent conservative host in Georgia, said of Trump, "He can't help himself."

"Donald Trump is really trying to build unity in Georgia by attacking the sitting Republican Governor whose ground game he will need to win and also that Governor's wife," Erickson wrote on X. "And if he loses, it'll be because of this stuff, not a stolen election."

# Mystery around Pablo González: Spanish journalist or Russian spy?

AP ■ WARSAW

When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, reporters from around the world rushed to the Polish-Ukrainian border to cover an exodus of refugees fleeing Russian bombs.

Among them was Pablo González, a freelance journalist from Spain who had been based in Poland since 2019, working for Spanish news agency EFE, Voice of America and other outlets. Warsaw-based reporters knew him as an outgoing colleague who liked to drink beer and sing karaoke into the wee hours of the morning.

Two and a half years later, he was sent to Moscow as part of a prisoner swap, leaving behind both mysteries about who he really was and concerns about how Poland handled a case in which he was accused of being a Russian agent.

In the first days of the war,

González provided stand-up reports to TV viewers in Spain against a backdrop of refugees arriving at the train station in the Polish border town of Przemysl.

But less than week into the war, Polish security agents entered the room he was staying in and arrested him. They accused him of "participating in foreign intelligence activities against Poland" and said he was an agent of the GRU, Russian military intelligence.

Friends were astonished — and, as Poland held González without trial for months that turned into years, some grew sceptical and organised protests in Spain demanding his release. Authorities have never detailed the accusations.

But on Thursday evening, the burly 42-year-old with a shaved head and beard was welcomed home by President Vladimir Putin after being freed in the largest prisoner swap since the Soviet era.

His inclusion in the deal appears to confirm suspicions that González was a Russian operative using his cover as a journalist.

Born Pavel Rubtsov in 1982 in then-Soviet Moscow, González went to Spain with his Spanish mother at age 9, where he became a citizen and received the Spanish name of Pablo González Yagüe. He went into journalism, working for outlets Público, La Sexta and Gara, a Basque nationalist newspaper. It's not clear what led Poland to arrest him. The investigation remains classified and the spokesman for the secret services told The Associated Press that he could not say anything beyond what was in a brief statement. Poland is on high alert after a string of arrests of espionage suspects and sabotage, part of what the authorities view as hybrid warfare by Russia and Belarus against the West.

Polish security ser-

vices said Poland included him in the deal due to the close Polish-American alliance and "common security interests". In their statement, they said that "Pavel Rubtsov, a GRU officer arrested in Poland in 2022, (had been) carrying out intelligence tasks in Europe".

The head of Britain's MI6 agency, Sir Richard Moore, said at the Aspen Security Forum in 2022 that González was an "illegal" who was arrested in Poland after "masquerading as a Spanish journalist".

"He was trying to go into Ukraine to be part of their destabilizing efforts there," Moore said.

Another hint at his activities came from independent Russian outlet Agentstvo, which reported that in 2016 Rubtsov befriended and spied on Zhanna Nemtsova, the daughter of Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, who was murdered in Moscow in 2015.

Poland-based journalists who knew González said he used his base in Poland to travel to former Soviet countries including Ukraine and Georgia. He had a license to operate a drone and used it to film Auschwitz-Birkenau from the air for coverage on the 75th anniversary of the death camp's liberation in 2020.

Voice of America, a US-government funded organisation, confirmed that he worked briefly for them, but they have since removed any of his work from their website.

"Pablo González contributed to a few VOA stories as a freelancer over a relatively short period of time starting in late 2020," spokesperson Emily Webb said in reply to an emailed query. "As a freelancer who provided content to a number of media outlets, his services were arranged through a third-party company used by news organisations around the world."

"At no time did he have any access to any VOA systems or VOA credentials," Webb said. "As soon as VOA learned of the allegations, we removed his material."

Because Poland's justice system was politicized under a populist government that ruled in 2015-23, some activists worried about whether his rights were respected. Reporters Without Borders was among the groups that called for him to be put on trial or released.

The group stands by its position that he should not have been held that long without trial. "You are innocent until a trial proves you guilty," Alfonso Bauluz, the head of the group's office in Spain told AP on Friday. He expressed frustration at the silence around the case, and the fact that there will apparently not be a trial at all, saying Poland has not presented the evidence it has against him.

But the group also says it

expects González to provide an explanation now that he is free. Jaap Arriens, a Dutch video journalist based in Warsaw, hung out with the man he knew as Pablo in Warsaw and Kyiv, as well as in Przemysl shortly before his arrest.

Arriens described him as a friendly, funny man with a macho demeanour and a chest covered in tattoos that he once showed off in a bar.

González mostly fit in, but seemed better-off than the average freelance journalist. He always seemed to have the newest and most expensive phones and computers, working at the Poland-Ukraine border with the latest 14-inch MacBook Pro. He had plenty of money to spend in bars.

He recalled González once saying: "Life is good, life is almost too good."

"And I thought: Man, freelance life is never too good. What are you talking about? I don't know any free-

lancer who talks like this."

González, whose grandfather emigrated from Spain to the Soviet Union as a child during the Spanish Civil War, was known as a Basque nationalist with ties to the region's independence movement.

Russia is suspected of supporting separatist movements in Spain and elsewhere in an effort to destabilise Europe.

González' wife in Spain had been advocating on his behalf during his detention in Poland, even though they were not living together at the time of his arrest. Over the past years, the suspect's supporters ran an account on Twitter, now X, to advocate for his release.

When he was sent to Moscow on Thursday, the @FreePabloGonzález account tweeted: "This is our last tweet: Pablo is finally free. Endless thanks to all." Those who have followed the case are now awaiting González's next moves.



# Children at risk of dying in famine-hit Darfur

AP ■ CAIRO

Malnourished children in a famine-hit camp for war-displaced people in Sudan's western region of Darfur are at risk of dying, an aid group said Sunday, because it was forced to ration malnutrition treatment due to a blockade imposed by a notorious paramilitary group. Doctors Without Borders said the Rapid Support Forces, which have besieged al-Fasher city as part of its war against the Sudanese military, have blocked three trucks carrying lifesaving medical supplies, including therapeutic food, for the city and the nearby Zamzam camp where famine was confirmed last week. Sudan plunged into chaos in April last year when simmering tensions between the military and the RSF developed into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, before spreading across the northeastern African country. Darfur saw some of the worst and most devastating bouts of fighting in



the war. The conflict has killed thousands of people and pushed many into starvation. It created the world's largest displacement crisis with more than 10 million people forced to flee their homes since April 2023, according to the U.N. Migration agency. Over 2 mil-

lion of those fled to neighboring countries. International experts in the Famine Review Committee confirmed Thursday that starvation at Zamzam camp, where up to 600,000 people shelter, has grown into full famine. International experts use set criteria to confirm the exist-

ence of famines. A famine is declared in an area when one in five people or households severely lack food and face starvation and destitution that would ultimately lead to critical levels of acute malnutrition and death. In Zamzam camp, which has swelled with the arrival of new displaced people, many children are in critical condition, Doctors Without Borders said, adding that the malnutrition ward at its field hospital in the camp is overcrowded with a 126% bed occupancy rate. The group said RSF fighters have blocked the trucks in the town of Kabkabiya for over a month, adding that it was forced to limit the number of children receiving therapeutic food in the overcrowded camp as its stock of medicine covers only two weeks. "Deliberately obstructing or delaying humanitarian cargo is putting the lives of thousands of children at-risk as they are cut-off from receiving lifesaving treatment," it said on social media platform X. There was no immediate comment from the RSF. The RSF has imposed a siege on el-Fasher in its monthslong attempt to take it from the military and its allied rebel groups. The city, the provincial capital of North Darfur, is the last stronghold for the military in the war-torn Darfur region.

# Indian student charged for falsifying records

PTI ■ NEW YORK

A 19-year-old Indian student, who was arrested and charged with falsifying records to gain admission in a US university, will have to return to India under a plea deal entered into with American authorities. Aryan Anand had submitted fake and falsified documents to secure admission into Lehigh University, a private research university in Pennsylvania for the 2023-2024 academic year. A report in the Lehigh University's student newspaper 'The Brown and White', said last month that a police investigation had found that Anand had falsified admission and financial aid documents. He had even "faked his father's death" as part of the conspiracy to obtain admission and scholarship, it said. Anand was arraigned by Magisterial District Judge Jordan Knisley on June 12, with a bail of USD 25,000. He pleaded guilty to one count of forgery. As part of the plea deal, he was sentenced to one to three months in Northampton County Prison, "which amounted to a time-served sentence", lehighvalleylive.com quoted defence attorney Molly Heidorn as saying.

