



OPINION 6

HONOUR THE UNSUNG HEROES OF OPERATION PAWAN

WORLD 8

7 KILLED IN CONGO'S MUSIC CONCERT STAMPEDE

MONEY 10

REMOVAL OF ANGEL TAX FOR STARTUPS TO HELP ATTRACT INVESTORS: GOYAL

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SINDHU OPENS CAMPAIGN WITH DOMINANT WIN 11 SPORTS

WHY? WHY? WHY?

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Phones kept buzzing with messages on WhatsApp groups with helpless students trying to find where their friends — studying at the Rau's Coaching centre's library on Saturday evening — were following the death of three civil services aspirants due to rain-induced flooding in the basement of the coaching centre. While reports claimed only three lives were lost, students who were witness to the tragic incident unfolding before their eyes claimed a higher number. All the deceased had cleared their preliminary examination, the results of which was declared a few days ago and were burning midnight oil to prepare for the Mains examinations scheduled in October-November which is second stage of Civil Services Examinations to qualify to become an IAS, IPS or allied services officer.



Police detain students protesting outside Karol Bagh metro station after three IAS aspirants died in the basement of Rau's IAS Study Circle at Old Rajinder Nagar area, in New Delhi, on Sunday

Thousands like the ones who fell prey to lackadaisical civic amenities make national Capital their karambhooni for a few years to get into elite Government services. "We have WhatsApp groups of UPSC aspirants. Those groups are full with students asking about the whereabouts of their friends. I am sure that the numbers are much higher

and the authorities are not giving us the full picture," said 27-year-old Ankit, adding that while protesting in the wee hours of Saturday, authorities also threw drainage water on them to disperse them. Old Rajinder Nagar, which is usually bustling with UPSC aspirants in haste to get to

their classes, witnessed protests of angry students who are worried about the whereabouts of their colleagues who are nowhere to be found. Albeit, police claiming three lives, students claimed on seeing at least four to five bodies being taken and the authorities shutting the lights

off regularly to not let the general public know the exact situation. Meanwhile, at the Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital, there was anger among the relatives of the deceased, who claimed they were not being allowed to see the bodies even though they have been waiting since morning. Deceased Shreya Yadav's uncle Dharmendra Yadav shared his harrowing experience. "I saw the news about the incident late at night and called Shreya over phone, but she didn't answer," he said. A resident of Ghaziabad, he said when his niece did not

Library running illegally in basement

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Rau's IAS Study Circle centre in Delhi's Rajinder Nagar, where three students died in rain-induced flooding, was functioning illegally as a library. The coaching institute was issued a fire safety certificate just 18 days before the incident. Notably, the institute, had falsely shown that the basement was being used for parking and as a store room, as per the building plan and No Objection Certificate (NOC) of the fire department.

respond to his calls, he rushed to the institute in Old Rajinder Nagar. "When I reached the coaching centre, I was directed to RML Hospital, where I learned that a body identified as that of Shreya had been found, but I was not allowed to see her," he added.

Two arrested

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

After arresting two people, the Delhi Police has registered an FIR and formed multiple teams to probe the Rau's coaching centre flooding incident which claimed the lives of three IAS aspirants, who had already cleared their prelims exam and were preparing in the library of the coaching institute for the Mains exams of UPSC. According to the police on Sunday, they have arrested owner Abhishek Gupta and coordinator Deshpal Singh of the Rau's IAS Study Circle and booked them for culpable homicide and under other charges. "Multiple teams have been formed to investigate the entire incident. We have asked the Delhi Fire Services to provide us report about the building and the basement which was being used as a library but mentioned as 'store room'," a senior police officer said. The officer said the basement was eight-feet below the ground level and more than 18 students were



present in it on Saturday evening when it got flooded after heavy rain. According to sources in the police department, the gate of the basement was closed, but due to high pressure of rain water, it got damaged and water gushed in. "We are checking CCTV footage from the area to ascertain the sequence of the events. After scanning the CCTV footage, we will identify the people who were standing close to the institute during the time of incident and will record their statements," said the officer.

