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WORLD 9 HEZBOLLAH LAUNCHES DRONE ATTACK ON NORTHERN ISRAEL

MONEY 10 INDIAN ECONOMY LIKELY TO GROW AT 7-7.2% IN FY25: DELOITTE

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

Late City Vol. 160 Issue 212 *Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

LUCKNOW, TUESDAY AUGUST 6, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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INDIA WAITS FOR GOLDEN BOY NEERAJ TO SHINE 11 SPORTS

BANGLADESH PM FLEES COUNTRY

PTI ■ DHAKA

With Bangladesh descending into chaos, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina surreptitiously fled the country in a military aircraft on Monday and the Army stepped in to fill the power vacuum, ending one uncertain chapter and opening another in the nation's restive history. As news of Hasina's departure spread, hundreds broke into Hasina's residence, vandalising and looting the interiors, providing dramatic expression to the anti-Government protests that have killed more than 100 people in the last two days. At the centre of people anger is the Hasina Government's controversial quota system reserving 30 per cent jobs for families of veterans who fought the 1971 liberation war. With volatile crowds taking to the streets — some clambering on Hasina's father and Bangladesh founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's statue and smashing it with hammers in a lasting image underscoring the fickleness of history — Army chief General Waqar-uz-Zaman announced that the 76-year-old Prime Minister has resigned. An interim Government will be taking over, he said in a televised address amid feverish speculation about where Hasina was headed. "I'm taking all responsibility (of the country). Please cooperate," Zaman added, signalling the end of Hasina's 15-year power run. The Army chief said he had met political leaders and told them the Army would take over responsibility for law and order. However, there were no leaders from Hasina's Awami League party at the meeting. As protests spiralled across the country, the Army chief said he had asked both Army and police not to



Protesters climb a public monument as they celebrate after getting the news of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation, in Dhaka, Bangladesh. (Right top) Sheikh Hasina PTI Photo



fire any shots. Zaman also urged restraint and asked protesters to end the violence. He vowed "justice" for all the people. In Dhaka, restive crowds, swarmed the airport and even spilled into the runway. The Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre in the city's Dhanmondi area was damaged. Four Hindu temples suffered "minor" damages across the country, eyewitnesses and a community leader said. The Bangabandhu memorial museum — dedicated to Mujibur Rahman who was assassinated along with his wife and their three sons while serving as president in 1975 — was also vandalised. Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana had survived the purge as they were abroad. Hasina then spent six years in exile in India. The home of Dr Wajed Miah, Hasina's husband, was not spared either in the vortex of violence on Monday, local reports said. From Ganabhadan, the Prime Minister's official residence, came extraordinary visuals of protesters storming in and walking away with sofas and even chairs.

Turmoil worries families living in West Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The continuing violence in Bangladesh and the fall of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Government have raised concern among the families residing on this side of the border. Hundreds of families have lost sleep worrying about the fate of their relatives and other loved ones in the strife-torn neighbouring country. "I don't know how they are ... though from different communities their neighbours are good and understanding but given the scale and magnitude of the violence I wonder how they are now... more than 20 of them," said 80-year-old Chintamani Kar of Behala in South Kolkata expressing concern for his cousin brothers' families at Magura off Jessore. A Bengali film actor, requesting anonymity, said she was worried about her grand uncle who was in Kolkata last year and was scheduled to visit again during the Durga Puja. "Their family was attacked twice at Satkhira... we asked them to migrate but

they would not... they had unflinching faith in the governance of Sheikh Hasina... but now what will happen to them... we have not been able to speak to them for the past fortnight or so," she said. Sheikh Qamran, a businessman from central Kolkata, said he too had not received any news of his relatives from Dhaka. "Traditionally, they are supporters of the ruling party there... it is obvious... but now after the fall of this Government I don't know what will happen to them... particularly because the way the establishments are being attacked and torched," said the trader about his relatives who live near Banani area of Dhaka. He said he had even tried to get in touch with them via relatives in Dubai but in vain. However the condition of Arindam (name changed) is more pathetic. His uncle is a member of the ruling party and had been a panchayat member somewhere in Pabna district owning several acres of land and fisheries. Continued on Page 8

NSA Doval meets ex-PM Hasina at Hindon Airbase

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who resigned on Monday, arrived at the Hindon airbase, Ghaziabad in a Bangladesh air force transport aircraft. She is reportedly planning to leave for London after a brief stopover at the airbase. National Security Adviser Ajit Doval

met Hasina at Hindon Air Base. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar briefed Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the situation in Bangladesh, sources said. Taking note of the fast evolving situation in Bangladesh, the BSF was on high alert while the Delhi Police further strengthened security around the Bangladesh High Commission in the

national Capital. Air India and Indigo announced the suspension of their operations to and from Dhaka. Hasina's C-130 plane landed at the Hindon airbase in the evening. Indian Air Force fighter jets were airborne as soon as her aircraft entered Indian air space and kept an eye on it for some time, sources said. Continued on Page 8

Bloodbath on Dalal Street

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Stock market investors lost a whopping ₹15.32 lakh crore on Monday following a crash in Indian equities triggered by a sharp plunge in Japanese and other global markets. The 30-share BSE benchmark plummeted 2,222.55 points or 2.74 per cent to settle at 78,759.40, marking its worst single-day retreat since June 4, 2024. During the day, it tanked 2,686.09 points or 3.31 per cent to 78,295.86. Following the sharp decline in equities, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms dropped by Rs 15,32,796.1 crore to Rs 4,41,84,150.03 crore (USD 5.27 trillion). "Domestic equity indices came under the grip of global markets carnage as a host of external factors like recession fears in the US on the back of weak jobs data, interest rate hike in Japan leading to impact on Yen-carry trade and a raging Middle East conflict triggered massive sell-off across the board," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. Detailed report on Page 10



File photo: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

Setback for AAP over LG's 10 aldermen appointment

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday upheld the appointment of 10 aldermen by the Lieutenant Governor to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) without the aid and advice of the Delhi Government's Cabinet. The judgment came as a major blow to the Arvind Kejriwal Government in Delhi amid tussle with the Lieutenant Governor on a host of issues. The top court pronounced its verdict on the Delhi Government's plea after reserving it for nearly 15 months. In its ruling impacting the fraught relationship between the LG's office and the AAP-led Delhi Government, a Bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud

and Justices JB Pardiwala and PS Narasimha ruled that the Delhi Lieutenant Governor is not bound by the aid and advice of the Delhi Government's Cabinet on appointment of aldermen since his powers in that regard is derived from the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act. The bench said the statutory power under section 3(3)(b)(i) of the Delhi Municipal Corporation (DMC) Act, as amended in 1993, empowered the LG to appoint the aldermen. "It is the law made by Parliament, it satisfies the discretion exercised by LG since law requires him to do so and falls under exception of Article 239," the bench held. Continued on Page 8

Coaching centres death chambers: SC; notice issued to Centre, Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday took suo motu cognisance of the deaths of three IAS aspirants due to flooding in the basement of RAU's IAS Study Circle in Old Rajinder Nagar and issued a notice to the Centre and Delhi Government, to examine if safety norms are being followed. The Supreme Court said coaching centres have become "death chambers" and are playing with the lives of students. "The incident was an eye-opener for all," it added. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan was hearing an appeal by the Coaching Federation of India challenging directions of the Delhi High Court regarding the proliferation of coaching institutes in Mukherjee Nagar. The bench said it was not sure as to what effective steps regarding safety had been taken by the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi or the Central Government. Detailed report on Page 8

Wayanad tragedy due to illegal habitat expansion: Min

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

A search and rescue operations continue in landslide-hit Wayanad district in Kerala which has claimed over 380 lives and left more than 100 missing, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav on Monday attributed the tragedy to the "illegal human habitat expansion and protection for illegal mining in the fragile region by local politicians" under the tutelage of the Southern State Government. Talking to reporters here on Monday, Yadav also accused local politicians of failing to regulate and protect sensitive zones, contributing to the disaster that struck the region six days ago. The impacts of the landslides are still being felt by the locals, exacerbating the ongoing crisis in Wayanad. "It is an illegal protection to the illegal human habitation by the local politicians. Even in the name of tourism, they are not making proper zones. They allowed encroachment of



A rescue operation underway after a landslide in Wayanad PTI

State Government. There has been illegal human habitation and illegal mining activity under the protection of the local Government. It is very shameful. They must protect nature and human lives," he said. "The Western Ghats is one of the most fragile regions in the country like the Himalayas. Serious efforts must be made to prevent disasters in such regions and the Kerala Government is also responsible for ensuring the same," Yadav said hoping that consultations on eco-sensitive zone notifications for the Western Ghats should be completed soon. Last week, i.e. on July 31, the Centre had issued a sixth draft notification to declare over 56,800 square kilometres of the Western Ghats across six states, including 13 villages in Kerala's landslide-hit Wayanad, Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA), inviting suggestions and objections within 60 days. Continued on Page 8

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SC issues notice to Centre, Delhi Govt over IAS aspirants deaths

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday took suo motu cognisance of the deaths of three IAS aspirants due to flooding in the basement of RAU's IAS Study Circle in Old Rajinder Nagar, issuing a notice to the Centre and Delhi Government, to examine if safety norms are being followed.

The Court said coaching centres have become "death chambers" and are playing with the lives of students. "The incident was an eye-opener for all," it added.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan was hearing an appeal by the Coaching Federation of India challenging directions of the Delhi High Court regarding the proliferation of coaching institutes in Mukherjee Nagar. The bench said it was not sure as to what effective steps regarding safety had been taken by the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi or the Central Government. "The recent unfortunate incidents taking away lives of some of the young ones who joined coaching centres for their career pursuits are eye openers for one and all. We therefore deem it appropriate to expand the scope of these proceedings as suo motu to issue notice to Union of India (through Ministry of Urban Affairs) and NCT of Delhi to show cause as to what safety norms have been prescribed so far and if so what is the effective mechanism introduced for



their compliance," the court said in its order. "This is horrible what we are reading. If need be, we will even close down these coaching centres. For the time being, the coaching should go online, unless there is meticulous compliance of building regulations and other safety norms." These places (coaching centres) have become death chambers. Coaching centres are playing with the lives of these aspirants who have come from different parts of the country with dreams and are working hard," the bench said. Such institutes must be made to operate via online classes until there is full compliance with the safety norms under the Master Plan of Delhi, 2021 read with Unified Building Bye Laws of Delhi, 2016, the Court suggested. "All

coaching institutes and centres of Delhi are required to comply with the fire and safety norms under the Master Plan of Delhi, 2021 read with Unified Building Bye Laws of Delhi, 2016. Coaching institutes can operate online unless there is full compliance of the safety norms and basic norms for dignified life of young ones studying there. Such norms must include proper ventilation, safety passages, air and light," the Court said. The top court took cognisance of the matter while hearing a petition filed by an association of coaching centres challenging a December 2023 Delhi High Court order which had directed the city's fire services and the civic body to inspect all coaching centres here to ascertain if they are

complying with the fire safety norms. Terming the plea frivolous, the apex court dismissed the appeal while imposing a cost of Rs 1 lakh on the association and said no coaching centre should be allowed to operate unless there is compliance with fire safety norms and other requirements. "It is very inappropriate time when this has come up... This is a state of affairs where a lot of young ones coming from places across the country to Delhi have lost their lives. On this plea by Coaching Federation, we are imposing one lakh cost to be deposited with the Supreme Court Bar Association and Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association," the Court directed.

On Friday, the High Court transferred the probe into the deaths of the three students from Delhi Police to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) "to ensure the public has no doubt over the investigation". Seven people, including Rau's IAS Study Circle CEO Abhishek Gupta and coordinator Deshpal Singh, have been arrested in the death of three IAS aspirant due to flooding in the basement of RAU's IAS Study Circle in Old Rajinder Nagar. The three who died were Shreya Yadav (25) of Uttar Pradesh, Tanya Soni (25) from Telangana and Nevin Delvin (24) from Kerala. Students enrolled in various coaching institutes have been protesting since the incident, demanding improved safety measures at coaching centres.