As part of the deal, Anand is required to return to India and Lehigh chose not to seek restitution of about USD 85,000. He was released to the custody of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. According to a release issued by the office of Northampton County's district attorney Stephen Baratta, Anand had created a fake email address impersonating a school principal, the report in lehighvalleylive.com said. The release had said that Anand's father is alive and in India. Anand's forgery came to light after a post he shared on the social media site Reddit titled 'I have built my life and career on lies' prompted the investigation into his case. In that anonymous post, he had laid out the details of his fraudulent scheme. The Brown and White report said that the investigation began when a Reddit monitor notified Lehigh's Admissions Department of the post on April 26. "The criminal complaint revealed the thread was authored by someone with the username 'u/transportationOK4728', and 'the creator was following only one University group of Reddit and that University was Lehigh University'", the report said.

Further investigation by the Lehigh police identified Anand as the author of the post, which has since been deleted but in which he had outlined his scheme. Anand had indicated that he "created a fake email address in the format of principal@schoolname.com for his application, submitted a death certificate for his father to acquire additional hardship financial aid, falsified tax documentation, altered his secondary school year 1-3 transcripts and created a false 'Senior School Certificate Examination' to show success in his final year of secondary school", the report said. Anand said it was "all for the purpose of securing admission and financial aid to attend a university in the United States." The criminal complaint filed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on April 30 accused Anand of violating the statutes of forgery, tampering with records or identification, theft by deception and theft of services. "Metadata revealed the death certificate and tax documents were altered using the 'iLovePDF' website, and the academic documents were modified using Adobe Photoshop," according to the criminal complaint.

# 11 killed due to torrential rains in northwest Pakistan



PTI ■ PESHAWAR

At least 11 people died in the last 24 hours due to torrential monsoon rains that caused flash floods and roof collapses in northwest Pakistan on Sunday, authorities said. At least seven deaths were reported from Tank and Karak districts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, bordering Afghanistan. Three people died when the roof of their house collapsed due to heavy rains in Tank dis-

trict, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority said. It added that four people died after they were swept away in Karak district. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur expressed grief and sorrow over the deaths and announced compensation for the families hit by the rains. Gandapur also directed the respective district administrations to provide the best possible assistance and relief to the people affected by the rains.

# Four years after the Beirut port blast, many decry stalled justice as regional tensions spike

AP ■ BEIRUT

Four years ago, Helen Ata got a call from someone she didn't know telling her that a massive explosion at the Beirut port had caused her building to collapse. Her brothers were trapped under the rubble. One of them, Issam, survived, with a permanent disability in his right leg. Her twin brother Abdo, whom she calls her "other half," died. "We will never feel safe again," she told The Associated Press, sitting next to a portrait of Abdo. The port blast anniversary Sunday comes as the region braces for retaliation after an Israeli strike killed a senior Hezbollah commander in Beirut and an explosion in Tehran, widely blamed on Israel, killed top Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. For many, the fears of a new escalation come as wounds of the port explosion four years ago remain raw. On August 4, 2020, hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate



detonated in a Beirut Port warehouse. The gigantic blast tore through the Lebanese capital, killing at least 218 people, according to an AP count, wounded more than 6,000 others, and devastated large swaths of Beirut, causing billions of dollars in damages. The blast stunned the nation and a probe by a maverick investigative judge into the explosion shook the country's ruling elite, rife with corruption and mismanagement. However, years of obstructions by top officials to dodge accountability and stall the probe have hampered hopes for justice. "Four years later, there is not a

single detainee," Ata said. "There is a crime, and there are accused, but there are no criminals." Judge Tarek Bitar is the second investigator to lead the probe into the port blast. He has charged over a dozen senior political, security, port and security officials. Most of the families of the victims rallying for justice have backed him, but senior officials have repeatedly refused to show up for questioning since the start of the investigation. Karim Nammour, a lawyer with the Lebanese watchdog group Legal Agenda, said the case has rattled officials because it exposed the dangers of the "criminal incompetence" of how they have run the country for decades. Lebanon's political leadership has accused Bitar, without providing evidence, of being biased in his investigation, and some even demanded his removal while filing legal complaints against him that have stalled the investigation for years.

# Imran says 'army should apologise'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has refused to apologise for the May 9 riots that erupted after his arrest last year and claimed that it was the Army that owed him an apology since he was "abducted" by the paramilitary rangers on the day of the violence. Khan, 71, was on May 9, 2023, arrested by the Pakistan Rangers from the Islamabad High Court premises during his appearance in a corruption case. His arrest sparked countrywide protests and riots by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf supporters who damaged civilian as well as military installations across the country. Army spokesman Maj Gen Ahmed Sharif on May 7 this year said any dialogue with the PTI could happen if the party apologised for its "politics of anarchy". The statement was followed by calls from different quarters that Khan founded PTI to apologise for the "Black Day" violence. Khan during a media talk on Saturday at the Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi when asked whether he would tender an apology for the May 9 violence, said he had no reason to apologise, further adding that he was arrested by the rangers headed by a serving major general from the premises of the Islamabad High Court, the Dawn newspaper reported. The former premier, who over the past few weeks has repeatedly expressed his willingness to talk to the army and not with the government, reiterating his position, said he would only hold talks with the "real authority" as negotiations with the government were "a futile exercise". He alleged that talks with the government would be counterproductive as there is an unannounced martial law in the field. The cricketer-turned-politician also added that talks with "people in the power corridors"

would be within the ambit of the Constitution. Dawn further reported that responding to a question that senior politician and his ally Mahmood Khan Achakzai has declined to become the focal point for proposed talks with the establishment, Khan said the senior leader had been nominated to negotiate with political parties. Earlier this week, the former premier said his party was ready for talks with the military establishment but laid down preconditions: the return of his party's "stolen mandate", the release of all detained party workers, and the holding of transparent elections. Khan also urged the military to nominate their representatives for talks. Talking about his prison woes, the former prime minister said he twice suffered from food poisoning as he had no refrigerator in his cell to preserve the food properly. Referring to the new Toshakhana reference in which he and his wife Bushra Bibi are the accused, Khan said the case was a "clear violation of the National Accountability Ordinance". He claimed still having in his possession the Graff watch, which he is accused of selling in the NAB reference. Khan said he had moved his valuable possessions to a safer location following a raid at his Banigala residence in March last year. He warned of legal proceedings against the NAB chairman, interior minister and those officers who implicated him in "false cases". Earlier, the accountability court adjourned till August 7 the proceedings in the 190 million pounds Al-Qadir Trust corruption case. Since Khan's counsel was unavailable, the cross-examination of investigation officer Mian Umar could not be completed. The PTI leader's legal team in an application before Judge Nasir Javed Rana requested that Khan be allowed to call his children.

# Flood damage: Putin offers disaster aid to N Korea

AP ■ SEOUL

Russian President Vladimir Putin offered humanitarian assistance to help North Korea cope with damages from recent floods, both countries said, in another sign of expanding relations between the two nations. In a message to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Saturday, Putin "extended deep sympathy and support" and conveyed his willingness to provide immediate disaster aid to help North Korea recover from the floods, the North's official Korean Central News Agency reported Sunday. Russia's state news agency Tass carried a similar report, saying that Putin told Kim in the message: "You can always count on our assistance and support." Ties between North Korea and Russia have been improving significantly amid widespread

outside beliefs that North Korea has supplied conventional weapons to Russia for its war in Ukraine in return for military and economic assistance. During a meeting in Pyongyang in June, Kim and Putin signed a pact stipulating mutual military assistance if either country is attacked, in what was considered the two countries' biggest defence deal since the end of the Cold War. Kim expressed his gratitude to Putin over the offer for aid, saying he "could deeply feel the special emotion towards a genuine friend in the most difficult period." But Kim said North Korea has established its own rehabilitation plans and will ask for Russian assistance later if it is needed, according to KCNA. Heavy rains in North Korea's northwestern region on July 27 flooded 4,100 houses, 7,410 acres of agricultural fields and numerous other public build-

ings, roads and railways, according to KCNA. The scale of casualties isn't known. KCNA recently quoted Kim as saying the flood caused a "casualty that cannot be allowed" but didn't elaborate. On Thursday, rival South Korea also offered humanitarian support to North Korea. Observers say North Korea will likely ignore or turn down the South Korean proposal, as animosities between the two countries are at one of their highest points in years. During a Friday visit to a military unit involved in operations to evacuate residents stranded by the floods, Kim called South Korea "scum" as he lambasted what he called "rubbish" South Korean media for allegedly tarnishing the North's image by exaggerating the death tolls from the floods. Kim didn't mention South Korea's offer to provide aid.