Govt clarifies on tax clearance certificate for going abroad

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After social media outrage over a Budget proposal making it mandatory to get tax clearance certificates for going abroad, the Government on Sunday clarified that the proposed amendment is not for all, and only those accused of financial irregularities or having substantial tax arrears need such clearance.

The Finance Ministry, in the Finance Bill, 2024, has proposed to add the reference of the Black Money Act, 2015, to the list of Acts, under which any person should clear his liabilities to obtain the tax clearance certificate.

"The proposed amendment does not require all the residents to obtain the tax clearance certificate," the ministry said in a statement. As per section 230 of the Income-tax Act, 1961, every person is not required to obtain a tax clearance certificate. Only in the case of certain persons, in respect of whom circumstances exist, which make it necessary to obtain a tax clearance certificate will be required to obtain such a certificate.

Manu first Indian shooter to win medal at Olympics

RISHABH MALIK/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/PARIS

A 22-year-old Haryana girl clinched the first medal for India. Manu Bhaker strikes the bronze medal in Women's 10m Air Pistol event in Paris Olympics in 2024. With her medal she becomes the first female shooter to win medal for India in Olympic games. On July 27 Manu Bhaker had qualified for the final of her event with a score of 580 points, finishing third out of 45 competitors with the top-eight going through to Sunday's final. Bhaker scored 221.7 in the final round in which she fought hard against Korea's Kim Yeji who bagged silver and Jin Ye Oh bagged the gold with a games record of 243.2. Bhaker stated, "I was fighting with all the energy I have. Really grateful that I could win the bronze. I read Bhagwat Gita and always tried to do what I am supposed to do, left everything else to god." "We can't fight destiny," said Bhaker who appeared in her second Olympic stint. Previously she couldn't make it to the final and registered a bronze in this 2024 Olympic ending a drought in Olympic event.



Manu Bhaker poses for a photograph with her bronze medal after finishing third in the 10m air pistol women's final round at the 2024 Summer Olympics, France, on Sunday

This was fifth medal in shooting for India. Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore (silver in Athens Olympics, 2004), Bindra (gold, Beijing 2008), Gagan Narang (bronze, London 2012) and Vijay Kumar (silver, London) have brought prestige to the country in shooting. Bhaker is one of the favourite contenders for India to top the medals in the Olympic. Bhaker, who hails from Jhajjar district in Haryana, is an accomplished athlete with

a distinguished career, having secured 15 gold medals at various levels, including nine at the World Cups. At just 22, she made a stunning debut at the International Sport Shooting Federation (ISSF) World Cup in Guadalajara, Mexico, clinching gold in the 10m air pistol final against top competitors like Olympic gold-medalist Anna Korakaki and three-time World Cup medalist Celine Goberville and in her first appearance in

2018 Common Wealth Games she clinched gold in 10m air pistol at the age of 16. In 2018, Manu became the first Indian to win a gold medal at the Youth Olympic Games. She has competed in two Olympic Games but faced challenges during her debut in Tokyo three years ago when her pistol malfunctioned in the 10m air pistol qualification, preventing her from reaching the finals in both the mixed 10m pistol and 25m pistol events. Despite this setback, Manu is now on a redemption path, earning the distinction of being India's first female Olympic medalist. With her historic achievement, Bhaker has not only inspired millions of young Indians but has also solidified her position as one of the country's brightest shooting stars. Her bronze medal is a testament to her dedication, hard work, and unwavering belief in her abilities. India is celebrating this momentous victory, with the entire nation joining in to congratulate the young champion. Her achievement is expected to give a significant boost to shooting in the country, encouraging more young talents to take up the sport.