Govt collects ₹8,263 cr towards GST on health insurance premium in FY'24

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst Opposition from Union Cabinet Minister Nitin Gadkari, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, and several MPs against the 18 per cent GST on health insurance premiums, the Government on Monday told Parliament that it collected ₹8,263 crore from this tax in the 2023-24 fiscal year. Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary noted that the 18 per cent GST rate on health insurance has been consistent since GST's introduction and the Government has received representations requesting for exemption or reduction in the rate of GST on life insurance and health insurance. Meanwhile, it is learnt that several Opposition parties are planning to stage a protest in the Parliament complex on Tuesday to press for the rollback of 18 per cent GST on life and health insurance premiums. Replying to a written query on the GST in the Lok Sabha, Chaudhary said that certain insurance schemes catering to poor sections of the society and differently-abled, such as Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), Universal Health Insurance Scheme, Jan Arogya Bima Policy and Niramaya Health Insurance Scheme are exempt from GST. In 2023-24, the GST collection from health insurance premium stood at ₹ 8,262.94 crore, while



₹1,484.36 crore was collected on account of GST on health insurance premium. In the 2022-23 fiscal, ₹ 7,638 crore GST was mopped up from health insurance premium, and another ₹ 963 crore from health reinsurance premium. In the 2021-22 financial year, GST of ₹ 5,354 crore was mobilised from health insurance premium, while Rs 826 crore came in from health reinsurance premium. In reply to a separate question, Chaudhary said, "After the introduction of GST with effect from July 1, 2017, GST is leviable on life insurance and health insurance services." To a question on whether there is a demand from the industry for withdrawal of service tax, Chaudhary said, "Representations have been received requesting for

exemption or reduction in the rate of GST on life insurance and health insurance." GST rates and exemptions are prescribed on the recommendations of the GST Council, which is a constitutional body comprising representatives from both the Centre and the States/UTs, he added. In Rajya Sabha, senior TMC Leader Derek O'Brien had raised the issue, seeking reduction of 18 per cent GST on health insurance policies as high tax rate is burdening people, especially the middle class. Raising the issue during Zero Hour in Rajya Sabha, he also referred to a letter written to the Finance Minister by senior BJP Leader and Union Minister Gadkari making similar demands. "The demand is

straightforward. Reduce 18 per cent GST on medical and health insurance. We should reduce it because this is an issue which is burdening people, mainly the middle class. That's why it needs to be reduced," said Derek. Further, he said there is an imbalance in the insurance sector, where 75 per cent is life insurance policies, and 25 per cent medical insurance. Derek said the West Bengal chief minister has written to the finance minister in this regard and many Opposition MPs have also raised the issue. Derek also rejected the argument given by the Government that the GST Council can only change this. "This is a flawed argument," he said, adding that the NDA has a majority in the council also.



PM took people into confidence on Article 370, claims book

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

There was complete clarity in my mind that taking the public in Jammu and Kashmir into confidence was absolutely essential for the execution of the decision," Prime Minister Narendra Modi says about his government's decision to abrogate Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Prime Minister's remarks come in the foreword of a new book titled "370: Undoing the Unjust, A New Future for J&K".

"We wanted the decision, whenever it would be taken, to happen with concurrence of the people rather than imposition," he writes in the book, researched and written by non-profit organisation BlueKraft Digital Foundation and published under the Penguin Enterprise imprint. The book mentions in detail how Modi managed to achieve the goal that he set out for himself.

The publishers said the book, which is scheduled to release this month, "chronicles, what is arguably the greatest constitutional feat in India's history and tells the inside story of how Prime Minister Modi managed the seemingly impossible".

It "delves into multiple blunders at the time of Independence that culminated into the unjust regimen of Article 370. It discusses the social, political and economic ramifications of Article 370 since its inception in 1949", a statement by Penguin said on Monday, which marks five years of revocation of Article 370. "It sheds light on the historical reluctance to challenge this provision and the eventual paradigm shift brought about by its abrogation in 2019..." it said.

Bill on quota for STs in Goa Assembly tabled in LS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal on Monday introduced a Bill in the Lok Sabha to provide reservation to Scheduled Tribes (ST) in the Goa Legislative Assembly. As of now, the ST community has no seats reserved in the State's Assembly. The Bill is titled Readjustment of Representation of Scheduled Tribes in Assembly Constituencies of the State of Goa Bill, 2024 and will empower the census commissioner to notify the population of STs in Goa. According to the Bill, the population of the Scheduled Tribes has increased considerably in Goa as per 2011 census vis-à-vis 2001 census figures. It noted that a "peculiar situation" has arisen in the State, wherein the population of the STs there



vis-à-vis the population of SCs is considerably higher -- as per the Primary Census Abstract, 2011 for Goa. The total population was 14,58,545; the population of SCs was 25,449 and the population of STs was 1,49,275. "But no seats are reserved for the STs and they are unable to avail the constitutional benefit of reservation." As there is no power with the Election Commission to determine the number of seats

for SCs and STs in any State prior to the next census, the Bill was being brought to provide for enabling provisions. The 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 EC will take into consideration the revised population figures of STs 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. As of now, no seat in the 40-member Goa Assembly is reserved for the ST community while one seat is reserved for Scheduled Castes.

SC seeks data on status of castes included in Bengal OBC list

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the West Bengal Government to provide quantifiable data on social and economic backwardness and the inadequate representation in public sector jobs of the castes that were included by it in the OBC list for granting quota benefits. The top court also issued notices to the private litigants who had moved Calcutta High Court against the inclusion of 77 castes, mostly Muslims, in the Other Backward Classes (OBC) list. The High Court on May 22 struck down the OBC status of several classes in West Bengal granted since 2010, finding such reservations to vacancies in services and posts in the State illegal. "Issue notice, including on the application of stay (of the judgment filed by the State Government). The State of West Bengal shall file an affidavit before this Court explaining the process followed for classification of



77 communities as OBCs: (1) the nature of survey; (2) whether there was a lack of consultation with the Commission (State backward panel) in respect of any communities in the list of 77 communities designated as OBCs," said a bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, Justice JB Pardiwala and Justice Manoj Misra. The bench also asked whether any consultation was done by the State for the sub-classification of the OBCs. The State Government filed

the appeal against the verdict. "Religion indeed appears to have been the sole criterion" for declaring these communities as OBCs, the High Court had said and added that it "is of the view that the selection of 77 classes of Muslims as backwards is an affront to the Muslim community as a whole". In all, the High Court had struck down 77 classes of reservation given between April and September 2010, and 37 classes created on the basis of a 2012 law.



Germany joins Tarang Shakti multilateral air exercise

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the air exercise 'Tarang Shakti', Ambassador of Germany Philipp Ackermann Monday said this is the first time that the German Air Force is exercising together with the Indian Air Force, and this extensive exercise "deepens our security and political ties" with India. The first phase of 'Tarang Shakti' -- the largest multilateral air exercise in the country -- is set to be held at Sullur in Tamil Nadu from August 6-14. It will see participation of four countries -- Germany, France, Spain and the UK -- with their assets. "This is the first time that the German Air Force is exercising together with the Indian Air Force, and it is also the first time that it flies in India -- a truly historic moment. This extensive multilateral exercise deepens our security and political ties with India and the region. We are working on a security and defence partnership between our countries," Ackermann was quoted as saying in a statement issued by the German Embassy. The IAF on July 31 had announced that 51 countries were invited to take part in the mega exercise, with officials saying that nearly 30 of them would be taking part in it. IAF's LCA Tejas, Mirage 2000, and Rafale are to take part in the exercise. Rafale from France, Typhoon from Germany, F-18 from Australia and F-16 from Greece, among others, would also be participating in the two-phase exercise. "Tarang Shakti is our first exercise with the Indian Air Force in India. We have been working on this for a long time with our Indian partners and now the time has come."

Hold elections in J&K as per SC-set deadline, says Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday demanded that elections in Jammu and Kashmir must be held according to the Supreme Court-set deadline, with party Chief Mallikarjun Kharge alleging that the BJP's policy on J-K and Ladakh neither respects 'Kashmiriyat' nor upholds 'Jammuiriyaat'.

Kharge's remarks come on the fifth anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of the State of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories of J-K and Ladakh. "BJP's policy on Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh neither respects 'Kashmiriyat' nor upholds 'Jammuiriyaat' (democracy)," Kharge said in a social media post.

"The Modi Government had claimed that this move would help to fully integrate Jammu and Kashmir, boost economic development of the region and prevent terrorism and separatism. However, the reality is starkly different," he said. Since 2019, there have been 683 fatal



terror attacks, resulting in the martyrdom of 258 security personnel and the loss of 170 civilian lives, the Congress Chief said. Notably, 25 terror attacks have occurred in the Jammu region since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third oath, claiming the lives of 15 soldiers and injuring 27, he said. Kharge also claimed that targeted killings of Kashmiri Pandits have become a norm in the past few years. A staggering 65 per cent of Government department posts in Jammu and Kashmir remain vacant since 2019, he

said. The unemployment rate in Jammu and Kashmir stands at 10 per cent, with an alarming 18.3 per cent youth unemployment rate, he said. Despite the introduction of the New Industrial Policy in 2021, a mere 3 per cent of investments have materialised on the ground, Kharge said. He further claimed that 40 per cent of projects under the PM's Development Package, 2015, remain pending. "Jammu and Kashmir's net state domestic product (NSDP) growth rate has declined from 13.28% (April

2015-March 2019) to 8.73% post-2019," he said. The people of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh yearn for normalcy, a sentiment they conveyed to Rahul Gandhi during the Bharat Jodo Yatra, Kharge said. "We demand that elections are held according to the Supreme Court set deadline so that people can elect their own representatives, secure Constitutional rights and put a full stop to this mechanism of being 'ruled by bureaucracy,'" Kharge asserted. The Indian National Congress stands firmly with the people of these regions, which are an integral part of India, he added. Whenever Assembly elections are held in Jammu and Kashmir, they will be the first since provisions of Article 370 of the Constitution were abrogated and the erstwhile State divided into two Union Territories in 2019. Last December, the Supreme Court directed the poll panel to hold Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir by September 30.



Jaishankar to open BIMSTEC's 1st Bay of Bengal Initiative today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will inaugurate the first Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Business Summit here which aims to foster greater regional collaboration through robust trade and investment relations among the members of the seven-nation grouping. The summit will be hosted by the Ministry of External Affairs in association with the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) from August 6-8, the MEA said in a statement on Monday. The first edition of the Business Summit aims to foster greater regional collaboration through robust trade and investment relations among the member countries

of the BIMSTEC, it said. It will be inaugurated by Jaishankar. Union Minister of Commerce and Industries Piyush Goyal and other leaders will deliver keynote addresses. Several ministers of the BIMSTEC member States from the ambit of trade, commerce and industry, as well as energy, along with high-ranking Government officials, policymakers, entrepreneurs and industry associations will participate in the event, the MEA said. The event will bring together more than 300 key stakeholders from across the Bay of Bengal region to facilitate economic collaboration and explore ways ahead in focus areas such as trade facilitation, regional connectivity, energy security, inclusive growth and sustainable development.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Justice delayed

Chief Justice of India highlights frustration over court delays, calls for urgent reforms to address pendency

The Chief Justice of India has voiced a growing concern shared by many: the prolonged delays in Indian courts are causing immense frustration among the public, turning the judicial process into an unwelcome ordeal. In a recent statement, the Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud remarked, "People get fed up with protracted court proceedings, the process becomes a punishment." This stark observation brings to light the urgent need to address the pervasive issue of case pendency in India's legal system. The Indian judiciary is grappling with an overwhelming backlog of cases, which has long been a subject of public discontent and legal scrutiny. The Chief Justice of India's recent statement underscores the severity of this issue, highlighting how extended court delays are not only hindering justice but also eroding public trust in the legal system. As of recent estimates, over 40 million cases are pending across various levels of the Indian judiciary and may take 300 years to clear it at the going pace. This staggering number includes civil, criminal, and administrative cases, many of which have been unresolved for years or even decades.



The backlog creates a bottleneck that prevents timely justice, leading to prolonged legal battles and increasing costs for the litigants. Extended delays can lead to a lack of confidence in the judiciary, with people perceiving the legal process as slow and inefficient. When cases languish in the courts for years without resolution, individuals begin to doubt the effectiveness and reliability of the judicial system. Knowing that legal proceedings are likely to be drawn out, many individuals may avoid seeking justice through the courts altogether.