# Albanians vote for new mayor of Greek town

Qeparo (AP):

Albanians in the southwestern town of Himara are to vote Sunday for a new mayor after their previous choice, a member of the country's ethnic Greek minority, was stripped of his title, convicted and imprisoned on vote-buying charges in what he and neighboring Greece have claimed was a politically motivated case. Voting started on Sunday with less than 7% of about 23,000 voters casting their ballots in the first two hours, according to the Central Election Commission, the country's governing election body. The process is normal and without any problems so far, it said. Some minor technical issues in some polling stations, with the election documentation, management or voters' identity cards have been reported by local media. Media also has reported that at least four buses have come from neighboring Greece with locally registered voters. Both rival

candidates have invested in bringing Albanian immigrants back to cast their ballots, a normal move in every election in the tiny Balkan country. The case against Fredis Belleris, a dual Albanian-Greek national who was elected to the European Parliament with Greece's governing conservative party in June, has strained relations between Tirana and Athens, with Greece threatening to hold up Albania's bid to join the European Union. Belleris, 51, was arrested two days before the May 14, 2023, municipal elections in Himara, a town populated by ethnic Greeks on what has been dubbed the Albanian Riviera, a coastal region with burgeoning tourist development that has been rife with property disputes. He was charged and ultimately convicted of offering about 40,000 Albanian leks (360 euros, \$390) to buy eight votes, and is serving a two-year prison sentence.

# Nigerian leader calls for end to hardship protests

Abuja (AP):

Nigeria's leader on Sunday called for an end to mass protests over economic hardship, saying the rallies have turned violent and blaming "a few with a political agenda" for driving them. The protests, which began Thursday, have been accompanied by reports of looting and vandalism, as well as accusations that security forces have used excessive force. Amnesty International has reported the deaths of nine protesters in clashes with police, while another four were killed by a bomb. The Nigerian police denied the Amnesty report. "I have heard you loud and clear," President Bola Tinubu said in his first public remarks on the demonstrations. "I understand the pain and frustration that drive these protests, and I want to assure you that our government is committed to listening and addressing the concerns of our citizens."

# Debby moving towards Florida with hurricane warnings

AP ■ MIAMI

A tropical depression strengthened into Tropical Storm Debby north of Cuba on Saturday and was predicted to become a hurricane as it moves through the Gulf of Mexico on a collision course with the Florida coast. The National Hurricane Centre said in an update posted at 5 am Sunday that Debby was located about 195 miles (315 kilometers) south-southwest of Tampa, Florida, and about 255 miles (410 kilometers) south-southwest of Cedar Key, Florida. The storm was moving north-northwest at 13 mph (20 kph) with maximum sustained winds of 50 mph (85 kph). The storm was strengthening over the southeastern Gulf and expected to be a hurricane before making landfall in the Big Bend region of Florida, the hurricane centre said. Wind and thunderstorms have spread over a broad area includ-

ing southern Florida, the Florida Keys and the Bahamas. A hurricane warning and tropical storm warnings were in effect for sections of Florida's coast and a tropical storm watch was added for coastal Georgia in the latest advisory. Debby is likely to bring drenching rain and coastal flooding to much of Florida's Gulf Coast by Sunday night and predictions show the system could come ashore as a hurricane Monday and cross over northern Florida into the Atlantic Ocean. Forecasters warn it also could drop heavy rains over north Florida and the Atlantic coasts of Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina early next week. Debby is the fourth named storm of the 2024 Atlantic hurricane season after Tropical Storm Alberto, Hurricane Beryl and Tropical Storm Chris, all of which formed in June. The National Hurricane Center in Miami predicted the system

will strengthen as it curves off the southwest Florida coast, where the water has been extremely warm. Intensification was expected to proceed more quickly later on Sunday. A hurricane warning was issued for parts of the Big Bend and the Florida Panhandle, while tropical storm warnings were posted for Florida's West Coast, the southern Florida Keys and Dry Tortugas. A tropical storm watch extended farther west into the Panhandle. A warning means storm conditions are expected within 36 hours, while a watch means they are possible within 48 hours. Tropical storms and hurricanes can trigger river flooding and overwhelm drainage systems and canals. Forecasters warned of 6 to 12 inches (150mm to 300 mm) of rain and up to 18 inches (450 mm) in isolated areas, which could create "locally considerable"

flash and urban flooding. Forecasters also warned of moderate flooding for some rivers along Florida's West Coast. Some of the heaviest rains could actually come next week along the Atlantic Coast from Jacksonville, Florida, through coastal regions of Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. The storm is expected to slow down after making landfall. "We could see a stall or a meandering motion around coastal portions of the southeastern United States," National Hurricane Center Director Michael Brennan said in a Saturday briefing. "So that's going to exacerbate not just the rainfall risk, but also the potential for storm surge and some strong winds." Flat Florida is prone to flooding even on sunny days, and the storm was predicted to bring a surge of 2 to 4 feet (0.6 to 1.2 metres) along most of the

Gulf Coast, including Tampa Bay, with a storm tide of up to 7 feet (2.1 metres) north of there in the sparsely populated Big Bend region. Forecasters warned of "a danger of life-threatening storm surge inundation" in a region that includes Hernando Beach, Crystal River, Steinhatchee and Cedar Key. Officials in Citrus and Levy counties ordered a mandatory evacuation of coastal areas, while those in Hernando, Manatee, Pasco and Taylor counties called for voluntary evacuations. Shelters opened in those and some other counties. Citrus County Sheriff Mike Prendergast estimated 21,000 people live in his county's evacuation zone. Officials rescued 73 people from storm surge flooding during last year's Hurricane Idalia. Prendergast said by phone that he hopes not to have a repeat with Debbie. "After the storm surge does come in, we simply don't have

enough first responders in our agency and among the other first responders in the county to go in and rescue everybody that might need to be rescued," he said. Governor Ron DeSantis declared a state of emergency for 61 of Florida's 67 counties, with the National Guard activating 3,000 guard members. Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp made his own emergency proclamation on Saturday. The White House said federal and Florida officials were in touch and FEMA "pre-positioned" resources including water and food. In Tampa alone, officials gave out more than 30,000 sandbags to barricade against flooding. "We've got our stormwater drains cleared out. We've got our generators all checked and full. We're doing everything that we need to be prepared to face a tropical storm," Tampa Mayor Jane Castor said.

# RBI likely to keep interest rate unchanged at 6.5%, say experts

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is likely to keep the key interest rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent on Thursday, and wait for more macroeconomic data before taking a call on rate cut in line with expectations, experts said.

The US Federal Reserve has decided to maintain a status quo on its interest rate for now and indicated there could be monetary policy easing in the coming months. Amid persisting inflationary pressures, RBI will be closely tracking the US monetary policy trajectory before changing its stance on interest rate, which has remained unchanged since February 2023, experts opined.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) may also refrain from rate cut as economic growth is picking up, notwithstanding the elevated interest rate of 6.5 per cent (repo rate).

The meeting of the Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das headed MPC is



scheduled for August 6 to 8. Das will announce the decision of the rate-setting panel on August 8 (Thursday).

The central bank last hiked the repo rate to 6.5 per cent in February 2023 and since then it has held the rate at same level in its last seven bi-monthly monetary policy reviews.

"We do expect a status-quo position to be adopted by RBI in the forthcoming credit policy. Inflation remains high even today at 5.1 per cent and

while this will come down numerically in the coming months, it will be more due to the base effect," said Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda. He further said growth is on the stable path which means that the present interest rate situation does not militate against business.

"The RBI would rather wait and be sure that inflation is on the downward path on a durable basis before taking any action. While we do not expect any change in GDP

forecast, there is a possibility of new guidance on inflation numbers," Sabnavis said.

Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, ICRA, said that high growth in FY2024, combined with the inflation of 4.9 per cent in first quarter of the current fiscal are unlikely to shift the voting pattern of the four members who voted for a status quo in the June 2024 meeting towards a change in stance or rate cut in the August 2024 meeting itself.

"If the food inflation outlook turns favourable on the back of a normal distribution of rains in the second half of the monsoon season, and in the absence of global or domestic shocks, a stance change is possible in October 2024. This could be followed by a 25 bps rate cut each in December 2024 and February 2025, with an extended pause thereafter," she said.

Last month, Governor Das had said the question of change of stance on interest rate is quite premature given the gap between current inflation and 4 per cent target.

# India seeks duty concession on cars, machinery, commercial vehicles in FTA with Sri Lanka

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is seeking customs duty concession on a number of goods including cars, commercial vehicles and machinery from Sri Lanka under a comprehensive free trade agreement (FTA), talks for which are underway, an official said.