Major gubernatorial reshuffle

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

President Draupadi Murmu effected major gubernatorial appointments with changes in the Governors of some States with Lakshman Prasad Acharya appointed as the Governor of Assam with the additional charge of Manipur while Gulab Chand Kataria replaced Banwarilal Purohit as the Governor of Punjab. Acharya has replaced Kataria, who has also been appointed the administrator of the Union Territory of Chandigarh, according to a communique issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Saturday night. According to a Rashtrapati Bhavan communication Murmu has accepted the resignation of Purohit as the Governor of Punjab and the administrator of Chandigarh, it said. "Lakshman Prasad Acharya, Governor of Sikkim, appointed as Governor of Assam and has also been given additional charge of the Governor of Manipur," the statement said. Anusuyi Uikye has been serving as the Governor of Manipur since February last year. Veteran BJP leader Om Prakash Mathur will be the new Governor of Sikkim, the communique said. Jharkhand Governor CP Radhakrishnan, who was also holding additional charge of Telangana, has been appointed as the new Governor of Maharashtra, succeeding incumbent Ramesh Bais. Former Union Labour and Employment Minister Santosh Kumar Gangwar will be the new Jharkhand Governor in place of Radhakrishnan. Former Deputy Chief Minister of



Tripura, Jishnu Dev Varma, will be the new Telangana Governor. Former IAS officer K Kailashnathan, one of the trusted aides of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been appointed as Lt Governor of Puducherry with effect from the date he assumes charge of his office. Kailashnathan, chief principal secretary to Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, stepped down on June 30 after holding the post for more than a decade after his retirement. Senior BJP leader from Maharashtra Haribhau Kisanrao Bagde has been appointed the Governor of Rajasthan, succeeding Kalraj Mishra. Former Lok Sabha member from Assam Ramen Deka has been appointed as the Governor of Chhattisgarh, and C H Vijayshankar, the former Lok Sabha member from Mysore in Karnataka, will be Meghalaya Governor, the communique said. These appointments will take effect from the dates they will assume charge of their respective offices, the statement added.

Row as students seek special space for namaz in Kerala college

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Nirmala College at Muvattupuzha (established in 1953) in Kerala finds itself in the middle of a new controversy as hundreds of Muslim students in the institution are on a warpath with the college management. On Friday, students under the leadership of SFI (the students' wing of the CPI-M) and Muslim League gheraoed the college principal Father Justin K Kuriakose, for almost two hours demanding special classrooms/auditoriums for offering namaz. This is a new development in the history of the 71-year-old college, which was established by the Catholic Church to make higher education accessible to students belonging to the State's high

ranges. "We were taken aback by the action of the students picketing the principal or gheraoing the teachers or management. Till now the Muslim students were making use of the mosques in the neighbourhood for offering Friday prayers. What made them demand for special classrooms or auditoriums remains a mystery," Kuriakose told The Pioneer on Sunday. The demand made by the students has been put up before the college management. "To set apart exclusive prayer auditoriums for students believing in different sects is not an easy task. Though ours is a Christian minority institution, we follow the directives issued by the university and Government,"



said a senior official of the management. Though the church is keen on resolving the issue amicably, the recent developments in the State have to be seen as factors that made the students resorting to extreme measures. The CPI (M)-led Kerala Government has recently appointed a senior IAS officer as the de facto foreign secretary of the State to communicate and coordinate with Governments in Europe, USA, Australia and Africa. Sources in Government Secretariat said the move has turned out to be a "treatment worse than the disease" as the External Affairs is an area that comes under the exclusive domain of the Centre. Another demand that has been overlooked by the media

in the State is the creation of separate district of Muvattupuzha and the bifurcation of the State itself as Kerala and Malabar. The change in Kerala's religious demography and the emergence of Muvattupuzha as a hotbed of religious extremism are seen as the factors contributing to the change in the attitude of the people. Christian Association and Alliance for Social action (CASA) has condemned the students picketing the principal of the college over an issue which has nothing to do with academics. "We have heard about people who disrupt normal life and traffic by forcibly occupying public places under the pretext of religious congregation and namaz.