This reluctance is particularly pronounced among those who cannot afford prolonged litigation or who need prompt resolution due to personal or financial constraints. The inordinate delays can drive people to seek alternative, and often extrajudicial, means of resolving disputes. Moreover, businesses and investors rely on a robust legal system to enforce contracts and resolve disputes. Addressing these delays is crucial for maintaining the integrity and efficacy of the judicial system and ensuring that justice is accessible and timely for all citizens. Several factors contribute to the chronic issue of case pendency in India. A significant number of judicial positions remain unfilled. The legal procedures in India can be highly complex, often leading to unnecessary delays. Many courts lack the necessary infrastructure and technological support. But the biggest source of delay is the practice of frequent adjournments, often granted for frivolous reasons. A Bollywood film dialogue "tareekh pe tareekh" sums it up succinctly. Some issues have been dealt with in the amendments to the Indian penal code which are now called 'Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita' but a lot more needs to be done to expedite justice and establish a rule of law! As the saying goes, "Justice delayed is justice denied," and the legal system must cope with the needs of a fast-paced society that we have today.

PICTALK



People take a dip before performing rituals on the occasion of 'Aadi Amavasai', in Rameshwaram

Grim prospects for peace in West Asia

The killing of Hamas leader threatens to derail any hopes for a ceasefire in Gaza further complicating efforts for peace in the region



UMANG KOHLI



Israel seems to have eliminated Hamas leader Haniyeh, using an airborne guided projectile in an early morning attack. Haniyeh was in Iran for the Iranian president's swearing-in ceremony as a state guest and was staying in one of the residences for veterans. The events in the Middle East are shaping dangerously, the things as they are turning out to be, it's not out of the scope of imagination that soon Iran may be part of a major regional conflict.

We have already seen that a confrontation between Hezbollah and Israel is underway in Lebanon. However, Israel has still not taken responsibility for the strike. Israel has been accusing Iran of harbouring Hamas leaders like Haniyeh and has openly vowed to kill them. Israel not taking responsibility for the attack shows that it does not want a direct confirmation with Iran right now. It remains to be seen how things play out, there is also a section in Israel that is suspicious of Iran's state media's claim that Haniyeh has even been killed.

Having said that there are little or no takers of the version that Israel is not responsible for the killing of Hamas's political leader. Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa has condemned the assassina-

tion of Ismail Haniyeh and termed it a violation of the entire international rule of law. The act is a grave violation of Iran's sovereignty and the supposed security bubble of the Iranian capital. This is likely to have far-reaching consequences in the short and the long term. Haniyeh, normally based in Qatar, had been the face of international diplomacy for Hamas. He had been an important part of internationally brokered indirect talks on reaching a ceasefire in the Palestinian enclave. This killing appears to set back chances of any imminent ceasefire agreement in the 10-month-old war in Gaza and Lebanon. Vowing to retaliate, Iran declared three days of national mourning. Iran has blamed the U.S. for providing Israel with the missiles that have been fired, and hence holding it directly responsible. The US itself has accepted that the risk of escalation is certainly up right now.

The killing of Haniyeh has made the task of de-escalation, deterrence and dissuasion towards war, which is the goal of the UN and the international community, much more complicated. It has given a reason for those who want things to escalate on



HEZBOLLAH WILL FIND LEGITIMACY IN TAKING ON ANY POSSIBLE TARGET IN ISRAEL, CIVIL OR MILITARY. IRAN WOULD FIND IT CONVENIENT TO DIRECTLY USE SOME OF ITS MISSILES AGAINST ISRAEL AND THE YARDSTICK TO JUDGE ITS EFFECTIVENESS WOULD BE THE NUMBER OF CIVILIANS KILLED

both sides to scuttle chances of peace and also provided them with the fodder to fuel further attacks on each other with impunity.

The immediate consequences of this escalation, Netanyahu will get support from the far right in Israel and he may push for attacks deeper into Lebanon. Hezbollah will find legitimacy in taking on any possible target in Israel, civil or military. Iran would find it convenient to directly use some of its missiles against Israel and the yardstick to judge its effectiveness would be the number of civilians killed. The Houthis will attack commercial ships in the Red Sea even more, leading to loss of business and livelihood across the world. Palestinians would cry on the streets for lack of food and medicine even more, but like always would only get lip service. Oil prices will go up and some people will make even more money.

More arms would be sold and better technology would be used to kill more people in less time. More and more areas may become dangerous even for the media. Schools and hospitals may be targeted even more since all the terrorists are hiding there only. In the US leaders would keep

blaming each other for the escalation with each side doing what is required to be done to get votes. UN is likely to look even more helpless in the days to come.

Apart from this humanity would be disgraced for it does not feel ashamed of any act of inhuman violent behaviour anymore. Aircraft carriers from the US will be deployed to safeguard the territorial integrity of Israel. There will be calls for people to join hands in the name of religion, and they will, only humanity will be divided and more people will die. Some people in India may find this killing of Haniyeh a great act of bravery, and they may even ask the political hierarchy to take lessons or even replicate this kind of attack.

Little do they realise that Israel has been fighting for existence, and are not at peace with themselves, peace has eluded them since their existence. However, we as a country are at peace and no one can dare challenge our existence, and hence we should never think of acting whimsically.

(The writer is expert on geopolitics and international Affairs. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FOOD SECURITY VS RISING PRICES

Madam — Apropos "Modi reaffirms India's role as Vishwa Bandhu, Aug 4. According to him, India has become a food surplus country and second largest producer of foodgrains, fruits and vegetables etc. But the high prices of cereals, pulses, edible oils, vegetables and fruits etc. has indeed impacted households across the country and made them beyond affordability of many.

According to the Economic Times, since November 2023, food inflation in the country has persisted at around 8% year-on-year. The Opposition too raises repeatedly about high food inflation. Per capita consumption of pulses, fruits and vegetables in India are one of the lowest in the world. Low consumption of them affects overall health, leading to deficiencies in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants and accordingly Indians are deficient in them, particularly in children it is a grave concern. Vegetarianism is a major dietary choice in India, therefore, plant-based food must be available at affordable prices in adequate quantities for a healthy nation.

O Prasada Rao | Hyderabad

INDIAN HOCKEY TEAM EXCELS

Madam—Who could have asked for more intriguing and a close contest in Sunday that added yet another unforgettable moment to India's hockey history that snatched victory from the jaws of defeat that once loomed large. After surprising world class Australia in a span of 52 years, India continued their winning streak by defeating England 4-2 in a nail biting finish in Olympics Hockey that kept millions of fans glued to their t.v. sets. With this resounding win, India enter into the semi finals.

The national game of India Hockey is again in the limelight as India produced a real fitting spirit especially at a critical moment when the odds are stacked against them as they were reduced to 10. This also could not dampen their spirit as Veteran Goalkeeper P.R Sreejesh saved one goal after to showcase her

Quota within quota



This refers to the news report, "Apex Court Upholds Quota Within Quota" (August 3). The Supreme Court's historic verdict now allows states to sub-categorize Scheduled Castes (SCs) for reservations. This sub-categorization is crucial as many SCs, particularly marginalized groups like the Balimiki in North India, Madiga and Arunthathiyar in South India, and Mang in Maharashtra, have been left behind in accessing benefits meant for SCs. Previously, states struggled to ensure their share of benefits due to an

earlier Supreme Court judgment in the EV Chinniah case. However, the recent Supreme Court ruling has highlighted the political dilemma faced by parties. During the assembly elections in Telangana last year, Prime Minister Modi announced a committee to examine the Madigas' demand for sub-categorization.

Implementing this sub-categorization is challenging in many other states, as it faces opposition from NDA ministers like Chirag Paswan and Ramdas Athawale. Sub-categorization could affect the interests of dominant castes such as Paswan in Bihar, Mahars in Maharashtra, and Jatavs in UP, Rajasthan, and Delhi. Will the BJP risk losing Paswan's support in Bihar? Additionally, the BJP is seeking to gain Jatav votes in UP, traditionally supporters of the BSP. Therefore, it will be interesting to see the BJP's stance on the Supreme Court's decision.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

protest that even saved penalties to see India remain in contention for a medal. This achievement has added yet another feather in the cap of Indian hockey since the 1972 Munich Olympics that India reached the semifinals in back to back games, followed the bronze medal in Tokyo.

The English team could not penetrate the Great wall of India as Indian players fought like warriors throughout the match and took it to the penalties. It seems that the golden era of Indian hockey is returning. No matter what the outcome of the forth coming matches, but one positive is the world class overall performance and team coordination, cooperation, fighting spirit until the last, hard work has really won hearts of millions.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH

Madam—A bulletin issued by the World Health Organization explores the increasing smoking among women and its health effects on children or unborn babies. A shocking reality has come to light.

Children's lungs are affected by women who smoke. Also, such children have weak immune system and children suffering from diseases like asthma are struggling with lung related diseases throughout their life. In adolescence and old age, such children's immunity decreases. It has been found.

Women are also suffering from various lung diseases due to the addition of v-cigarettes and e-cigarettes. The major disease in these patients is asthma. It has been observed significantly. Also, children in such households are constantly sick due to various reasons. Increasing smoking among women affects the infant and children born with smaller lungs and weak immune system. It has been found that India has also, the warning given by the World Health Organization must be taken seriously. The problem of babies born with small lungs due to smoking is a big challenge.

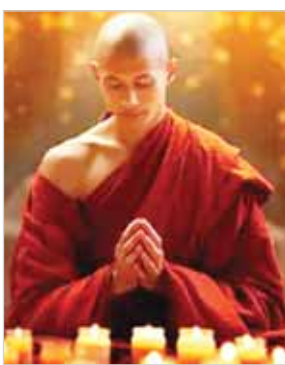
Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Mumbai

Handling disrespect and finding inner peace

We should recognise the value of pausing and reflecting, to determine whether our reactions to perceived insults are genuinely justified

I read a beautiful story by a well-known Indian author about a middle-class household. The lady of the house locks herself in an earmarked dark room whenever she feels unloved and uncared for by her family. We too retreat to our inner self, the equivalent of our dark room, sometimes in our lives. During a recent vacation, my wife's friend compared me to a beast of burden.

The adjective is also often used by parents admonishing their good-for-nothing sons. The word is probably also applicable to all husbands. I sulked till a couple of hours later, I gave it back to her. This time my wife objected, forcing me into another sulk. They had probably expected a better sense of humour. I was not amused. A friendly neighbour objected to my entrance to attend a meeting in a rather loud stage whisper for reasons I was unaware of. I was asked to wait outside. It turned out that he was retaliating to an earlier fight with another neighbour. He had probably expected



me to empathise with his unexpressed anguish. I felt insulted. Another time, a neighbour acting as an observer in society elections, got up rather aggressively, started shouting at me, and asked me to get out, on the grounds of some rules not mentioned anywhere.

A couple of hours later, he came out and shook hands with me. I tried to mend fences by putting on my best smile. He rudely turned his face away, telling anyone who cared to listen, "He is a writer; he does not even know the rules." I could not understand the relationship between a writer and knowledge of

unwritten rules. Rationally thinking about the incident a day later, I thought he was probably venting his frustration about inadequate writing skills. It was no consolation. I faced several unpleasant events in my professional life. I took them in my stride. One such incident happened within a few weeks after I had joined my first working post in the railways.

I sat in the senior foreman's office after my usual morning round of the maintenance shed, when I was interrupted in my discussions by the entry of 30 odd staff led by a union leader. Listening to the problems, I was startled by the landing of an earthenware teacup on the table. They were trying to gauge my reaction. I took it as a management challenge, not an insult. I witnessed a cat-fight between two young ladies in an upmarket shop in Delhi. One lady had tried to get ahead of the other at the payment counter. I was relieved that it remained a verbal duel,

rather than turning into a fisticuff. In another incident, a mother trying to help her teenage son choose clothes was rudely snubbed by the latter, "Do not talk like a fool!" The mother had tears in her eyes as she surreptitiously looked around, and then fussed some more over her child. I too looked the other way, embarrassed at the rude snub in public to a mother's affection. There are many such incidents that we face in our lives. We take a few more seriously than the others, while others we shrug off. The line between a perceived insult and rational logic is often blurred. It is easy to cross this line without even realising it. It may save a visit to the inner dark room, if we do not react, but pause, reflect, and remember the Greek philosopher, Epictetus, "It is not he who reviles or strikes you who insults you, but your opinion that these things are insulting."