India has also sought easier visa norms to further facilitate entry of professionals from here, the official said. The 14th round of talks between senior officials of India and Sri Lanka was concluded recently in Colombo.

Issues which came up for the talks included rules of origin, goods, services, and technical barriers for trade.

On the other hand, Sri Lanka has sought removal of a quota on apparel exports to India. The island nation is also asking for duty concessions on tea and certain agricultural commodities.

The official said that as elections are announced in Sri Lanka, the next round of negotiations between the two countries will be held after that.

The two nations have already implemented a free trade agreement in goods and now



they are negotiating to expand the pact by including more goods and services.

The India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) came into force in March 2000. It enhanced economic relations between the two countries by reducing tariffs on a wide range of goods.

Since the original ISFTA focused solely on goods, both countries have been negotiating for several years to expand it into a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which would include services, investment, and other areas of economic cooperation.

Under the current FTA, India allowed limited imports of garments from Sri Lanka at a 50 per cent tariff (or customs

duty) concession for up to 8 million pieces annually, with a requirement that 6 million of these pieces use Indian fabric. Additionally, India offered a 50 per cent tariff concession on up to 15 million kg of tea from Sri Lanka each year.

Think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that Sri Lanka may be seeking removal of the quota on garments, especially considering that India has allowed duty-free imports of garments from Bangladesh under the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) for Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

"However agreeing to this request may not be easy for India as allowing duty free imports has led to a significant increase in

garment imports from Bangladesh, growing from USD 144.25 million in FY2014 to USD 739.06 million in FY2024, a cumulative growth of 412.34 per cent," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

Sri Lanka has placed items like automobiles and electrical goods in its negative list, restricting their import.

Since the implementation of the ISFTA, trade between the two countries has experienced fair growth.

India's exports to Sri Lanka increased from USD 499.3 million in FY2000 to USD 4.17 billion in 2023-24, a cumulative growth of 735.2 per cent. Meanwhile, imports grew from USD 44.3 million to USD 1.4 billion over the same period.

In the last fiscal, India's key exports to Sri Lanka included petroleum products (USD 704 million), cotton (USD 260 million), pharmaceuticals (USD 255 million), refined sugar (USD 206 million), fabric (USD 223 million), machinery (USD 171 million), pepper (USD 90.9 million), car and motorcycle parts (USD 79.3 million), onions (USD 63.4 million), and pulses (USD 32 million).

# FPIs invest ₹32,365 cr in equities in July on continued policy reforms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors infused Rs 32,365 crore into Indian equities in July on the back of expectation of continued policy reforms and sustained economic growth and better-than-expected earnings season.

However, they pulled Rs 1,027 crore from equities in the first two trading sessions of this month (August 1-2), data with the depositories showed. There has been a mixed trend with respect to FPI flows following the budget announcement on increase in capital gains tax on equity investments.

Going forward, developments in the US economy and markets will set the trend for FPI in August, V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

"Weaker-than-expected employment data along with slowing economy has made it certain that the US Fed is expected to cut rates in September. The more important question here is the extent of cut. Currently, there is strong commentary getting built for maybe a 50 basis points rate cut in interest



rates," Vaibhav Porwal, Co-founder of Dezerv, said.

According to the data with the depositories, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have made a net inflow of Rs 32,365 crore in equities in July. This came following an inflow Rs 26,565 crore in June driven by political stability and the sharp rebound in markets.

Before that, FPIs withdrew Rs 25,586 crore in May on poll jitters and over Rs 8,700 crore in April on concerns over a tweak in India's tax treaty with Mauritius and a sustained rise in US bond yields.

The resurgence in FPI investment can be attributed to sustained economic

growth, government's focus on infrastructure development, better-than-expected earnings season that has improved corporate India's balance sheet, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

Additionally, upward revisions in India's GDP forecast by IMF and ADB, and a slowdown in China, also works in India's favour, he added.

Apart from equities, FPIs invested Rs 22,363 crore in the debt market in July. This has pushed the debt tally to Rs 94,628 crore this year so far.

# Mcap of eight of top-10 most valued firms slump ₹1.28 lakh cr; TCS, Infosys biggest laggards

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Eight of the top-10 most valued firms together lost Rs 1,28,913.5 crore in market valuation last week, with IT majors Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys emerging as the biggest laggards, amid weak trend in equities.

The valuation of TCS tumbled Rs 37,971.83 crore to Rs 15,49,626.88 crore, the most among the top-10 firms. The market capitalisation (mcap) of Infosys tanked Rs 23,811.88 crore to Rs 7,56,250.47 crore.

ITC's mcap dropped by Rs 16,619.51 crore to Rs 6,11,423.11 crore and that of State Bank of India slumped by Rs 13,431.54 crore to Rs 7,56,717.85 crore. The valuation of Reliance Industries Limited declined by Rs 13,125.49 crore to Rs 20,28,695.57 crore.

Bharti Airtel's market valuation went lower by Rs 11,821.5 crore to Rs 8,50,389.88 crore and that of ICICI Bank diminished by Rs 7,843.75 crore to Rs 8,42,176.78 crore. The valuation of Hindustan Unilever dipped by Rs 4,288



crore to Rs 6,32,862.41 crore. However, the mcap of HDFC Bank jumped Rs 32,759.37 crore to Rs 12,63,601.40 crore.

The valuation of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) soared Rs 1,075.25 crore to Rs 7,47,677.98 crore.

Last week, the BSE benchmark declined by 350.77 points or 0.43 per cent. In the ranking of the most valued firms, Reliance Industries retained the number one rank followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Infosys, LIC, Hindustan Unilever and ITC.

# Spending on outbound tourism to rise 11% annually to reach USD 55 bn in 2034: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Spending on outbound tourism is expected to grow from USD 18.82 billion in 2024 to USD 55.39 billion in 2034, a report said.

The 'Navigating Horizons' report jointly prepared by Nangia NXT and Ficci said packaged tours still dominate the outbound market in India, with a share of 39.20 per cent in 2024, as there is a preference for choosing pre-planned tour packages from travel service providers due to greater convenience and customisation.

The report said that availability of Indian or vegetarian food options as well as awareness about niche tourism will help increase the number and frequency of Indians engaging in foreign travel in the coming years. The market has already seen robust growth with rising disposable incomes, an expanding middle class, systemic ease and flexibility in obtaining visas, and a desire for international experiences.

"Countries like Egypt, Azerbaijan and Georgia, among others, known for their rich history, cultural



heritage, natural beauty and unique topographies, are attracting more and more Indians to venture abroad. Such destinations are often more affordable as well," the report said.

With a rising urban and young population, the inclination towards exploring international destinations is expected to continue to grow. Demographic trends thus are likely to support growth in outbound tourism in the near future, it added.

"India's outbound tourism market is showing stellar growth and is projected to reach USD 18.82 billion in 2024. There have also been

measurable benefits to allied industries such as aviation and hospitality. The growth in the industry is bolstered by increased consumer spending, visa reforms, social media visibility and commercial marketing efforts," said Suraj Nangia, Head (Government and Public Sector Advisory), Nangia NXT.

With the Indian outbound market expected to grow at a CAGR of 11.4 per cent and reach USD 55.39 billion by 2034, the outlook is positive with coordinated efforts by all stakeholders propelling the industry forward, Nangia added.

# After record profits, State-owned fuel retailers see profit slump in Q1

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After reporting record profits, state-owned fuel retailers Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), BPCL and HPCL posted up to 90 per cent slump in their June quarter earnings as margins fell and they booked under-recovery on the sale of domestic cooking gas LPG at government-controlled rates.

IOC, the nation's largest oil firm, reported 81 per cent drop in standalone net profit in April-June - the first quarter of current 2024-25 fiscal year - to Rs 2,643.18 crore as opposed to a profit of Rs 13,750.44 crore a year back, according to a company filing. Net profit also declined sequentially, when compared to an earning of Rs 11,570.82 crore in March quarter.

Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) posted 90 per cent drop in profit to Rs 633.94 crore as compared to an earning of Rs 6,765.50 crore in April-June 2023 and Rs 2,709.31 crore in the preceding March quarter.

Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) net profit dropped to Rs 2,841.55 crore in April-June from Rs 10,644.30 crore a year back and Rs 4,789.57 crore in January-March, its filing showed. The three fuel retailers made extraordinary gains from



holding petrol and diesel prices despite a drop in cost. The price freeze was justified in the name of recovering losses they had suffered in the previous year when they did not raise retail prices despite a surge in cost.

The gains arising from the price freeze were eroded with petrol and diesel prices being cut by Rs 2 per litre each just before general elections and a fall in refining margins.