NTA announces CUET-UG results

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

National Testing Agency (NTA) on Sunday announced the results for the Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG, paving the way to begin the undergraduate admission process which has been delayed this year. The NTA had on July 7 released the provisional answer keys of the CUET-UG 2024. A retest for more than 1,000 candidates whose grievances were found genuine by the agency was conducted on July 19. The delay in the CUET-UG results came amid a row over alleged irregularities in competitive exams, including in the NEET-UG and the UGC-NET.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Enough is enough

The tragic deaths of three students in basement flooding is a repeat story of administrative apathy and negligence

The incident is both tragic and surreal. It is difficult to comprehend that three students could lose their lives in a coaching centre operated in a basement that gets flooded. In a heartbreaking incident that has once again spotlighted the glaring deficiencies in urban infrastructure and governance, three civil service aspirants tragically lost their lives due to flooding in a basement. This avoidable disaster raises serious questions about official apathy, the flouting of safety norms, and the recurring nature of such incidents. On a fateful evening, heavy rains lashed the city, overwhelming the already inadequate drainage systems. The basement, where the students were studying, was rapidly filled with water. Despite desperate attempts to escape, the rising water levels led to the tragic drowning of the three young lives. The basement, meant for commercial storage, was illegally converted into a coaching centre. With no proper ventilation, emergency exits, or drainage systems, it became a death trap during the downpour. This incident underscores a stark reality faced by many urban dwellers who are forced to live in substandard and unsafe accommodations due to high real estate costs and inadequate housing policies.



The deaths of these students could have been prevented had there been stricter enforcement of building codes and timely maintenance of drainage systems. However, the incident has laid bare the apathy of the authorities responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of citizens. Residents in the area had repeatedly complained about the poor drainage and the illegal conversion of basements into living spaces. Despite these warnings, no significant action was taken. The inaction of municipal authorities and the lack of accountability have resulted in yet another tragedy. After the death of three students, it is time for the crocodile tears to flood on the social media. A big section of political class would rather do nothing but just be concerned about such incidents. Indeed it is the nexus between the local politicians, bureaucrats and business owners of dubious credentials to indulge in flouting the norms and make a fast buck. They do not mind playing with the lives of innocent people. The incident is not an isolated one, similar incidents have happened in the past. This is part of a disturbing pattern where safety norms are routinely flouted by the powerful. Illegal constructions, unauthorized conversions, and poor maintenance of infrastructure are rampant in many urban areas including the capital city. Builders and landlords often bypass regulations, compromising the safety of residents for profit. Such incidents are alarmingly frequent, each time highlighting the same issues of poor infrastructure, negligence, and lack of accountability. Despite the public outcry and media attention that follows each tragedy, there seems to be little systemic change. Again, a customary enquiry would be instituted which would give its report when the incident is all but forgotten from the public memory and we as a nation wait for another one to happen.

The incident underscores a stark reality faced by many urban dwellers who are forced to live in substandard and unsafe accommodations due to high real estate costs and inadequate housing policies. The deaths of these students could have been prevented had there been stricter enforcement of building codes and timely maintenance of drainage systems. However, the incident has laid bare the apathy of the authorities responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of citizens. Residents in the area had repeatedly complained about the poor drainage and the illegal conversion of basements into living spaces. Despite these warnings, no significant action was taken. The inaction of municipal authorities and the lack of accountability have resulted in yet another tragedy. After the death of three students, it is time for the crocodile tears to flood on the social media. A big section of political class would rather do nothing but just be concerned about such incidents. Indeed it is the nexus between the local politicians, bureaucrats and business owners of dubious credentials to indulge in flouting the norms and make a fast buck. They do not mind playing with the lives of innocent people. The incident is not an isolated one, similar incidents have happened in the past. This is part of a disturbing pattern where safety norms are routinely flouted by the powerful. Illegal constructions, unauthorized conversions, and poor maintenance of infrastructure are rampant in many urban areas including the capital city. Builders and landlords often bypass regulations, compromising the safety of residents for profit. Such incidents are alarmingly frequent, each time highlighting the same issues of poor infrastructure, negligence, and lack of accountability. Despite the public outcry and media attention that follows each tragedy, there seems to be little systemic change. Again, a customary enquiry would be instituted which would give its report when the incident is all but forgotten from the public memory and we as a nation wait for another one to happen.