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA



FIRST COLUMN

STRATEGIES TO COMBAT CHRONIC STRESS

Understanding and managing stress effectively is essential for a healthier life



SAKSHI SETHI

The human body is designed to experience stress. The 'fight or flight response' otherwise thought of as an 'acute stress' response are inbuilt mechanisms that allow an individual to deal with threats to survival. Stress at the workplace can arise from various factors, often stemming from the demands of the job, the work environment and individual characteristics. Chronic stress is a state of ongoing, persistent stress that can develop when a person faces prolonged challenges or pressures without adequate periods of relaxation or recovery. Unlike acute stress, which is short-term and can even be beneficial in certain situations (like a deadline or a sudden challenge), chronic stress lasts for an extended period and can have deleterious effects on both physical as well as mental health.

Signs of chronic stress at the workplace can manifest in various ways, affecting an individual's physical health, emotional well-being, cognitive abilities and behaviour. Cognitive-behavioural approaches, mindfulness training and resilience-building programs have been shown to help employees manage stress more effectively. These strategies can enhance employees' ability to cope with stressors and reduce the negative impact of stress on their health and performance. It can lead to significant economic costs for employers, including healthcare expenses, lost productivity, absenteeism and turnover. Organizations through interventions such as job redesign, flexible work arrangements, employee wellness programs and stress management training can reduce chronic stress as these interventions aim to reduce job



demands, increase job control and provide employees with the resources they need to cope effectively with stress. Recognizing these signs early can help in addressing the underlying issues before they escalate. Research shows that in the United States, the American Institute of Stress (AIS) has estimated that around 40% of worker turnover is due to stress and the cost of stress in the workplace has been estimated to be over \$300 billion per year.

Studies also show that perceptions of stress and coping mechanisms can vary across cultures. The shift to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new stressors related to work-life balance, isolation and digital overload. Ongoing research is exploring how these changes affect chronic stress levels and what interventions are most effective in this new work environment. Furthermore, studies highlight the role of leadership in either mitigating or exacerbating stress. Supportive leadership styles, clear communication and recognition of employee efforts can reduce stress, while authoritarian or inconsistent management can increase it. There is no denying the fact that different industries have unique stressors. For instance healthcare professionals often face stress due to high-stakes decision-making and emotional demands, while employees in tech industries might experience stress from rapid changes and constant innovation.

This type of stress can lead to individual burnout, which is when the body's budget is depleted. Unlike acute stress, which is short-term and can even be beneficial in certain situations such as a deadline or a sudden challenge, chronic stress lasts for an extended period. It can have detrimental effects on both physical and mental health. It is the chronic stress that comes from any area of our lives that can lead to a place of exhaustion and demotivation. It's tough, but the individual needs to find the will within self to get inspired and take recovery into their own hands. Understanding the sources of stress is crucial for both employees and employers to develop strategies to manage and reduce stress, thereby creating a healthier and more productive work environment.

(The writer is an educator, views expressed are personal)

Japan's defence dilemma: Pacifism vs security



SANTHOSH MATHEW

As the world commemorates the 79th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan contemplates pivotal shift in its defence policy



As the world commemorates the 79th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a profound moment of reflection intersects with a pivotal shift in Japan's defence policy.

On August 6 and 9, 1945, the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan were devastated by atomic bombs dropped by the United States, marking a pivotal moment in World War II and the history of warfare. The bombings resulted in the immediate deaths of tens of thousands of people, with the total number of casualties, including those from radiation sickness and injuries, rising to over 200,000. Hiroshima, targeted first, saw the "Little Boy" bomb obliterate much of the city, while Nagasaki was struck by the "Fat Man" bomb three days later.

The immense destruction and loss of life precipitated Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945, effectively ending World War II. These events also ushered in the nuclear age, highlighting the devastating power of atomic weapons and sparking global debates on nuclear ethics, warfare, and disarmament. The bombings remain a somber reminder of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear conflict and the importance of striving for peace and international cooperation.

The devastation, which claimed the lives of civilians, imprinted an indelible mark on the nation's collective consciousness and laid the foundation for its pacifist constitution. In the aftermath of these horrific events, Japan adopted a policy of defensive neutrality, enshrined in Article 9 of its constitution, renouncing war and prohibiting the maintenance of armed forces for combat.

This commitment to pacifism became a cornerstone of Japan's identity, earning it a place of respect in the global community and even frequent nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize. However, as



JAPAN'S NEW NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY IS A RESPONSE TO THE GROWING TENSIONS IN THE REGION. NORTH KOREA HAS ALREADY CONDUCTED MISSILE TESTS CAPABLE OF REACHING JAPANESE TERRITORY, WHILE CHINA'S INCREASING ASSERTIVENESS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

the world grapples with evolving geopolitical threats, Japan has announced a significant shift in its defence policy.

The government has decided to allocate 2% of its GDP to defence spending, marking a departure from its longstanding pacifist stance. This decision, driven by perceived threats from North Korea and China, positions Japan as the second-largest arms importer globally, following Saudi Arabia.

Japan's new national security strategy is a response to the growing tensions in the region. North Korea has already conducted missile tests capable of reaching Japanese territory, while China's increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea and its broader regional ambitions have raised alarms in Tokyo.

These developments have prompted Japan to reconsider its post-World War II defence posture. Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, a staunch advocate for revising Japan's pacifist constitution, argued that the nation must strengthen its military capabilities to counter regional threats. Although Abe's tenure saw some legislative changes allowing for a modest self-defence force, widespread public opposition prevented a complete overhaul of Article 9. Nonetheless, Abe's vision of a robust Japanese military continues to influence current policies. Current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, with the backing of both the House of Councillors and the House of Representatives, has pressed forward with this new defence agenda. However, public

sentiment remains largely against these changes. According to a Kyodo News Agency survey, 80% of the population opposes the government's constitutional amendment efforts, reflecting a deep-rooted commitment to pacifism among the Japanese people.

The decision to shift defence policies on the anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is particularly poignant. The memories of the atomic bombings serve as a stark reminder of the horrors of war and the importance of peace. The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not just a military strategy but also an unprecedented human tragedy. The bombings, justified by the U.S. as necessary to end the war, were, in reality, cruel scientific experiments that unleashed untold suffering and long-term consequences.

The atomic bombings forced Japan to adopt a peace-oriented constitution, promoting disarmament and dialogue over conflict. Article 9 has been a symbol of hope and a testament to Japan's commitment to ensuring that such devastation never occurs again.

The policy shift, therefore, raises important questions about the future of pacifism in Japan and its role in international peace and security. As Japan increases its defence budget and modernizes its military capabilities, it steps into a complex and competitive arms race.

The nation that once stood as a beacon of pacifism now finds itself at a crossroads, balancing its historical commitment to peace

with the pressing need to address contemporary security challenges. The legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki endures, reminding the world of the catastrophic consequences of war and the enduring value of peace.

As Japan navigates this new defence trajectory, it must reconcile its past with its present, ensuring that the principles of peace and humanity remain at the forefront of its national identity. In the shadow of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan's defence policy evolution marks a significant chapter in its history. The world watches closely as Japan seeks to uphold its commitment to peace while safeguarding its future in an increasingly uncertain global landscape.

The devastating bombings marked a turning point in World War II, leading to Japan's surrender and the end of the conflict. These tragic events imprinted a commitment to pacifism in Japan's national consciousness, enshrined in its post-war constitution.

However, with rising geopolitical threats from North Korea's missile tests and China's regional ambitions, Japan has no choice but to reconsider its pacifist stance and increase its defence spending, sparking a national debate on the future of its long-held commitment to peace.

(The writer is an associate professor Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies & Social Sciences Pondicherry Central University; views are personal)

Bangladesh's political shakeup: A diplomatic setback for India

The resignation of Sheikh Hasina poses a significant challenge for New Delhi, as it now faces an uncertain political situation in its neighbouring country

While Bangladeshis may be celebrating the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after she was forced to resign and flee the country on Monday, her removal is a huge blow to India. Not only had New Delhi-Dhaka ties flourished under her prime minister-ship but the Awami League leader had been mindful of India's strategic interests. She had even tried to keep India's strategic interests in mind vis-à-vis China while adroitly balancing relations with both. During her 15 years of unbroken rule, New Delhi-Dhaka ties enjoyed both stability and mutual trust.

But with the army taking charge in Bangladesh and an interim government set to take over, India has a lot to



PARUL CHANDRA

worry about. For one, it now has to deal with a new dispensation after having built a very comfortable working relationship with the Sheikh Hasina government over the last 15 years. Secondly, it will also have to contend with the fact that it is the army that will be exercising actual control even with an interim government in place. Thirdly, India will be dealing with an entirely new politi-

cal set-up if and when elections are held in Bangladesh to install a new government. With India having thrown all its weight behind Sheikh Hasina, it may be faced with a huge challenge to build ties with the Opposition parties. India could also be in deep trouble if the pro-Pakistan Bangladesh National Party (BNP) returns to power. It had recently triggered anti-India sentiments in Bangladesh by carrying out an 'India Out' campaign which fortunately fizzled out early. Opposition parties can fan the simmering of these sentiments again, especially given how closely New Delhi was identified with her government. Indeed, for New Delhi, ties with Dhaka had been a "son-

ali adhayay" (golden chapter) under Sheikh Hasina who delivered on New Delhi's expectations, while choosing to downplay India's inability to deliver on the important Teesta waters sharing agreement. But with a new government in power, all this might change. New Delhi, therefore, will have to deftly manoeuvre its way through a tricky diplomatic situation now. It has no choice but to do so given that it has vital stakes in the stability of Bangladesh, ranging from the economic to the strategic, in a country with which it shares a 4,096-km long border.

It will also be hoped that the situation in Bangladesh will stabilise soon, knowing well that prolonged instability



there can have serious security and economic ramifications for India. For instance, taking into account New Delhi's security concerns, Sheikh Hasina had cracked down on northeast insurgents sheltering in Bangladeshi territory early on in her second stint as PM. Her government's relentless pursuit of the pro-Pakistan

BNP as well as its ally JeI, also helped India's security interests. Equally worrying for India has been the rise of other radical Islamist outfits like the Hefazat-e-Islam in Bangladesh, which had organised anti-India protests ahead of PM Narendra Modi's visit there.

The over one million Rohingya refugees who fled Myanmar and are sheltering in Bangladesh too have been a security concern for India. Already home to a sizable number of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, India would also be concerned about a further influx of refugees seeking to flee their troubled country. With five Indian states in the northeast sharing a border with Bangladesh, any such

influx could pose a huge security challenge for the region.

Additionally, prolonged turmoil there could hurt Indian efforts to boost connectivity to the NE via Bangladesh using rail links and the sea route. India has for long been seeking alternative routes to bypass the vulnerable Siliguri corridor, which if blocked can cut off land access to its entire NE. The push for shorter routes to the NE via Bangladesh, which would cut down time and costs for the movement of goods, could also receive a setback.

The quota stir has already hit bilateral trade after the movement of trucks was stalled at the land ports. While cross-border trade

has now resumed, there have been huge economic losses on either side. Prolonged turmoil can only worsen trading ties between the two countries. Bangladesh is India's biggest trading partner in South Asia. In FY 2022-23, the bilateral trade was \$15.9 billion, though it remains heavily skewed in favour of India. A lot is at stake for India as its close neighbour witnesses some tectonic changes in its governance and political landscape. It means it will have to put in all its diplomatic and political heft into its outreach to whoever is in charge of the new dispensation in Bangladesh.

(The writer is a senior New Delhi-based journalist writing on foreign affairs)

Hasina: From record 4th consecutive term to dramatic ouster

PTI ■ DHAKA

Sheikh Hasina, who was elected for a record fourth consecutive term and fifth overall term this year, was always admired by her supporters as an "Iron Lady" before the dramatic development that abruptly ended her 15-year-rule in Bangladesh.