Also, the three had uncompensated LPG subsidy - IOC booking under-recovery of Rs 5,156.23 crore in April-June, BPCL Rs 2,015.10 crore and HPCL Rs 2,443.71 crore, according to the filings.

As per an order of the oil ministry, when market determined price (MDP) of LPG cylinders is less than its effective cost to customer (ECC), oil marketing companies (OMCs) have to

retain the difference in a separate buffer account for future adjustment. However, as on June 30, 2024, the three firms had a net negative buffer as the retail selling price was less than MDP.

The three retailers IOC, BPCL and HPCL had reported record profits totalling about Rs 81,000 crore in FY24 (2023-24), which was far more than their annual earnings of Rs 39,356 crore in pre-oil crisis years. This is because they resisted calls to revert to daily price revision and pass on softening in rates to consumers on grounds that prices continue to be extremely volatile - rising on one day and falling on the other - and that they needed to recoup losses incurred in the year, when they kept rates lower than cost.

IOC in 2023-24 posted a standalone net profit of Rs

39,618.84 crore compared to Rs 8,241.82 crore in 2022-23. While the company could argue that FY23 was impacted by the oil crisis, the FY24 earnings are higher than even the pre-crisis years - Rs 24,184 crore net profit in 2021-22 and Rs 21,836 crore in 2020-21.

BPCL posted a net profit of Rs 26,673.50 crore in FY24, higher than Rs 1,870.10 crore earnings in 2022-23 and Rs 8,788.73 crore in FY22.

HPCL's 2023-24 profit of Rs 14,693.83 crore is compared with a Rs 8,974.03 crore loss in FY23 and a profit of Rs 6,382.63 crore in 2021-22, according to the filings. The losses in FY23 had led to the finance minister announcing Rs 30,000 crore equity infusion in the three firms. Mid-way through the year, that support was halved to Rs 15,000 crore. The support was to happen by way of equity infusion via a rights issue.

But after the record profits of 2023-24, the equity infusion plan has now been scrapped. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had on February 1 last year, while presenting the annual Budget for the 2023-24 fiscal (April 2023 to March 2024), announced an equity infusion of Rs 30,000 crore in IOC, BPCL and HPCL to support the three state-owned firm's energy transition plans.

# Rise in construction activities to propel India's cement demand by 7-8% in FY25: UltraTech

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Demand for cement is projected to grow 7-8 per cent in the current financial year, helped by an increase in construction activities throughout the country, UltraTech Cement said in its latest annual report.

To meet this increased demand, the cement industry is expected to add 35 - 40 million tonne capacity in the next fiscal, with 60-65 per cent concentrated in the eastern and southern regions, said the Aditya Birla group flagship firm.

Besides, this demand surge will translate into an increase in capacity utilisation of the industry to 72 per cent in FY25, which was around 68 per cent in FY23.

"In FY 2024-25, cement demand is projected to grow 7-8 per cent driven by an increase in construction activities throughout the country, spread across the infrastructure and housing sector," said UltraTech.

There has been a "concerted focus" on the integrated and coordinated planning and implementation of infrastructure projects, adhering to the principles of PM Gati Shakti. Priority has been given to allocating expenditure towards vital sectors and additionally, the effectiveness of cash management has been enhanced through the timely release of resources



using the Single Nodal Agency/Treasury Single Account system, it added. "Responding to the increasing demand from the infrastructure and housing sectors, the Indian cement industry is poised to add new production capacities. As much as 35-40 million tonne capacity is expected to be commissioned in the next fiscal, with 60-65 per cent concentrated in the eastern and southern regions," it said.

Addressing the company's shareholders, Chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla said India's infrastructure sector is poised for "remarkable growth", with an estimated 15.3 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) in investments, projected over the next five years.

Citing a Morgan Stanley report, Birla said, "This growth is expected to result in a cumulative expenditure of USD 1.45 trillion." "The rapid expansion of production capacity, coupled

with the significant strengthening of brand equity in the marketplace, positions your company to harness these long-term growth opportunities effectively," he said adding UltraTech's growth trajectory mirrors India's growth story.

UltraTech is aggressively expanding its capacity and Birla said "our growth momentum has accelerated, enabling us to be at the forefront of India's infrastructure development." While mentioning the capacity of UltraTech, Birla said its "scale and capacity footprint is unparalleled" which will further enable it to service India's growing demand for cement across the country.

Last month, UltraTech announced acquiring a majority stake in South-based India Cements Ltd (ICL) and also over Rs 3,000 crore open offer to acquire 26 per cent shares of the company.

In FY24, UltraTech recorded net sales of Rs 69,810 crore and crossed the historic milestone of 150 MTPA (million tonne per annum) capacity.

"From the first cement unit that we commissioned in the early 1980s with one MTPA capacity to now the world's third largest cement company, outside of China, UltraTech's journey has been marked by scorching growth, ambitious bets and flawless execution," said Birla.

# Zomato collected ₹ 83 cr in platform fee from customers till March

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Food delivery aggregator Zomato, which began charging platform fee on orders from last August, collected Rs 83 crore through the new levy till March, the company's annual report has revealed.

Platform fee has been cited as one of the three key factors driving Zomato's Adjusted Revenue, which grew 27 per cent year-on-year to Rs 7,792 crore in FY24.

"Adjusted Revenue as a percentage of GOV (gross order value), continued to increase primarily due to increase in restaurant commission take-rates, improvement in ad monetization and introduction of platform fee from Q2FY24 onwards," the report stated.

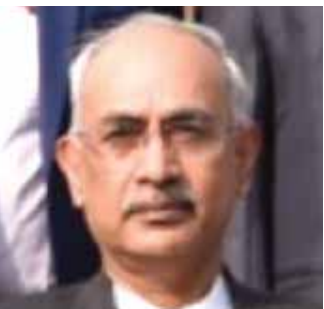
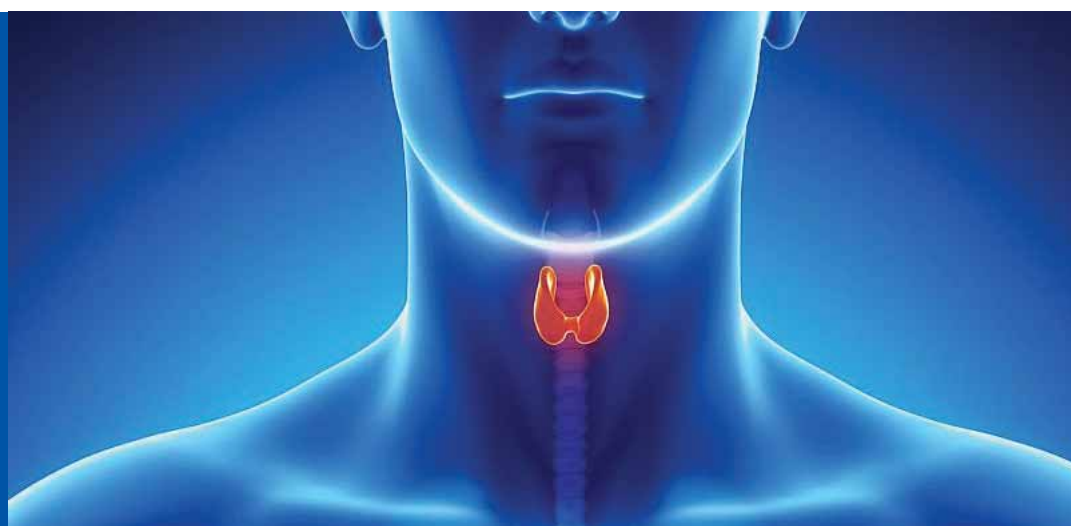
All of these factors more than compensated for the reduction in customer delivery charge per order due to the free delivery benefit available on Gold orders, it added.

Interestingly, most late night orders in the last fiscal year came from Delhi NCR, while most breakfast orders came from Bengaluru, Zomato shared in the report.

The food delivery aggregator began levying platform fee at Rs 2 per order last August, which has gradually been increased to Rs 6 now in key markets.

# GOITRE

## BENIGN GROWTH WITH POTENTIAL RISKS



**DR SUNIL CHUMBER**  
 Professor and Head

Characterised by multiple growths in the thyroid gland, multinodular Goitre (MNG) is typically benign but carries a small cancer risk. Factors like family history and nodule features influence cancer risk, necessitating timely imaging and, blood investigations among others. In this second part of the series, **ARCHANA JYOTI** speaks with the team of AIIMS Delhi's Surgical Disciplines Department headed by **DR SUNIL CHUMBER** to get more insight into this

### UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS AND COMPLICATIONS OF CANCER IN MNG

#### Are All Nodules Dangerous?

Not all thyroid nodules are harmful. In fact, most nodules in a multinodular goitre are benign, meaning they are not cancerous. However, there is a small chance that some nodules can be malignant (cancerous). Understanding this risk is crucial for proper monitoring and treatment.