### PICTALK



Kanwariyas carry Ganga water during their pilgrimage in the holy month of 'Shravan', in Haridwar

# Honour the unsung heroes of operation Pawan



R S SIDHU

## The lack of public commemoration for the 1,171 soldiers killed in action during Operation Pawan in Sri Lanka highlights a troubling apathy

India's future path to greatness shall be marked with supreme sacrifices by its warriors who if confined to the dustbin of state apathy, as reflected by the Government disinclination towards public commemoration of supreme sacrifice by 1171 Indian soldiers KIA during Operation 'Pawan' in Sri Lanka, may adversely impact the national will during inevitable future military confrontations. To recall Operation 'Pawan', the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) operation in Sri Lanka, was the largest joint services military operation conducted by India, in the 1971 War. It led to the establishment of Headquarters IPKF, a Corps-size tri-service organisation with nearly 100,000 troops from the three services under its command. Had the proposed Maritime Theatre Command been in existence, Operation 'Pawan' would have come under its ambit.

The intensity of this 32-month-long 'politico-military peace keeping' operation, undertaken from 29th of July 1987 to 24th of March 1990, is best gauged from the gallantry awards won and casualties suffered by this force. 1172 Indian soldiers were Killed In Action (KIA), and more than 3500 soldiers suffered grievous injuries. The IPKF was awarded 1 Param Vir Chakra, 6 Maha Vir Chakras, 98 Vir Chakras and scores of other gallantry awards. The ghost of the political failure to see through to the end of its first geopolitical foray in near abroad continues to impact Indian policy establishment even in the present times.

As of now, against the backdrop of a sustained Chinese presence in Sri Lanka, India is struggling to adopt a coherent strategy to deal with the continued intransigence by the Sri Lanka Government to implement the political solution of devolution to the Tamils enshrined in the Indian Sri Lanka Agreement (ISLA) of 29th of July 1987. India is bound to invite hostility from the dominant geopolitical forces in its neighbourhood. This will mandate it to be prepared for Out-of-area military operations to secure its economic and geopolitical interests. India's



future path to greatness therefore shall be marked with supreme sacrifices by its warriors who if confined to the dustbin of state apathy, as reflected by the Government disinclination towards public commemoration of supreme sacrifice by 1171 Indian soldiers KIA in Sri Lanka, may adversely impact the national will during the inevitable future military confrontations. The Government is very vocal in pronouncing its nationalist credentials but sluggish in putting money into building deterrent capabilities. Last week's defence budget was a green signal for China to race even further ahead under the illusion there will be no war. Still, policy pronouncements are not enough unless backed by a revitalised and reorganised military competent to safeguard its economic interests, all aspirational talk is mere rhetoric. Building National War Memorials is one thing; honouring the fallen braves appropriately is quite another matter regardless of the outcome because victory or defeat on the battlefield is never complete unless it is surrendered as in 1971. This is where the IPKF comes into the picture because it was not permitted to complete its military mission. Its contribution to the preservation of Sri Lanka's territorial integrity is fully acknowledged; in Colombo especially. New Delhi must honour its sacrifices on 29 July as a tribute to



THERE IS ANGST AGAINST THE INJUSTICE OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ARMED FORCES NOT OFFICIALLY COMMEMORATING THE IPKF OPERATIONS AT THE NWM AS IS DONE FOR THE 1971 AND KARGIL WARS

the valour of the fallen brave. The political parameters of the ISLA had been achieved by the IPKF by December 1988. The ethnic Sri Lanka Tamil predominant Northern and Eastern Provinces were amalgamated into a unitary Northeastern Province, general elections to the North East Provincial Council were successfully conducted, with a duly elected EPRLF-led government sworn in. Had the IPKF stay been extended to tame the LTTE, the military mission could have created conditions for implementing a political solution short of Elam.

This would have secured national interest, but the new Indian government should not have endorsed the new Sri Lankan government's demand to withdraw IPKF from the island in August 1989. Ascribing the failure of ISLA to IPKF, which was just a corollary to ISLA, is unfair. The failures lay in the diplomatic and government policy, which the establishment wishes to cover up by laying the blame at the doorstep of its military.