Hasina, who provided stability to the once military-ruled Bangladesh but at the same time criticised as an "autocratic" leader by opponents, was among the world's longest-serving female heads of government. The 76-year-old daughter of Bangladesh founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had been ruling the strategically located South Asian nation since 2009. She was elected for a record fourth consecutive term in January in an election boycotted by the main opposition party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of former premier Khaleda Zia and its allies.

Born in erstwhile East Pakistan (now in Bangladesh) in September 1947, Hasina

became active in politics while studying at the University of Dhaka in the late 1960s. She served as her father's political liaison during his imprisonment by the Pakistani government.

After Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan in 1971, her father Mujibur Rahman became the president and then prime minister of the country. However, in August 1975, Rahman, his wife and their three sons were assassinated in their home by military officers.

Hasina and her younger sister Sheikh Rehana survived the purge as they were abroad. Hasina, who spent six years in exile in India, was elected as the leader of the Awami League, a party founded by her father. In 1981, Hasina returned home and became vocal about democracy in the country ruled by the military, which placed her under house arrest on multiple occasions.

In the 1991 general elections, the Hasina-led Awami League failed to secure a majority. Her rival Khaleda Zia of the BNP

became prime minister. Five years later, Hasina was elected prime minister in the 1996 general elections. Hasina was voted out of office in the 2001 elections but returned to power with a thumping victory in 2008 polls. Khaleda Zia-led BNP has been left in the lurch since then. Hasina escaped an assassination bid in 2004 when a grenade exploded at her rally. Soon after coming to power in 2009, Hasina set up a tribunal to try 1971 war crimes cases. The tribunal convicted some high-profile members of the opposition, sparking violent protests.

Jamaat-e-Islami, an Islamist party and a key ally of BNP, was banned from participating in elections in 2013. BNP chief Khaleda Zia was sentenced to 17 years in prison on corruption charges.

The BNP boycotted the 2014 elections but joined the one in 2018, which party leaders later said was a mistake, alleging that the voting was marred with widespread rigging and intimidation. In the 2024 elections,



Black smoke rises from the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University during clashes between protesters and Awami League members, on the first day of the non-cooperation movement in Dhaka, on Sunday, August 4

Over 300 protesters were killed in violence during the protests that led to her dramatic ouster. Hasina presided over one of the world's fastest-growing economies and improved living standards in the South Asian nation in the past 15 years. The NEWSNEXTBD.com dubbed her the "Iron Lady" several years back and since then it was used by the Western media to refer to her.

Her supporters credit Hasina with humming development projects and providing stability in the country, which has witnessed military rule for years. Hasina won praise for the handling of the world's biggest refugee crisis as over a million Rohingya have taken shelter in Bangladesh after fleeing for their lives in neighbouring Myanmar to evade persecution after a 2017 army crackdown at their homeland.

Hasina is also credited for skillfully negotiating the rival interests of India and China as Bangladesh is virtually sandwiched between the two Asian giants. She got the support of both the big neighbours and

Russia ahead of the elections. Bangladesh's per capita income tripled since Hasina took power in January 2009 while its gross domestic product (GDP) clocked at a growth rate of 7.28 per cent last year.

The country of nearly 170 million people has achieved near self-sufficiency in food production and raised average life expectancy to levels higher than neighbouring India. People close to her used to say that the premier is a "workaholic" and she performs the daily Islamic rituals.

Rising energy and commodity prices in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, however, forced her government to seek IMF support amid falling foreign reserves.

The workers in Bangladesh's main export-earning garment industry were dissatisfied with a recent wage hike and lodged protests in recent years. Political opponents described Hasina's government an "autocratic" and corrupt regime, while many civil society figures and rights groups accused it of rights abuses.

Kim marks delivery of 250 N-capable missile launchers to frontline units

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea marked the delivery of 250 nuclear-capable missile launchers to frontline military units at a ceremony where leader Kim Jong Un called for a ceaseless expansion of his military's nuclear program to counter perceived US threats, state media said on Monday.

Concerns about Kim's nuclear program have grown as he has demonstrated an intent to deploy battlefield nuclear weapons along the North's border with South Korea and authorised his military to respond with preemptive nuclear strikes if it perceives the leadership as under threat. North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said the launchers were freshly produced by the country's munitions factories and designed to fire "tactical" ballistic missiles, a term that describes systems capable of delivering lower-yield nuclear weapons.

Kim said at Sunday's event in Pyongyang the new launchers would give his frontline units "overwhelming" firepower over South and make the operation of tactical nuclear weapons more practical and efficient. State media photos showed lines of army-green launcher trucks packing a large street with seemingly thousands of spectators attending the event, which included fireworks.

North Korea has been expanding its lineup of mobile short-



In this photo provided by the North Korean government, Kim Jong Un speaks during a ceremony to mark the delivery of 250 nuclear-capable missile launchers to frontline military units, in Pyongyang, North Korea, on Sunday

range weapons designed to overwhelm missile defences in South Korea, while also pursuing intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to reach the US mainland.

Kim's intensifying weapons tests and threats are widely seen as an attempt at pressuring the United States to accept the idea of North Korea as a nuclear power and to end US-led sanctions imposed on North Korea over its nuclear program. North Korea also could seek to dial up tensions in a US election year, experts say. Kim lately has used Russia's war on Ukraine as a distraction to further accelerate his weapons development. In

response, the United States, South Korea and Japan have been expanding their combined military exercises and sharpening their nuclear deterrence strategies built around strategic US military assets.

In his speech at Sunday's event, Kim called for his country to brace for a prolonged confrontation with the United States and urged a relentless expansion of military strength. He justified his military buildup as a counter to the "increasingly savage" military cooperation between the United States and its regional allies, which he claimed are now showing the characteristics of a "nuclear-based mili-

itary bloc."

"It would be our choice to either pursue dialogue or confrontation, but our lesson and conclusion from the past 30 years ... is that confrontation is what we should be prepared more thoroughly for," said Kim.

"The United States we are facing is not just an administration that comes and goes after a few years, but a hostile nation that our children and grandchildren will be dealing for generations to come and that also illustrates the necessity to continuously improve our self-defence capabilities."

Kim also said the decision to hold the weapons ceremony while the country was trying to recover from disastrous flooding showed its determination to "push ahead with the strengthening of our national defense capabilities force without stagnation under any circumstances."

The floods in late July submerged thousands of homes and huge swaths of farmland in regions near the border with China.

Russia has offered flood aid to North Korea, in another sign of expanding relations between the two nations. Kim has made Russia his priority in recent months as he pushes a foreign policy aimed at expanding relations with countries confronting Washington, embracing the idea of a "new Cold War" and trying to display a united front in Putin's broader conflicts with the West.

Australia lifts terror threat level from 'possible' to 'probable'

AP ■ MELBOURNE

The Australian government on Monday elevated the nation's terrorism threat alert level from "possible" to "probable," citing concerns about increasing radicalisation among young people and community tensions over the Israel-Hamas war.

It is the first time the threat level has been elevated to the midpoint of the five-tier National Terrorism Threat Advisory System since November 2022. The level had been "probable" the previous eight years.

But Prime Minister Anthony Albanese added that while government officials think the current climate makes terrorism an increased danger, they didn't know of any specific threats. "I want to reassure Australians probable does not mean inevitable, and it does not mean there is intelligence about an imminent threat or danger," Albanese told reporters.

He said the government was acting on the advice of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, the nation's main domestic spy agency known as ASIO.

"The advice that we've received is that more Australians are embracing a more diverse range of extreme ideologies and it is our responsibility to be vigilant," Albanese said.

"We've seen a global rise in politically motivated violence and extremism. Many democracies are working to address this, including our friends in the United States and in the United Kingdom. There are many things driving this global trend towards violence. Governments around the world are concerned about youth radicalisation, online radicalisation and the rise of new mixed ideologies." Australian authorities last declared a terrorist act in April, when a 16-year-old boy was accused in the stabbing of a Sydney bishop while a church service was being livestreamed.

Hezbollah launches drone attack on northern Israel

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah said it launched a drone attack early Monday on northern Israel that the Israeli military said wounded two Israeli troops and set off a fire. The violence came as fears of an all-out regional war mount following the killings last week of a senior Hezbollah commander in Lebanon and Hamas' top political leader in Iran.

The Iranian-backed Hezbollah said in a statement it targeted a military base in northern Israel in response to "attacks and assassinations" carried out by Israel in several villages in south Lebanon.

The attack did not appear to be part of a more intense retaliation expected in response to the killing of Hezbollah commander Foad Shukur in Beirut last week.

Israel and Hezbollah have exchanged near-daily strikes for the past 10 months against the backdrop of the war in Gaza, but they have previously kept the conflict at a low level that

had not escalated into full-on war.

Last week's assassinations of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Iran's capital, Tehran, and Hezbollah commander Shukur in Beirut raised tensions in the region. Israel has been bracing for a retaliation from Iran and its allied militias.

Gen. Hossein Salami, the head of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, threatened Israel on Monday over the assassination of Haniyeh, warning that Israel was "digging its own grave" with its actions in its war against Hamas.

"They will see the result of their mistake. They will see when, how and where they will get their response," Salami said in a speech.

Israel returns more than 80 bodies to the Gaza Strip, Palestinian official says: A Palestinian official says Israel has returned more than 80 bodies to the Gaza Strip. The identities of the deceased and the cause of death were not immediately known.

Over the course of its nearly 10-month offensive in Gaza, the military has exhumed remains as it searches for the bodies of hostages taken in Hamas' October 7 attack, which ignited the war.

Weam Fares, a spokesperson for the Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza, says 84 bodies were handed over at the Kerem Shalom crossing on Monday and were taken directly for burial. The hospital did not provide further details.

The Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment.

Associated Press reporters saw the bodies being brought to a cemetery in a container truck belonging to a private company. They were buried in a mass grave.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said it was not involved in the transfer.

Meanwhile, The Israeli military said Palestinian militants fired at least 15 projectiles into Israel from Gaza, and first responders say one person was lightly wounded.

TikTok to withdraw rewards feature

AP ■ FRANKFURT

TikTok has agreed to withdraw a rewards feature that raised concerns about its potential to encourage excessive screen time, particularly among children, the European Union's executive commission said Monday.

It was the first resolution of an investigation under the 27-country EU's sweeping Digital Services Act, which went into effect in February and aims to ensure a "safe and accountable

online environment" by regulating large digital platforms. TikTok made the commitment without conceding the feature violated the Digital Services Act, officials said.

The commission has however ruled that the withdrawal is legally binding, which "sends a clear message to the entire social media industry," said Margrethe Vestager, European commissioner for digital affairs. "Design features on platforms with addictive effects put the well-being of their users at

risk," she said in a statement. "That's why we have made TikTok's commitments under the DSA legally binding."

The case involves TikTok Lite, a low-bandwidth version of the app released in Spain and France. It allowed users to earn points for things like following creators, liking content, or inviting friends to join TikTok.

The points could be exchanged for Amazon vouchers and gift cards on PayPal. TikTok said rewards were restricted to users

18 years and older, who had to verify their age. Users could watch up to one hour a day of videos to earn rewards, which were capped at the equivalent of one euro (USD 1.09) a day. The commission opened an investigation in April due to concerns that TikTok has not done a diligent assessment required under the act of the feature's potential "addictive effect," especially for children, "given suspected absence of effective age verification mechanisms on TikTok."

Vietnamese biz tycoon sentenced to 21 yrs for duping stockholders

AP ■ HANOI

A prominent Vietnamese business tycoon was found guilty Monday of defrauding stockholders of nearly USD 150 million by falsely inflating the value of his company, in a case that comes as the government cracks down on widespread corruption in the country.

The Hanoi People's Court sentenced Trinh Van Quyet, 48, to 21 years in prison after a two-week trial that included 49 defendants who were named as accomplices, state-run VN Express reported. He was arrested in 2022.

The billionaire was the chairman and founder of the FLC Group, which owns the discount Bamboo Airways and has broad real estate holdings including hotels, resorts and golf courses, among other

assets. According to the indictment, Quyet fraudulently inflated the value of the group's general contractor subsidiary, FLC Faros, by reporting fictitious capital contributions, before taking the company public in 2016.