**Potential Complications of MNG:** While MNG itself is usually not life-threatening, it can cause several complications, including:

- **Compression Symptoms:** As the goitre grows, it can press against the windpipe (trachea) and esophagus (food pipe), leading to difficulty breathing and swallowing. This pressure can also cause a noticeable swelling in the neck.

- **Thyroid Dysfunction:** MNG can sometimes lead to hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid), where the gland produces too much thyroid hormone, causing symptoms like weight loss, rapid heartbeat, and nervousness. Less commonly, it can cause hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid), resulting in fatigue, weight gain, and depression.
- **Cancer Risk:** Although rare, some nodules in a multinodular goitre can become cancerous. Detecting these malignant nodules early is vital for



**DR ANKITA SINGH**  
 Assistant Professor

effective treatment.

**RECOGNISING RISK IN MNG**  
 Several factors can increase the risk of thyroid cancer in



**DR AJAY MOHAN**  
 Senior Resident

individuals with MNG:

- **Family History:** A family history of thyroid cancer or genetic conditions that predispose to cancer increases the risk.

- **Radiation Exposure:** Previous exposure to radiation, particularly in childhood, can raise the likelihood of developing thyroid cancer.
- **Nodule Characteristics:** Nodules that are large, rapidly growing, or have certain features seen on ultrasound (such as irregular edges or microcalcifications) may be more suspicious for cancer.

**PREVENTIVE MEASURES AND FOLLOW-UP**  
 Regular check-ups and appropriate diagnostic tests are crucial for managing the risk of cancer in MNG. If you have a MNG, your doctor may recommend:

- **Periodic Ultrasound Exams:** To monitor nodule size and characteristics.
  - **Thyroid Function Tests:** To ensure your thyroid is working properly.
  - **Prompt Biopsy of Suspicious Nodules:** Early detection is key to successful treatment.
- While the majority of MNG are benign, it is important to be aware of the potential risks and complications, including the small chance of cancer. Regular check-ups, appropriate diagnostic tests, and timely treatment are key to managing this condition effectively. If you have a multinodular goitre or notice any unusual symptoms, consult your doctor for personalised advice and care. Staying informed and vigilant can help ensure the best possible outcomes.



### BLOOD INVESTIGATIONS

Blood investigations in multinodular goitre form an important part of evaluation. It helps understand the cause of the goitre and the status of thyroid hormone production - increased, normal or decreased. It includes the following:



**DR CATHERINE HALAM**  
 Senior Resident

- **TSH (Thyroid Stimulating Hormone)** - usually remains normal but can be reduced in toxic MNG (increased secretion of thyroxine by thyroid gland) and increased in hypothyroidism (decreased thyroxine secretion)
- **Free T4**
- **Free T3**

Both usually remain normal, increased in toxic goitre, can be decreased in goitres with hypothyroidism.



**DR KAMAL KATARIA**  
 Additional professor

investigate the functional status of a patient with a simple diffuse goitre or multinodular goitre may differ depending on the geographic areas of the world. Although serum thyroglobulin correlates with the iodine status and the size of the enlarged thyroid gland, it has little or no value in diagnosis of goitre.

In treating a condition like MNG, doctors often rely on different imaging methods to get a clear picture of what's happening in the thyroid gland. Here's a breakdown of the main ones used:

- **Ultrasound (US):** This is the first imaging investigation to be done in anyone with MNG. It gives a black and white picture of the thyroid gland and allows your doctor to see the size and number of nodules, and even their makeup - whether they're solid, fluid-filled, or a mix of both. Ultrasound images also help identify suspicious features in the nodules that might indicate cancer risk.
- **Computed Tomography (CT):** CT scans provide more detailed images than ultrasound, but is not required for all cases of MNG. Your doctor will ask for this only if required like if the goiter is large, or pressing on other organs, and if cancer is suspected. In these situations, CT scans provide a closer look at the thyroid and nearby

### IMAGING MODALITIES



**DR. DEVENDER**  
 Assistant Professor

structures to help plan treatment.

- **Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI):** This is another way to get detailed images of the thyroid and surrounding areas. Again, it is not performed for all patients and has similar indications as for CT scan and is especially useful when doctors suspect the goiter is growing into other tissues, or if a patient is allergic to dye used in CT scans.
- **Thyroid Scintigraphy:** This is a different type of scan in which a special kind of dye ("radioactive tracer") is



**DR AAYUSH NAGPAL**  
 Junior Resident

used to take images of the thyroid. It shows if nodules are "hot" or "cold", which is, whether they are actively working - to produce thyroxine (hot), or not (cold). Hot nodules usually aren't cancerous, but cold ones might need further checking.

Each imaging method has its pros and cons, but your doctor often will use a mix of them to get the full picture of what's going on with the thyroid. This helps them make the best decisions about treatment and keep an eye out for any potential problems.

*(To be concluded)*



## RML Doctors Set New Benchmark in Plastic Surgery Arena

In a departure from traditional celebrations such as routine seminars and conferences, doctors at the central government-run Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital in Delhi embarked on a marathon of surgical prowess to mark World Plastic Surgery Day on July 15. The hospital's medical team, led by The Burn and Plastic Surgery Department, set out to demonstrate their expertise in an unprecedented 24-hour surgical session.

From 9 am on July 15 to 9 am on July 16, a dedicated team of 17 surgeons tirelessly operated across 24 operating theatres, tackling a spectrum of complex cases ranging from congenital anomalies to severe trauma-induced deformities.

Among their patients were individuals as young as two years old to adults up to 47 years of age, each requiring specialised care and surgical intervention. Of the two minors (two years of age) bardach's palatal repair and contracture release with skin grafting were done. The oldest male, a 47-year-old patient underwent lymphangioma excision plastic surgery.



**DR AJAY SHUKLA**  
 Medical Superintendent of RML Hospital, Delhi

**The department's initiative was aimed to prioritise postponed surgeries and urgent cases, underscoring its commitment to timely treatment and increasing the number of procedures conducted**

crucial for facial symmetry and expression. The marathon session also catered trauma-induced deformities, burns requiring skin grafts, and congenital anomalies such as cleft lip and palate. Dr. Sharma, a seasoned Professor within the department, emphasised the transformative impact of these surgeries, not only improving physical health but also enhancing overall quality of life for their patients.

Dr. Neeraj Banerjee, head of Anesthesia, and the team headed by Dr. Rupesh conducted the OT as a mission. Dr. Banerjee said, that reconstructive surgery aims to restore the appearance and function of body parts affected by illness, injury, cancer, tumors, developmental issues, or congenital defects. Commenting on the unique approach, Dr. VK Tiwari, a renowned Plastic Surgeon and former Medical Superintendent of RML Hospital, currently serving as Dean of Hindu Rao College in Delhi, said such initiatives will give idea to more hospitals which will ultimately benefit the needy.

"These surgeries often involve more complexity and longer healing times compared to cosmetic treatments," he said.

# Plastic Surgery: Transforming Lives and Confidence

DR SANJAY PARASHAR and DR KRITI LOHIA delve into the various benefits of plastic surgery, emphasising its role in improving physical appearance, correcting congenital deformities, boosting self-esteem, and fostering mental well-being for individuals facing personal challenges

Plastic surgery is a subspecialty that focuses on the restoration, reconstruction, or enhancement of the human body and it has evolved significantly over the years. It comprises two broad specialties- Aesthetic surgery, which was once primarily associated with celebrities for beauty enhancements, and Reconstructive surgery, which encompasses a wide range of procedures that significantly impact an individual's life.

augmentation, liposuction, and hair transplantation significantly alter not only a person's looks but also help align their external appearance with their inner self-image. This alignment is like a bullet train to a substantial boost in self-esteem. When individuals feel happy about their appearance, they most definitely experience increased self-confidence, which positively influences various aspects of not only their own lives, from personal relationships to professional endeavors but also a trickle-down effect on people in their circles. For instance, a person who has spent the majority of their life feeling self-conscious about a prominent nasal hump or unbalanced breasts



**DR SANJAY PARASHAR**

may find that correcting these issues through plastic surgery eliminates a significant source of insecurity. Other skin issues like vitiligo, acne, scars, burns, moles, warts, cysts, mulberry birthmarks, dark spots, etc can be handled through minimally invasive aesthetic dermatology and improve the looks significantly. These procedures become the first step towards their newfound



**DR KRITI LOHIA**

confidence, which encourages them to engage more freely in social situations, pursue career opportunities with greater vigor, and generally approach life with a more positive outlook.