The ISLA had weak foundations. The contingency of Sri Lanka and LTTE renegeing on the ISLA was not thought through. The withdrawal of IPKF left India without decisive influence to oversee the implementation of the promised political package by Sri Lanka to remove the discriminatory state practices

against its ethnic Tamil minority, impacting Indian policy towards Sri Lanka even in the present.

The provision of weapons and allied support by R&AW to the LTTE even when militarily engaged against IPKF, and the availability of physical infrastructure support to LTTE in Tamil Nadu, was against national interests. Similar primacy to political interests can be sensed by the refusal of the Indian state to commemorate KIA of Operation 'Pawan.' There is angst against the injustice of the government and the armed forces not officially commemorating the IPKF operations at the NWM as is done for the 1971 and Kargil wars. Graves of some of the Indian soldiers killed during Operation 'Pawan' are still in Sri Lanka. It is hard to understand the dichotomy of the Indian leadership, both political and military, paying public tributes at the IPKF war memorial in Colombo, in the heart of Sri Lanka, but failing to honour those KIA during Operation 'Pawan,' at the NWM at New Delhi. The IPKF war veterans are ever hopeful that the Govt will realise the injustice and consent to a befitting annual national homage to 1171 of its Bravehearts who made the supreme sacrifice during 'Operation Pawan.'

(The writer won Sena Medal in an Operation 'Pawan' veteran; he is strategic thinker, and author; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### PM MODI'S WARNING TO PAKISTAN

Madam — This refers to the report "Modi warns Pak on terrorism," The Pioneer, Jul 27. PM Narendra Modi, while addressing the 25th Kargil Diwas celebrations, has warned Pakistan against continuing its futile policy breeding and sponsoring cross-border terror. Both the message and the timing were perfect. PM Modi has given voice to the frustrations of most Indians, and was echoing the viewpoint of the entire Indian polity and the Parliament by expressing the national consensus that Kashmir belongs to India. No policy of terror or initiation of war-like action will ever deter India as his clear pronouncement. He also reflected our national resolve strongly that India would not think twice about doing all it takes to protect its territory and people. Nevertheless, as Mr Modi rightly said, Pakistan has not learnt its lessons. It continues to wage war in the garb of terrorism and proxy wars. And it still continues to be a sanctuary for anti-India terrorists, if the recent surge in attacks in Jammu is any indication. Indian leaders have time and again sought to mend relations with Pakistan and have made genuine overtures for peace. But each time we have received only deceit and backstabbing in return. In the last 25 years, the differential between India and Pakistan in terms of economic prosperity and global reputation has sharply widened. But Pakistan has still not grown out of its desire to be hyphenated with India and is, in the process, only harming its own people.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

#### EMPOWERING MINERAL RICH STATES

Madam — Due to historic verdict on mining royalty and taxes now the state government is empowered to levy taxes on mining companies and due to this reason concerning States will be hugely benefited and the financial state of these States will be improved, and it is due to a landmark judgment on July 25, a nine-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court which upheld the right of States to levy taxes on mining activities, recognizing that 'royalty' and

## The historic rise of women leaders



If Kamala Harris wins, she will become the first woman President of the USA. If Donald Trump wins, he will become the second president to serve non-consecutive terms (45th and 47th), following Grover Cleveland, who was the 22nd and 24th president. Franklin D. Roosevelt is the only U.S. president to have served three terms. Whether anyone will surpass that record remains a long-term puzzle. All eyes will be on

November 5th, 2024, ballot day in the USA. As of July 27, 2024, 29 nations around the world have women as heads of state or government (Presidents or Prime Ministers).

The history of women heads of state and government is fascinating. The world's first woman president was Maria Estela 'Isabel' Peron of Argentina (1974 to 1976). The first elected woman Prime Minister was Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka in 1960, who served three terms. In the 1970s, three women Prime Ministers—Bandaranaike (Sri Lanka), Indira Gandhi (India), and Golda Meir (Israel)—were known as the "Iron Ladies Trio." Later, Margaret Thatcher, the "Iron Lady No. 4," became the Prime Minister of the UK.