In the initial public offering, the company sold some 391 million shares to about 30,000 investors, defrauding them of 3.6 trillion Vietnamese dong (about USD 144 million) according to the indictment. Among Quyet's co-defendants were officials from Vietnam's State Securities Commission and Securities Depository Center, who were accused of being complicit in the scheme by approving and facilitating the initial public offering despite knowing of discrepancies in the figures. Details on the verdicts for the

co-defendants were not immediately released.

Quyet was arrested in 2022, as part of a crackdown on corruption instituted by Vietnamese authorities. The Communist Party's Blazing Furnace campaign began in 2013, but it wasn't until 2018 that authorities began scanning the private sector. Since then, several owners of Vietnam's fast-growing businesses have been arrested. The anti-corruption campaign had been the hallmark of Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, Vietnam's top politician, who died last month at age 80, three days before Quyet's trial started. The ideology had called corruption a grave threat to the party and vowed that the campaign would be a "blazing furnace" where no one was untouchable.

China's marriage registrations to fall record low this year

PTI ■ BEIJING

China's marriage registrations in 2024 were set to register a record low since 1980, a demographic expert has warned after the marriage registrations in the first half of this year fell by 4.98 lakhs, heightening the country's looming demographic crisis.

The fall in marriage numbers was expected to add to the declining birth rates, which have been steadily falling over the years amid the rapid rise of the ageing population.

The latest statistics from China's Ministry of Civil Affairs show that 34.3 lakh Chinese couples got married during the first half of 2024, a drop of 4.98 lakh couples compared to the same period from last year, state-run Global Times reported on Monday. It said that 1.27 million couples also got divorced.

He Yafu, an independent demographic expert who tracks marriage registration data, predicted that based on the present trend, the annual figure of marriage registrations in 2024 will drop to a record low since 1980. The decline in the number of marriage

registrations since 2014 was attributed to a decrease in the young population, the gender imbalance with more men than women among the marriageable population, the postponement of the age of first marriage, high costs of getting married, and changing attitudes toward marriage.

He said the continued decline in the number of marriage registrations in 2024 indicates that the number of new-borns will go downward again in 2025.

Due to factors such as the decrease in the young population and low child-birth intentions, the declining trend in China's birth rate, in the long run, will be difficult to fundamentally change unless substantial childbirth support policies are implemented in the future to address this challenge, the report quoted him as saying.

China's population continued to decline as the overall population fell by 20.8 lakh last year to 140.97 crore, down from 141.18 crore in 2022, as India overtook China to become the most populous country in the world in 2023, according to official data released early



this year.

China's population reported its first decline in six decades in 2022 after the birth rate hit a new low, resulting in decades of the child policy pursued vigorously by the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) to control population growth, with experts predicting a steep decline in the coming years. Researchers warned that the Chinese

economy, which, in the past significantly benefited from a demographic dividend, will have to tackle challenges including fewer working-age people, weaker spending power and a strained social security system as its population ages further.

China's overall population is set to see a steeper decline in the coming years, said Professor Peng Xizhe from the Centre for Population and Development Policy Studies at Fudan University.

It's almost certain the population will go on with negative growth, Peng told the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post early this year.

The demographic crisis was largely attributed to a decades-old one-child policy that was scrapped in 2016, after which China permitted all couples to have two children.

In 2021, China passed a revised Population and Family Planning Law allowing Chinese couples to have three children and announced a number of incentives to encourage people to have more children, in an apparent attempt to address the reluctance of couples to have more kids due to mounting costs.

Sensex, Nifty nosedive nearly 3% to month low

Amid global equity rout on US growth concerns

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty crashed nearly 3 per cent on Monday following extremely weak trends in global equity markets amid fears of a slowdown in the US economy. The 30-share BSE Sensex plummeted 2,222.55 points or 2.74 per cent to settle at over a month's low of 78,759.40, marking its worst single-day retreat since June 4, 2024. During the day, it tanked 2,686.09 points or 3.31 per cent to 78,295.86. The NSE Nifty slumped 662.10 points or 2.68 per cent to settle at 24,055.60. During the day, it tumbled 824 points or 3.33 per cent to 23,893.70. Nifty also saw its worst single-day fall since June 4, 2024, when markets crashed more than 5 per cent due to general election results. An over 12 per cent plunge in Japan's Nikkei and geopolitical tensions in the Middle East dented market sentiment, analysts said.



In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled sharply lower. Japan's benchmark stock index plunged 12.4 per cent on Monday, compounding a global market rout set off by investor concerns that the US economy could be headed for recession. A report on Friday showing hiring by US employers slowed last month by much more than expected convulsed financial markets, vanquishing the euphoria that had taken the Nikkei 225 to all-time highs of over 42,000 in recent weeks. On Monday, the Nikkei closed

down 4,451.28 points at 31,458.42. It had dropped 5.8 per cent on Friday, making this its worst two-day decline ever. Its worst single-day rout was a plunge of 3,836 points, or 14.9 per cent, on October 19, 1987, a global markets crash that was dubbed "Black Monday" but proved to be only a temporary setback despite fears it might have augured a worldwide downturn. European markets were also trading with deep cuts. The US markets ended significantly lower on Friday. From the Sensex pack, Tata Motors slumped over 7 per

cent. Adani Ports, Tata Steel, SBI, Power Grid, JSW Steel and Maruti were the other big laggards. However, Hindustan Unilever and Nestle ended in positive territory. "The global markets were jolted into a cautious mode by recessionary fears in the US following disappointing job statistics and unwinding of carry trade following the rapid rise of the yen. The effects were felt by the domestic market as well and are expected to impact in the near term," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,310 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. "The global market is reeling as bears enter with a cocktail of bad news. The fear of a reverse Yen carry trade, following an interest rate hike in Japan, was the initial catalyst. This was compounded by fears of a recession in the US after extremely poor jobs data, which spooked market sentiment," said Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 1.93 per cent to USD 75.33 a barrel. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge dropped 4.21 per cent and midcap index plummeted 3.60 per cent. Amid widespread selling pressure, the BSE benchmark plunged 1.08 per cent on Friday. The broader Nifty of NSE dropped 1.17 per cent. In two straight sessions to Monday, Nifty and Sensex have corrected nearly 4 per cent.

India's services sector growth eases slightly in July



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's services sector growth recorded another month of robust expansion in July, albeit at a slightly slower pace than in June, largely supported by robust demand conditions and investment in technology, a monthly survey said on Monday. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services Business Activity Index was at 60.3 in July, down only fractionally from 60.5 in June. In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction. "Service sector activity rose at a slightly slower pace in July, with new business increasing further, primarily driven by

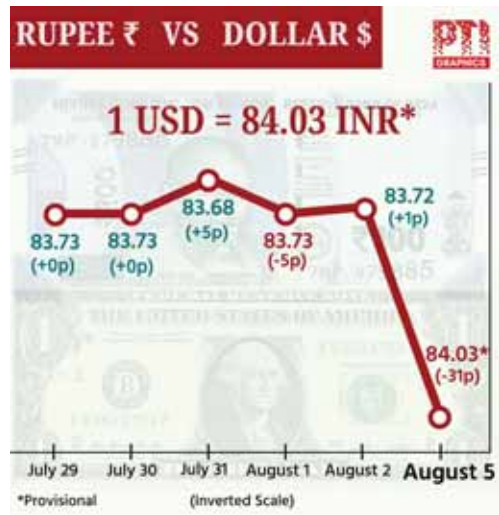
domestic demand. Looking ahead, services firms remained optimistic about the outlook for year ahead," Pranjud Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC, said. New export orders increased at the third-strongest pace since the inception of the series in September 2014, amid strengthening demand for Indian services from across the world. Some of the sources of rising export orders mentioned by panellists included Austria, Brazil, China, Japan, Singapore, the Netherlands and the US. Favourable economic conditions and optimistic expectations for output supported recruitment among services firms, the survey said. On the price front, higher wage and material costs continued to

push up business expenses, with the overall rate of inflation quickening from June. Stronger cost pressures and positive demand trends contributed to the steepest rise in prices charged for the provision of services for seven years. Looking ahead, services firms remained strongly optimistic about growth prospects. Around 30 per cent of the survey panel forecast greater output volumes in the next 12 months, while only 2 per cent expect a decline. The overall level of sentiment rose since June and was aligned with its long-run average. Anecdotal evidence suggested that confidence in the outlook for demand and sales, alongside improved customer engagement and new enquiries, boosted optimism. Meanwhile, the HSBC India Composite Output Index posted 60.7 in July, down only fractionally from 60.9 in June and above the crucial 50.0 no-change mark for the thirty-sixth month running. "India's composite PMI recorded another month of robust expansion in July, albeit at a slightly slower pace than in June," Bhandari said.

Rupee tumbles 31 paise to close at all-time low of 84.03 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee slumped 31 paise to settle at an all-time low of 84.03 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, following a sell-off in broader global markets amid rising geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and worries over recession in the US. Forex traders said the downfall in the domestic unit came on the heels of a sharp downturn in the Indian equity markets and significant foreign fund outflows. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.78 and touched an intra-day high of 83.76 and a low of 84.03 against the dollar during the session. It finally settled at its fresh record low level of 84.03 (provisional) against the American currency, down 31 paise against its previous close. On Friday, the rupee settled 1 paise higher at 83.72 against the US dollar in a range-bound



trade. "We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on risk aversion in the global markets. Escalation of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and outflows by foreign investors may further pressurise the domestic unit," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. However, a weak US dollar and declining crude oil prices may support the rupee at lower levels. Any intervention by the Reserve Bank may also benefit

the rupee, Choudhary added. Traders may take cues from US ISM services PMI data. Investors may watch out for the RBI's monetary policy decision this week. USD/INR spot price is likely to trade in a range of Rs 83.60 to Rs 84.20, Choudhary said. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 2,222.55 points, or 2.74 per cent, to 78,759.40 points, and Nifty dropped 662.10 points, or 2.68 per cent, to 24,055.60 points. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, dropped 0.65 per cent to 102.54. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, fell 1.91 per cent to USD 75.34 per barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Friday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 3,310.00 crore, according to exchange data.

Bringing blueberries to Indian market

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Camposol, Peru's largest blueberry producer joins forces with Walmart-backed Ninjacart, India's leading agri-startup that leverages technology and data to organise the global agriculture ecosystem to bring high-quality blueberries to Indian consumers. Camposol and Ninjacart's strategic partnership is transforming the blueberry market in India through Ninjacart's digital marketplace, tech-enabled supply chain, cutting edge solutions, and a data-driven approach. This collaboration aims to facilitate Camposol's market entry through a curated strategy, utilising Ninjacart's expertise and data systems to drive accelerated growth. Leveraging Ninjacart's extensive network of over 100,000 retailers, the partnership ensures a reliable and consistent supply of high-quality blueberries, benefiting consumers and retailers alike.

Indian economy likely to grow at 7-7.2% in FY25, says Deloitte

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's economy is expected to grow at 7-7.2 per cent in the current fiscal year driven by robust economic fundamentals and continuity in domestic policy reforms, Deloitte India said on Monday. The August update of Deloitte's India Economic Outlook said several initiatives in the Union Budget 2024-25 toward improving agriculture productivity, creating jobs for the youth, and in manufacturing and addressing the challenge of access to finance for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), would help improve supply-side demand, curb inflation, and prop up consumer spending, especially in rural areas. Deloitte India Economist Rumki Majumdar said, India will witness robust growth in the second half after a period of uncertainty in the first six months of the year. "Key contributing factors include the continuity in domestic policy reforms, reduced uncertainties in the US post-elections, and more synchronous global growth within a low inflation regime. "Additionally, improved global liquidity conditions, as central banks in the West ease their monetary policy stance, will enhance capital flows and drive higher investments, particularly in the private sector," Majumdar said. Observing that strong economic fundamentals would drive GDP growth between 7 per cent and 7.2 per cent in FY25, the Economic Outlook report said



effectively addressing the urban-rural consumer spending gaps, inflation, and employment concerns can significantly enhance the affordability of aspirational rural consumers. "The much-desirable policy pivot was evident in the Union Budget presented last month. Reducing the urban and rural spending gap in the coming years will ensure sustained consumer demand from a larger consumer base," it added. Deloitte India's growth projection is at par with that of RBI, which projected FY25 growth at 7.2 per cent. It is higher than Finance Ministry's Economic Survey which estimated GDP expansion between 6.5-7 per cent. The Indian economy grew at 8.2 per cent in 2023-24 fiscal year. The report further said despite strong growth, private consumption spending has remained modest over the past five years. The pandemic, high global and domestic inflation, consequent tightening of financial conditions, and the effects of poor agriculture output on rural demand

seem to have capped private consumption growth in India. But a Deloitte research showed that India is witnessing distinct and broad-based shifts in consumption patterns. There is a broad-based shift in the composition of consumption towards more non-food and discretionary items, reflecting changing lifestyles and preferences that are here to stay. According to the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, spending on discretionary goods and services (including conveyance) has gone up both in rural and urban India, with the former quickly catching up in spending on discretionary durable goods (including automobiles, electric and electronic goods) with the latter in just one decade. "Demand for processed food has been among the highest in most states, suggesting a shift towards ready-to-eat options. Rapid urbanization, increasing women's participation in the workforce, and enhanced marketing and availability are driving these changing dietary habits," the report said. According to Deloitte research, if increasing income in states results in a relatively equitable distribution and higher rural spending, businesses can tap into a larger proportion of the states population that resides in rural areas. This gives businesses access to a large consumer base and a sustainable consumer spending demand, as compared to states with a widening gap.