**CORRECTING CONGENITAL DEFORMITIES**  
 Plastic surgery also has a profound impact on individuals who are born

with congenital deformities such as cleft lip and palate, craniosynostosis (premature fusion of skull bones), and syndactyly (webbed fingers) that are effectively treated through reconstructive surgery. These congenital issues affect not only their physical appearance but also lead to functional impairments and social stigma. Cleft lip and palate, for example, are among the most common congenital deformities, affecting approximately 1 in 700 babies worldwide. These conditions cause difficulties in feeding, speech, and hearing, and often result in social challenges due to visible facial differences. Reconstructive surgery corrects these deformities,

significantly improving an individual's quality of life or in this case, a child. When you look beyond just the physical benefits, children and adults who undergo successful corrective surgery, time and again report higher self-esteem and better social integration, as they no longer feel defined by their appearance. It is often argued that plastic surgery allowed them to redefine themselves.

**ADDRESSING TRAUMATIC INJURIES**  
 Traumatic injuries, such as those sustained in accidents or due to violence, can leave individuals with severe disfigurements that impact their physical and emotional well-being. Reconstructive

plastic surgery repairs damage caused by burns, fractures, and other traumatic injuries, restoring both function and appearance. Consider the case of a burn victim who has suffered extensive facial and body burns. These resulting scars can be physically debilitating and emotionally harrowing. Through skin grafts, tissue expansion, regenerative therapies, and other reconstructive techniques, plastic surgeons and trained dermatologists significantly reduce the appearance of these scars and improve the functionality of affected areas. The psychological impact of such transformations is both immense and priceless.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS AND IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE**  
 The psychological benefits of plastic surgery extend beyond improved self-esteem. Individuals frequently report a reduction in their anxiety and depression following these procedures. This is particularly true for those who have lived with long-term dissatisfaction or emotional distress related to their appearance. By addressing their concerns, plastic surgery helps alleviate negative emotions and promotes mental well-being. (Dr Sanjay Parashar is a well-known plastic surgeon in Dubai and Dr Kriti Lohia is an Aesthetic Dermatologist and Dermato-surgeon. They are co-founders of 'Aesthetics redefined by Cocoon', Gurgaon)

# JULIEN SHOCKS SHA'CARRI, WINS WOMEN'S 100 METRE GOLD, BRINGS 1ST OLYMPIC MEDAL TO SAINT LUCIA

AP ■ SAINT-DENIS, FRANCE

Sha'Carri Richardson's comeback story hit a brick wall when Julien Alfred romped in the rain to the 100-meter title in 10.72 seconds to bring the first-ever Olympic medal to her island country of Saint Lucia.

Racing one lane to the left of Richardson, and with water from a fast-moving storm puddling on the purple track in the Stade de France, Alfred got off to a fantastic start, then powered through the rain and beat Richardson by .15 seconds - about three body lengths on Saturday. It was the biggest margin in the women's Olympic 100 since 2008.

Richardson' training partner, American Melissa Jefferson,



finished third in 10.92 seconds. All week long, the field seemed to be clearing for Richardson, the reigning world champion who was making her Olympic debut after a positive test for marijuana cost her a chance to

race three years ago in Tokyo. When Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce abruptly withdrew from the semifinal, which went off about 90 minutes before the gold-medal race, the entire Jamaican team that had swept the podium

in Tokyo was out of the 100. One island's loss is another's gain. The strongest contender left was Alfred, who hails from the Eastern Caribbean island with a population of around

180,000. She was the only Olympic entrant besides Richardson to break 10.8 this year - and when she and Richardson lined up next to each other in the semifinals, it was a preview of things to come. Alfred won that race by .05, then lined up next to Richardson again for the final and tripled that margin. One of the most anticipated races of the Olympic track meet was never a contest.

Alfred had two steps on the entire field at the 40-meter mark, while Richardson, whose starts have been an issue at times this summer, labored to get to full speed.

The American, her arms pumping wide in Lane 7, looked to be making up a bit of ground when Alfred leaned

into the finish line. But there was too big a gap between them and the real contest was the one between Richardson and Jefferson for second. America's lone gold medal of the day came from Ryan Crouser, who earned a threepeat in the shot put. Another American silver went to the 4x400 mixed relay team, which got reeled in by Femke Bol of the Netherlands in the anchor lap. Jasmine Moore won a bronze medal in the triple jump competition, won by Thea Lafond, setting herself up for a possible double when she competes in long jump later this week. Earlier in the day, Noah Lyles finished second (10.04) in a sluggish first-round qualifying heat to make the semifinals in the men's 100.

## BADMINTON AT OLYMPICS Sen falls to Axelsen in semis, to play bronze-medal playoff

PTI ■ PARIS

India's dream of a first-ever Olympic gold in badminton will remain unfulfilled after Lakshya Sen suffered a straight-game defeat to reigning Olympic champion Viktor Axelsen in the men's singles semifinals at the Paris Games here on Sunday. The 22-year-old from Almor, a 2021 World Championships bronze medal, squandered a three-point advantage in the first game and a 7-0 lead in the second to surrender 20-22 14-21 to the two-time world champion Axelsen in a 54-minute semifinal clash. Sen will have another chance to become the first Indian male shuttler to win an Olympic medal when he meets Lee Zii Jia of Malaysia in the bronze medal playoff. India have never won a Olympic gold medal in bad-



minton with PV Sindhu claiming a silver and bronze at the Rio and Tokyo Olympics and Saina Nehwal securing a bronze in London Games.



## Lovlina outwitted in QF; India's boxing campaign ends

PTI ■ PARIS

India's boxing campaign at the ongoing Olympics came to a medal-less end after Tokyo edition bronze-winner Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) bowed out following a hard-fought quarterfinal loss to China's Li Qian in the women's competition here on Sunday.

Borgohain, the reigning world champion in the category, went down 1-4 to the Tokyo Games silver-winning 34-year-old in a messy contest during which both the boxers were repeatedly cautioned for clinching and holding.

The 26-year-old's loss ended India's boxing campaign in the Olympics after Nishant Dev was ousted from the men's 71kg quarterfinals on Saturday night, also a close contest.

A six-strong boxing contingent, comprising four women and two men, was representing the country in the Games. Out of these, four had crashed out in the preliminary stage itself.

It was a pacy start to the proceedings as Borgohain and Qian quickly got into a tangle.

However, none of the boxers seemed willing to launch the first attack.

The holding and clinching started pretty early in the bout and the referee had to repeatedly step in to separate the two old foes.

Qian seemed determined while Borgohain came across the more animated of the two early on. The Chinese connected some clean combination punches and a left hook towards the end of the first round. She was particularly impressive before she took a 3-2 lead in the contest.

The second round didn't start any different but Qian was more purposeful in her approach. Her right straights were on target while Borgohain was cautioned twice for excessive holding. It was once again 3-2 in favour of Qian but with a differential set of judges scoring in her favour this time, she only had a slender one-point lead on one card, while the remaining four were tied. The holding and clinching continued in the third round too and both the women seemed a bit drained.

However, Qian showed great presence of mind throughout to keep Borgohain at a distance. Borgohain was not up to it when it came to controlling the pace of the bout and repeatedly took hits on counter-attacks.

The Assamese had fought Qian in the Asian Games final last year and gone down 0-5. She later beat Qian in the semifinals of the world championship semifinal in 2023.

But more recently, she was bested by the veteran in a pre-Olympic tournament in Czechia in June.

## Boxer Nishant's Olympic debut ends in heartbreak with quarterfinal loss

PTI ■ PARIS

Nishant Dev's maiden Olympic campaign ended in heartbreak after a devastating split verdict defeat to Mexico's Marco Verde Alvarez in the men's 71kg quarterfinal here on Saturday.

Leading after the first round, the 23-year-old world championship bronze medallist Indian right hook on Nishant's face, that forced the referee to give the Indian a standing count, followed by a left in the dying minutes. But the Indian's dom-

in the 2021 World Championships. Nishant was off to a flyer as Alvarez struggled to match his pace. He used his straight jabs to great effect, landing them square on the Mexican's face as well as the body to tire his opponent.

Alvarez was trailing for the most part of the round but managed to connect a lethal right hook on Nishant's face, that forced the referee to give the Indian a standing count, followed by a left in the dying minutes. But the Indian's dom-



inant display ensured he had the bragging rights. Nishant continued to unleash

a range of punches, including a combination of hooks, while Alvarez too upped his game,

connecting some vital blows. However, Nishant looked the stronger of the two as he picked the Mexican's shots.