P V Madhu Nivriti | Secunderabad

'taxation' are different recognizing both as separate. In the case of Mineral Area Development Authority vs Steel Authority of India, the nine-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court gave this decision in an 8:1 split. Eight judges including Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud voted in favor of this decision while Justice B V Nagarathana disagreed. The decision, pending for more than 25 years, finally clarifies that States can levy additional taxes on mining activities and land used for such purposes.

The decision is a significant development in empowering States to generate more revenue, which can be used to meet local needs and mitigate the adverse effects of mining. The distinction between royalties and taxes was at the centre of the court's decision. Royalties are payments made by mining leaseholders to the lessee on the basis of a specific agreement as stipulated under Section 9 of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDRA). These payments are made in exchange for the right to extract minerals and are thus seen as compensation for the

use of land and resources. Taxes, on the other hand, are more commonly imposed by governments and used to fund public services and infrastructure.

Yash Pal Raihan | Jalandhar

#### MODI'S OLIVE BRANCH TO RSS

Madam — In the lead-up to its 100th year, Narendra Modi just gave a birthday gift to the RSS. Amidst speculations of a deepening rift between the RSS and the Modi-Shah-controlled BJP, the NDA government withdrew the order dated 1966 that prohibits government employees from participating in RSS activities.

Is this an olive branch, considering the inexplicable statement made by J P Nadda, almost declaring independence from the RSS in the middle of the Lok Sabha elections? This comes on top of several grants and appointments going to people and organisations belonging to or close to the RSS.

C K Ramanathan | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## How generative AI is transforming the workplace



ACHAL KHANNA

### The rapid advancements in generative AI are revolutionising the workplace, reshaping job roles, and redefining the future of work

Automation has been at the core of human evolution since the beginning of time. Humans have always sought out ways to make their jobs faster and easier. From physical labour to mechanized tools and now artificial intelligence, the unprecedented rate at which this sector has evolved has been transformative. With every upgrade, the next set of expectations is demanded immediately. This leads us to the conclusion that the future of work is NOT in the future; it is NOW!



However, historical precedents show that technological advancements tend to transform rather than displace jobs. AI is no different. It will change how we work, introducing new methods and enhancing collaboration between humans and machines. According to a report by SHRM and The Burning Glass Institute on Generative Artificial Intelligence and the Workforce, the impact of Gen AI will be less about automation and more about augmenting workers' productivity and effectiveness. According to a Global Report by Thomson Reuters, 77% of professionals believe AI will significantly impact their work within the next five years.

The 'War for Talent' Will Be Fought on Newer Terrains: The traditional paradigms of skills and talent acquisition

are evolving rapidly. Organizations must look beyond conventional talent pools to find the right candidates.

**Competitive Edge through Generative AI:** A growing number of organizations are already incorporating generative AI into their HR processes, and many are exploring its potential in other functions. Organizations have already introduced the use of Generative AI in their HR processes, and many organizations are exploring possible uses.

**Human Creativity:** The Ultimate Differentiator As generative AI becomes more accessible, human creativity and ingenuity will become even more valuable. While AI can process data and provide insights, it is human attributes such as creativity, empathy, and strategic thinking that will set organizations apart. The ability to connect disparate ideas and develop innovative solutions beyond AI's capabilities will be crucial. Human ingenuity will be the key differentiator in a world where AI is a common tool. The case for Reverse

Augmentation AI's potential is best realized when combined with human intelligence (HI). This synergy enables more effective and differentiated applications of AI, resulting in higher return on investments. By leveraging the strengths of both AI and HI, organizations can achieve superior outcomes and drive innovation.

**Investing in Leadership Development:** As generative AI enhances operational efficiencies, the focus on developing leadership talent will become increasingly important. Leadership development will require targeted investments to ensure they are equipped to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing environment. Organizations must prioritize investments in both technology and human capability development to remain competitive. Organizations must stay agile, continuously adapting to the changes brought about by AI. The foresight to navigate these changes will be the key to sustaining growth and achieving long-term success.