Sebi amends mutual fund rules to curb front-running, insider trading

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi has amended mutual fund norms requiring Asset Management Companies (AMCs) to put in place an institutional mechanism to identify and deter front-running and insider trading in securities. Additionally, the management of AMCs will be responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of the institutional mechanism. Also, the regulator has directed AMCs to have a whistle-blower mechanism. This came in the wake of Sebi's passing two orders regarding front-running cases involving Axis AMC and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC). In a gazette notification dated August 1, Sebi said, "Asset management companies shall put in place an institutional mechanism, as may be specified by the Board, for the identification and deterrence of potential market abuse including front-running and fraudulent transactions in securities". Front-running refers to an illegal practice, where an entity trades based on

advanced information from a stock broker or analyst before the information has been made available to clients. As per the notification, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Managing Director (MD) or such other person of equivalent or analogous rank and Chief Compliance Officer of the asset management company will be responsible and accountable for the implementation of such an institutional mechanism. "The asset management company shall establish, implement and maintain a documented whistle-blower policy that shall provide for a confidential channel for employees, directors, trustees, and other stakeholders to raise concerns about suspected fraudulent, unfair or unethical practices, violations of regulatory or legal requirements or governance vulnerability, and establish procedures to ensure adequate protection of the whistle-blowers," Sebi said. To give these effects, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has amended mutual fund rules, which will come into force from November 1.

Over ₹177 cr lost on account of ATM/credit card, internet banking frauds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As much as Rs 177 crore was lost on account of credit, debit card and internet banking frauds in the 2023-24 fiscal, Parliament was informed on Monday. In a written reply to the Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said the amount of loss due to cyber fraud has increased from Rs 69.68 crore in FY23 to Rs 177.05 crore in FY24. The quantum of loss in FY22 was Rs 80.33 crore, it was Rs 50.10 crore in FY21 and Rs 44.22 crore in FY20.

Chaudhary further said to help customers recover the loss on account of fraudulent transactions, the RBI has issued instructions to banks on limiting the liability of customers in cases of unauthorised electronic banking transactions. A customer need not bear any loss if the deficiency is on the part of the bank and in cases, where the fault lies neither with the bank nor with the customer but lies elsewhere in the system and the customer notifies the bank within three working days of receiving the



communication about the unauthorised transaction. Where the loss is due to the

customer's negligence, the customer has to bear the entire loss until he/she

reports the unauthorised transaction to the bank. Where the fault lies neither with the customer nor with the bank and lies elsewhere in the system, and the customer reports between 4-7 working days of the unauthorised transaction, the maximum liability of the customer ranges from Rs 5,000 to Rs 25,000, depending on the type of account/ instrument. If the unauthorised transaction is reported beyond 7 working days, the customer liability shall be determined as per the bank's Board approved policy.

"The burden of proving customer liability in case of unauthorised electronic banking transactions shall lie on the bank," Chaudhary said. To facilitate the citizens to report any cyber incidents, including financial frauds, the Home Ministry has launched a National cybercrime reporting portal (www.Cybercrime.Gov.In) and a National cybercrime Helpline Number '1930'. Further, customers can also report financial fraud on the official customer care website or branches of banks.

RBI proposes regulatory principles for management of model risks in credit

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Monday proposed to lay down principles for management of model risks in credit for banks and other regulated entities with a view to ensuring prudence and robustness. Regulated Entities (REs) generally use various models as part of their credit management, including for credit appraisal, borrower scoring, pricing, and risk management, among others. Inherently, model outputs are exposed to uncertainties as they are based on assumptions which may not manifest in the envisaged ways and may take different forms in a real-world scenario, the RBI said in a draft circular on "Regulatory Principles for Management of

Model Risks in Credit'. This potentially exposes REs to model risk, which has implications on prudential aspects of credit risk management, compliance and reputational risk. With a view to ensuring prudence and robustness, in the use of such models, RBI proposed to lay down certain broad regulatory principles which should be adopted by REs. "REs shall put in place a detailed Board approved policy with regard to model risk management framework for all models deployed, covering the entire model life cycle," the draft said. The policy should cover details of governance and oversight aspects commensurate with model materiality; processes

around model development or selection; and documentation for models deployed. It should also cover independent vetting / ongoing validation or review processes; change control; and the monitoring and reporting framework including role of internal audit function. "Credit risk model" refers to any quantitative method that applies statistical, economic, financial, or mathematical principles and assumptions to process data into an output to be used for credit decisions. The models used by REs may either be developed internally or sourced from external third-party suppliers, including under collaborative lending arrangements, or can be a mix of both as per the provisions of the policy, the draft said.

IndiGo to introduce business class seats in select flights from mid-November



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IndiGo will introduce business class seats in select flights on 12 domestic routes starting from November 14 and will also launch a customer loyalty programme, as the 18-year-old airline embarks on ambitious business expansion plans. Making the announcement at an event to mark 18 years of flying, IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers on Monday said the business class seats will be open for booking from August 6 and added that business class passengers will be offered curated special meals.

There will be a total of 12 seats in the configuration of 4 seats in 3 rows in the A321 neo planes. These aircraft will have a total of 220 seats -- 12 business and 208 economy class, according to an official. The seats will be introduced in the select flights from November 14, the official added. The introductory one-way fare for a business class seat will be starting at Rs 18,018. Elbers said the business class seats will be available on busiest and business routes, and will start with Delhi-Mumbai flights. The airline, which is focused on cost leadership, will also be launching the customer loyalty programme 'IndiGo BluChip' which will go live in September. On May 23, IndiGo announced that it will introduce business class in select routes this year. Currently, Tata Group-owned Air India, Air India Express and Vistara offer business class seats. Elbers said the airline will launch flights to seven more international destinations in the current fiscal that ends on March 31, 2025.

INDIA WAITS FOR GOLDEN BOY NEERAJ TO SHINE

PTI ■ PARIS

A man of many firsts in Indian athletics, Neeraj Chopra would be eyeing another piece of history with his javelin when he takes aim at his second Olympics amid expectations of a golden finish yet again. His fabled consistency would be tested after a season that has seen him battle a nagging adductor niggle. He would begin his quest on Tuesday with the qualifications round from where the Haryana lad is expected to make the finals on August 8.

A top podium finish will make Chopra only the fifth man in Olympics history to defend his title and the first Indian to win two gold medals in an individual event in the multi-sporting spectacle. Eric Lemming (Sweden; 1908 and 1912), Jonni Myrta (Finland; 1920 and 1924), Chopra's idol Jan Zelezny (Czech Republic; 1992, 1996 and 2000) and Andreas Thorkildsen (Norway; 2004 and 2008) are the only ones to

have defended the men's javelin gold medals in the Olympics. He has competed in just three events this year but the 26-year-old world champion is back in full flow in a season where none of his global competitors have done exceptionally well. After finishing second in the Doha Diamond League in May with a throw of 88.36m, which is his season's best, Chopra withdrew from Ostrava Golden Spike on May 28 as a precautionary measure after he felt "something" in his adductor (group of muscles located on inner thighs). Chopra, who has a personal best of 89.94m, made a strong comeback by winning gold at the Paavo Nurmi Games in Finland on June 18 with a throw of 85.97m. He later opted out of the Paris Diamond League on July 7, insisting that the event was never a part of his competition calendar this year. His coach later dismissed concerns surrounding



Chopra's fitness, telling PTI that his adductor has no issues now and his ward has been in high intensity phase of training. One of the most consistent javelin throwers in recent times, Chopra has sent his spear below 85m mark just twice out of his 15 competitions since winning gold in the Tokyo Olympics. Tokyo Olympics silver medalist Czech thrower Jakub Vadlejch, who beat Chopra in the Doha Diamond League, Germany's Julian Weber and former world champion Anderson Peters will once again be the Indian superstar's main rivals. The other Indian in fray in men's javelin is Kishore Jena, who booked an automatic berth with his 87.54m throw in the Asian Games last year, but has struggled to cross the 80m mark after that. Chopra is expected to lift the sagging spirits of the Indian athletics contingent which is yet to register a performance of consequence in the showpiece's ongoing edition.



Triathlon mixed relay goes ahead with swims in the Seine amid water quality concerns

AP ■ PARIS

Olympic triathletes plunged into the Seine River Monday morning as the mixed relay event got underway after organizers said the bacteria levels in the long-polluted Paris waterway were at acceptable levels. The plan to hold the swimming portion of the triathlons and the marathon swimming events in the Seine was an ambitious one. Swimming in the river has, with some exceptions, been off-limits since 1923 because it has been too toxic. Representatives from World Triathlon and the International Olympic Committee along with Paris Games organizers and regional and weather authorities met Sunday night to review water tests. The results indicated the water quality at the triathlon site had improved over the preceding hours and would be within the limits mandated by World Triathlon by Monday morning, they said in a statement. In a very close sprint finish, the team from Germany won the gold medal, with the United States taking silver and Britain clinching bronze.

combine to kill enough of the germs ahead of each event set to include a swim in the Seine. Athletes swam in the river for the men's and women's individual triathlons Wednesday, though the men's race had been delayed by a day because of the water quality. Elevated bacteria levels in the waterway have caused cancellations of the swimming portion of training sessions for the relay event. American triathlete Taylor Spivey said the uncertainty was difficult. "I mean, everyone watching can see what an incredible venue this was, for the triathlon," she said, noting that organizers clearly chose the course location for the backdrop of Paris monuments, which included the Eiffel Tower and the Champs-Elysees. "But the constant question of the water quality, the water quality and the current, was very stressful for the athletes, I would say, because there the contingency plan was only to push the race back, not necessarily like a plan B location." Her teammate, Morgan Pearson, said the last-minute changes in plans were unfair to the athletes and fans. He also was tired of talking about the water quality in the Seine: "I've been getting asked this question for the last year. I qualified a year ago, and I think, no pun intended, we're all just a little bit sick of the question." Brazilian triathlete Arnold Djemyer said the water was fine Monday. "There was really no difference about the quality of the water today compared to the first race," he said. "We already knew what we were going to face and it was all fine." Vette Bergsvik Thorn of Norway, who competed Monday, was one of several triathletes who fell ill after swimming in the Seine last Wednesday. He said he had a bad stomach illness for about 12 hours but said "it's hard to say if it's the river or just some ordinary food poisoning."