But the judges favoured the Mexican 3-2 as Alvarez and Nishant entered the final three minutes by the narrowest of margins, leading on one card. Alvarez landed a combination of punches to start the final round on an aggressive note. The Mexican showed more urgency as he landed an uppercut. The Indian, on the other hand, looked completely spent and while he tried to throw

punches he was slow. Alvarez acknowledged that the bout was a tough one.

"It was a tough bout, played with heart and mind. I hit on his body to open up for upper cuts. I had lost to him in 2021 world Championships. I have a lot of respect for him," Alvarez said.

"He is very technically sound boxer. My coaches asked me to play smart after I lost the first round."

Nishant is the fifth Indian boxer to exit the Olympic Games.

## Katie Ledecky swims into history with 800 freestyle victory at Paris Olympics

AP ■ NANTERRE (FRANCE)

Katie Ledecky capped another stellar Olympics by becoming only the second swimmer to win an event at four straight Summer Games, holding off Ariarne Titmus to win the 800-meter freestyle Saturday night.

It was Ledecky's second gold medal in Paris and ninth of her remarkable career, which marked another milestone. She became only the sixth Olympian to reach that figure, joining swimmer Mark Spitz, track star Carl Lewis, Soviet gymnast Larisa Latynina and Finnish runner Paavo Nurmi in a tie for second place.

## Ukraine wins its first gold medal of Paris Olympics in women's team saber fencing

AP ■ PARIS

Ukraine has won its first gold medal of the Paris Olympics by defeating South Korea in the final of the women's team saber fencing on Saturday.

The Ukrainian team recovered from six points down to beat South Korea 45-42 on 22 points from individual bronze medalist Olga Kharlan. She came in for the final leg of the bout with her team at 40-37 down and went 8-2 to win.

Ukraine had two medals before Saturday's final; a silver in shooting from Serhiy Kulish and the bronze that Kharlan won Monday in women's saber. That was a particularly emotional moment for Kharlan, a year after she was disqualified



at the world championships for refusing to shake the hand of a Russian fencer, something which briefly put her Olympic qualification in jeopardy. It was an incident that highlighted the tension over whether to allow Russian athletes to keep competing following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

## Viktorija, a former UCF rower with epilepsy, wins Lithuania's first medal in Paris Olympics

AP ■ VAIRES-SUR-MARNE, FRANCE

A former University of Central Florida rower with epilepsy who won Lithuania's first medal at the Paris Olympics on Saturday hopes her achievement will help motivate others with the disorder.

Viktorija Senkute, who attended the Florida college from 2015-18, won the bronze medal in the women's singles class. It was also the first medal for any Baltic country at the 2024 Paris Games.

"This is insane, I still feel like I'm dreaming," Senkute said. "It's a very big day for Lithuania, for all Baltic countries and for UCF. Everybody from UCF was watching and cheering, everybody from Lithuania. This unites so many



countries, so many people." Senkute said she wants to use her Olympic success to help show that people with epilepsy can live their lives normally and compete at a high level. "It means nothing to me. It's not a limitation at all," she said.

"People who have epilepsy are normal, regular people and they win Olympic medals. So I really hope that this will be a motivation for everyone who at some point people didn't believe in them. I kept doing what I want, what I love. And this being rowing. And this led to fulfilling my dreams."

The 28-year-old Senkute was diagnosed with epilepsy, which causes seizures, when she was 15 and has to take medication daily to keep it under control. "I take medication every morning and afternoon, but it's just routine discipline," she said. "I'm just taking it with my vitamins, so I don't even notice. It's really a part of my life, but it gives no limitations."

UCF's rowing team won four American Athletic Conference championships while Senkute was on the team.

## Won't retire until I get Olympic medal: Deepika

PTI ■ PARIS

She has flattered to deceive for four straight Olympics but multiple World Cup medal-winning archer Deepika Kumari has vowed not to quit unless she ends up on podium which she feels could be Los Angeles in four years' time. For Deepika, it has always been a case of not being able to display enough temperament in pressure situation at the grandest stage.

"Obviously, I want to play more in the future and will continue my game," Deepika told PTI in an exclusive interaction at the India House here.

"I really want to win an Olympic

medal, and I won't quit until I achieve that. I'll train harder and come back strongly," added Deepika, who has won every international medal except for an Olympic yellow medal.

"Firstly, I will present myself more strongly. There are many things, like quick shooting, that I need to learn a bit more about, and it's very important to train myself accordingly. "What I learned from the Olympics is that late shooting doesn't work; you have no room to make big mistakes, so you have to control that. I will learn that from here," she said in hindsight. Deepika, 30, appeared in her fourth consecutive Olympics in



Paris, making a remarkable comeback after becoming a mother for the first time in December 2022, when she gave birth to her daughter. After topping the national selection trials, Deepika went on to

win an individual gold at the Shanghai World Cup in April. Back at her favorite venue, where she had won multiple World Cup medals, Olympic pressure was evident as she had her worst ranking round ever at

the Games. She qualified for the main draw as the 23rd seed, ranking lower than fellow Indian debutants Ankita Bhakat and Bhajan Kaur. Her score of 658 was notably 36 points below that of Korean top seed and eventual gold medalist Lim Sihyeon. She was the weakest link in the team event, as they succumbed to the Netherlands in their opening round match without much of a fight.

However, Deepika was not ready to give up as she made a splendid comeback in the individual category, working her way up to the quarterfinals with three tough wins.

Pitted against Korean archer Nam Suhyeon, whom she had defeated in the semifinal of the Shanghai World Cup, Deepika took a two-set lead but could not convert another, shooting into the 7-point red ring as the Korean teenager rallied to a 6-4 win.

Nam finished with a silver, losing to her more favored teammate Lim.

Looking back at the result, Deepika said: "I was not nervous. I was playing strongly, but one shot (the 7-point) really went wrong, and that was the reason I lost the match. Overall, it was a good experience."

## Salukvadze, only woman to compete at 10 Olympics, says she's retiring. For good this time

AP ■ CHATEAUXROUX, FRANCE

After 10 Olympics and 36 years, Nino Salukvadze says she's finally done.

The pistol shooter from Georgia has been ever-present at the Summer Olympics since Seoul in 1988, when she competed for what was still the Soviet Union. At the 2024 Paris Olympics, she became the first female athlete to compete at the Games 10 times. In that time, the 55-year-old has seen the Games become bigger and more professionalized and says the competition is tougher than ever.

Salukvadze considered retiring after her first Olympics, after she'd won gold and silver medals as a 19-year-old. She nearly walked away in the 1990s, when she struggled to support her family financially in newly independent Georgia. She announced her

retirement after the Tokyo Games in 2021.

This time, though, she says she is done "for sure."

Coming to the Paris Olympics was about honoring her father, Vakhtang, who was also her coach. After the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Olympics in 2021, he talked her out of retirement for one last push.

"He was my mentor not only in sports, but also in life. He was a wise man," she told The Associated Press in the city of Chateauxroux, near the Olympic shooting range, on Friday after her last competition.

"He never asked for anything in his life. We had the kind of relationship where we understood each other just with our eyes," Salukvadze said.

"If you quit sports, you can't come back. Just try," she recalled her father saying. "It was the



only favor he asked me for his whole life. I thought he perhaps wouldn't be able to ask again. I gathered all my strength, for his sake."

Salukvadze's father died earlier this year at the age of 93, but he lived to see his daughter qualify for a spot for Georgia.

From her 10 Olympics, Salukvadze has three medals: one gold, one silver and one bronze. In Paris, she placed 38th in the 10-meter air pistol event and 40th in the 25-meter pistol, meaning she didn't reach a televised final. Salukvadze's last Olympic medal - and her first for an independent Georgia - was in Beijing in 2008. At the time, Georgia was at war with neighboring Russia. Salukvadze won bronze and embraced Russian silver medalist Natalia Paderina on the podium in what was widely seen as a gesture for peace.

Salukvadze may not be totally done with the Olympics yet. She's a coach at her own shooting club back home in Georgia and is a vice president of the national Olympic committee.

Salukvadze's record 10th Olympic appearance was recognized by the International Olympic Committee. "IOC President Thomas Bach has sent his congratulations to Nino Salukvadze in a letter and we understand that the International Shooting Sport Federation is holding an event to honor this achievement," the IOC told the AP in an emailed statement. Even after 36 years, nothing quite matches the feeling of winning an Olympic gold medal as a teenager back in 1988.

"When I won at the Olympics and stood on the podium, it was indescribable," she said. Even now, Salukvadze added, "I can evoke these feelings in myself in the same way, feel it just the same."