"It's been quite a few stressful days with not knowing if we can swim or not," he said. Swiss officials announced Saturday that triathlete Adrien Briffod, who had competed in the Seine on Wednesday, would not compete Monday after falling ill with a stomach infection. On Sunday, they announced that Simon Westermann, who had been tapped to replace Briffod, also had to withdraw because of a gastrointestinal infection. Westermann had not participated in any swims in the Seine. Paris spent 1.4 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) on infrastructure improvements to clean up the river that flows through its center. That included the construction of a giant basin to capture excess rainwater and keep wastewater from flowing into the river, renovating sewer infrastructure and upgrading wastewater treatment plants. Heavy rains that have fallen off and on during the Games have caused headaches for organizers as they result in elevated levels of fecal bacteria, including E. Coli and enterococci, flowing into the river. Drenching rains fell Thursday night, but conditions had otherwise been dry except for light rain Saturday evening. The sun shone brightly as the race unfolded Monday and athletes said organizers reassured them that there were no concerns with water quality. Organizers have continued to express confidence that warm temperatures and the sun's ultraviolet rays would

Motivated India eye German scalp to script another historic chapter in men's hockey



PTI ■ PARIS

Having displayed nerves of steel to be within touching distance of a second successive Olympic medal, the Indian hockey team will fancy its chances against familiar foe and reigning world champion Germany in the semifinal of the ongoing Games, hoping to better the bronze that it claimed in the Tokyo edition. India won last of their eight Olympic gold medals way back in the 1980 Moscow Games. Paris provides them a great opportunity to make history. A semifinal win will ensure a silver for India, which they last won in the 1960 Rome edition. The Indians displayed a tenacious performance against Britain in the quarterfinal at the iconic Yves-du-Manoir Stadium on Sunday. Playing with 10 men for close to 40 minutes after Amit Rohidas was shown a red card for unintentionally hitting rival forward Will Calnan on his face, the Harmanpreet Singh-led side defended stoutly to hold Britain 1-1 in regulation time and force a shoot-out, where it emerged 4-2 winner. Veteran goalkeeper P R Sreejesh, playing his last international tournament, seemed to have saved his best for the last leg of his career as he made save after save, including two in the shoot-out, to seal India's second consecutive Olympic semifinal spot.

It was one of the bravest performances from the Indians as in modern day hockey, to play and win with a man down is a Herculean task. And come Tuesday, Harmanpreet and his men would not only look to better the colour of their Tokyo medal but would also want to give a befitting farewell gift to the talismanic Sreejesh who will walk into the sunset after the Paris Games. Nicknamed "The Great Wall of Indian hockey", Sreejesh has been phenomenal in the Games so far, standing like a warrior in front of the post and enjoying every moment of his last hurrah at the Olympics. Against Britain, Sreejesh made 10 spectacular saves from field shots. If that was not enough, he kept out 10 penalty corners. "When I stepped on this field today (Sunday), there were two options for me. This can be my last match, or I got an opportunity for two more matches and I think, yeah, I got two more matches now," Sreejesh said later. "See, whoever comes in the semis, we (will) just play our game. That's it, that's important, because now it's a different game, because we are one man down and we need to focus on that now." But it won't be easy for the Indians as key defender and first rusher Amit Rohidas has been suspended from the semifinal match after receiving a contentious red card against

Britain, a decision which Hockey India has appealed. Rohidas' absence will also weaken India's options from penalty corners as he has been second to Harmanpreet from set pieces and the entire responsibility will now rest on the skipper. "Now, these things are not in our control. While it is a setback to not have Amit on the pitch for the semis, we are focused on the task at hand," said Harmanpreet, who has been India's leading scorer at the Games with seven goals. "On Sunday, what stood out in our performance was the team's ability to take on the added responsibility of a key position that Amit played. Every player stepped up and even until the last minute, we were fighting back." Going by world ranking and recent head-to-head record, there is hardly anything to differentiate between current world champions and four-time Olympic gold medalists Germany from India. While Germany are ranked fourth in the world, the Indians are a rung below. Germany, who beat Argentina 3-2 in the quarterfinal, are familiar opponents for India in high-stakes tournaments, the most famous being the bronze medal match in Tokyo where India registered a thrilling 5-4 win, thanks a stunning last-second save by Sreejesh. In the days leading up to the Paris Games, India had played Germany in practice matches and the Harmanpreet-led side won five out of those six contests. India's most recent contests against Germany were in the FIH Pro League's London leg in June this year, where they defeated the Honamas 3-0 before losing 2-3 in the return tie. "We wanted to play Germany in the final. At least, that was what we had discussed amongst ourselves during team meetings ahead of the Olympic Games.

Pregnant Olympians push boundaries of possibility in Paris



AP ■ PARIS

Many Olympic athletes take to Instagram to share news of their exploits, trials, victories and heartbreaks. After her fencing event ended last week, Egypt's Nada Hafez shared a little bit more. She'd been fencing for two, the athlete revealed - and in fact had been pregnant for seven months. "What appears to you as two players on the podium, they were actually three!" Hafez wrote, under an emotional picture of her during the match. "It was me, my competitor, & my yet-to-come to our world, little baby!" Mom (and baby) finished the competition ranked 16th, Hafez's best result in three Olympics. A day later, an Azerbaijani archer was also revealed on Instagram to have competed while six-and-a-half months pregnant. Yaylagul Ramazanova told Xinhua News she'd felt her baby kick before she took a shot - and then shot a 10, the maximum number of points. "There have been pregnant Olympians and Paralympians before, though the phenomenon is rare for obvious reasons. Still, most stories have been of athletes competing when they're far earlier in their pregnancies - or not even far enough along to know they were expecting. Like U.S. Beach volleyball star

Kerri Walsh Jennings, who won her third gold medal while, unknowingly, five weeks pregnant with her third child. "When I was throwing my body around fearlessly, and going for gold for our country, I was pregnant," she said on "Today" after the London Games in 2012. She and husband Casey (also a beach volleyball player) had only started trying to conceive right before the Olympics, she said, figuring it would take time. But she felt different, and volleyball partner Misty May-Treanor said to her - presciently, it turned out - "You're probably pregnant." It makes sense that pregnant athletes are pushing boundaries now, one expert says, as both attitudes and knowledge develop about what women can do deep into pregnancy. "This is something we're seeing more and more of," says Dr. Kathryn Ackerman, a sports medicine physician and co-chair of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee's women's health task force, "as women are dispelling the myth that you can't exercise at a high level when you're pregnant." Ackerman notes there's been little data, and so past decisions on the matter have often been arbitrary. But, she says, "doctors now recommend that if an athlete is in good condition going into pregnancy, and there are no complications, then it's safe to

work out, train, and compete at a very high level." An exception, she says, might be something like ski racing, where the risk of a bad fall is great. But in fencing, says the Boston-based Ackerman, there is clearly protective padding for athletes, and in less physically strenuous sports like archery or shooting, there's absolutely no reason a woman can't compete. It's not just an issue of physical fitness, of course. It is deeply emotional. Deciding whether and how to compete while trying to also grow a family is a thorny calculus that male athletes simply don't have to consider - at least in anywhere near the same way. Just ask Serena Williams, who famously won the Australian Open in 2017 while pregnant with her first child. When, some five years later, she wanted to try for a second, she stepped back from tennis - an excruciating decision. "Believe me, I never wanted to have to choose between tennis and a family," Williams - who won four Olympic golds - wrote in a Vogue essay. "I don't think it's fair. If I were a guy, I wouldn't be writing this because I'd be out there playing and winning while my wife was doing the physical labor of expanding our family. Maybe I'd be more of a Tom Brady if I had that opportunity." Williams welcomed Adira River Ohanian in 2023, joining older sister Olympia. And Olympia was the name that U.S. Softball player Michele Granger's mother reportedly suggested for the baby Granger was carrying when she pitched the gold-medal winning game in Atlanta in 1996. Her husband suggested the name Athena. Granger preferred neither. "I didn't want to make that connection with her name," said Granger to Gold Country Media in 2011. The baby was named Kady.

Boxer Imane Khelif calls for end to bullying after backlash over gender misconceptions

AP ■ PARIS

Olympic boxer Imane Khelif said the wave of hateful scrutiny she has faced over misconceptions about her gender "harms human dignity," and she called for an end to bullying athletes after being greatly affected by the international backlash against her. The Algerian athlete spoke about her tumultuous Olympic experience on Sunday night in an interview with SNTV, a sports video partner of The Associated Press. "I send a message to all the people of the world to uphold the Olympic principles and the Olympic Charter, to refrain from bullying all athletes, because this has effects, massive effects," Khelif said in Arabic. "It can destroy people, it can kill people's thoughts, spirit and mind. It can divide people. And because of that, I ask them to refrain from bullying." The victories of Khelif and fellow boxer Lin Yu-ting of Taiwan in the ring in Paris have become one of the biggest stories of the Paris Games. Both women have clinched their first Olympic medals even as they have faced online abuse based on

unsubstantiated claims about their gender, drawing them into a wider divide over changing attitudes toward gender identity and regulations in sports. The 25-year-old Khelif acknowledged the pressure and pain of enduring this ordeal while competing far from home in the most important event of her athletic career. "I am in contact with my family two days a week. I hope that they weren't affected deeply," she said. "They are worried about me. God willing, this crisis will culminate in a gold medal, and that would be the best response." The vitriol stems from claims by the International Boxing Association, which has been permanently banned from the Olympics, that both Khelif and Lin failed unspecified eligibility tests for the women's competition at last year's world championships. Khelif declined to answer when asked whether she had undergone tests other than doping tests, saying she didn't want to talk about it. She expressed gratitude to the International Olympic Committee and its president, Thomas Bach, for

standing resolutely behind her while the banned former governing body of Olympic boxing stoked a furor around her participation in Paris. "I know that the Olympic Committee has done me justice, and I am happy with this remedy because it shows the truth," she said. She also has seen massive support at her bouts, drawing cheers when she enters the arena and crowds waving Algerian flags chanting her first name. She will fight again Tuesday in the women's 66-kilogram semifinals at Roland Garros. Khelif repeatedly made clear she won't allow chatter or accusations to deter her from attempting to claim Algeria's first Olympic gold medal in women's boxing. "I don't care about anyone's opinion," Khelif said a day after beating Anna Luca Hamori of Hungary. "I came here for a medal, and to compete for a medal. I will certainly be competing to improve (and) be better, and God willing, I will improve, like every other athlete." Although she is aware of the worldwide discussion about her, Khelif said she has been somewhat

removed. "Honestly, I don't follow social media," she said. "There is a mental health team that doesn't let us follow social media, especially in the Olympic Games, whether me or other athletes. I'm here to compete and get a good result." Khelif started her Olympic run last Thursday with a victory over Angela Carini of Italy, who abandoned the bout after just 46 seconds. Carini later said she



regretted her decision and wished to apologize to Khelif. That unusual ending raised the chatter around Khelif into a roar, drawing comments from the likes of former U.S. President Donald Trump, "Harry Potter" writer J.K. Rowling and others falsely claiming Khelif was a man or transgender. The IOC repeatedly declared her and Lin qualified to participate in the Olympics, and it has decried the

murky testing standards and untransparent governance of the IBA, which was banished entirely from the Olympics last year in an unprecedented punishment for a governing body. Khelif clearly felt the weight of the worldwide scrutiny upon her, and her victory over Hamori on Saturday appeared to be cathartic. After the referee raised Khelif's hand with the win, she went to the center of the ring, waved to her fans, knelt and slammed her palm on the canvas, her smile turning to tears. "I couldn't control my nerves," Khelif said in the interview. "Because after the media frenzy and after the victory, there was a mix of joy and at the same time, I was greatly affected, because honestly, it wasn't an easy thing to go through at all. It was something that harms human dignity." She had competed in IBA events for several years without problems until she was abruptly suspended from last year's world championships. The Russian-dominated body - which has faced years of clashes with the IOC - has refused to provide any information about the tests.

Algeria's national boxing federation is still an IBA member. Khelif is from rural northwestern Algeria, and she grew up playing soccer until she fell in love with boxing. Overcoming her father's initial objections, she traveled 10 kilometers (about 6 miles) by bus to train for fights in a neighboring town. After reaching the sport's top level in her late teens, she struggled early in her career before reaching an elite level. Khelif has been a solid, if unspectacular, international competitor for six years, and she lost to eventual gold medalist Kellie Harrington of Ireland at the Tokyo Olympics. Khelif's next bout in Paris is against Janjaem Suwannapheng of Thailand. If Khelif wins again, she will fight for a gold medal Friday. "Yes, this issue involves the dignity and honor of every woman and female," she told an Algerian broadcaster in brief remarks Sunday after beating Hamori. "The Arab population has known me for years and has seen me box in the IBA that wronged me (and) treated me unfairly, but I have God on my side."