(The writer is CEO SHRM India, APAPC and MENA; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN A PATH TO PERSONAL LIBERATION

With unwavering determination and faith, one can conquer even the most persistent habits



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

We are what we repeatedly do, said Aristotle... If we have a look at the dictionary meaning of habit, then it says 'something that you do often and regularly, sometimes without knowing that you are doing it.' To define it simply, habits can be described as involuntary actions. They are a kind of 'automatic behaviour' as it were, for one does not do them after much thought. There is no doubt in it that almost everyone in this world has one or other bad habit. Don't we all have? Like, many people have the bad habit of smoking. But, if you tell them that it is a bad habit, some of them will bring in a little bit of philosophy and some would try to support it with medical opinion also.

They will say, "Smoking is very exhilarating. It is good for my brain because it brings me concentration." Others will say, "Smoking keeps my bowels free." Others still will confess that it is a bad habit that they find hard to give up. Little do most people realise that it is a bad habit that pollutes their physical system and the atmosphere and causes diseases like cancer. Similarly, some people have the habit of talking too much. They just can't keep quiet even for a couple of minutes. Little do these people realise that much breath and energy is wasted on useless talk.

This could usefully be spent in silent meditation. But the problem is that he who talks and talks is, today, considered as a smart, clever and wise person, and a person who talks less is thought to be lacking in general knowledge or to be deficient in the art of conversation! Such examples of bad habits can be multiplied, but, what we need to understand from these examples is that, in most cases, people do not realise that it is a bad or a harmful habit and where this truth is realised, there isn't the strong desire to get freed from its grip and that is why some people philosophically say; This habit of mine will die only when I die.

So what is the solution to get over one's bad habits? Is it practically possible? Yes! With a little effort and attention, it is indeed possible. To start with one needs great enthusiasm which is very essential for leaving bad habits. There is a well-known proverb in English: "Well-begun is half done". So, after realising that the habit which you have decided to give up is



really bad, you should put up a brave and enthusiastic fight against this evil. From the very outset, call forth all your latent energies not only to cut its root and branch but also to destroy its seed, for if the seed remains, the tree is likely to grow up again. When a house is on fire, how promptly and energetically the inmates react? At that time, they are fully concentrated and they use all the means to extinguish the fire.

Put your resolve into action immediately. Secondly, remove the words 'impossible', 'difficult', 'I cannot' etc. from your mind. These are the expressions of a weakling or a timid person. Cheer yourself up. Realize the truth that the evil habit is your own creation, you have given birth to it and nourished it to bring its growth and now you should not say with a weak will that it is difficult to control it.

Always remember! habits are not your original nature; they are your second nature. You have acquired them and you say that you cannot give them up? You are their Master and you believe yourself to be their slave? 'Faith, it has been rightly said, "can move mountains and this your habit is only a molehill. Therefore, rise and take up the bow of endeavour and become an instrument to the Divine to shoot this devil—your bad habit—for, God is with you as He always is on the side of the virtuous. But, remember! A mere wish or desire to eradicate evil is not enough. You must have pure and strong will besides a definite aim and purpose. Wish or desire is a small, temporary ripple in the lake of mind but Will is the power that executes the desire to fulfilment. There is nothing impossible for a man of strong willpower to achieve. So let's make a resolve that we will liberate ourselves in the true sense.

*(The writer is a spiritual educator and a popular columnist views are personal)*

# Budget is pro-growth but stability concern remains



UTTAM GUPTA

Major expenditure items may go out of control, raising concerns about the budget's feasibility; moreover, the Government's gross tax revenue target of Rs 38.40 lakh crore is overly ambitious



On top of a GDP (gross domestic product) growth of 8 per cent plus for three consecutive years, the Union Budget for FY 2024-25 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on July 23, 2024, has all the ingredients to sustain the momentum during the current year as well. For the current year, she has proposed capital expenditure at Rs 111,111 crore, which is 17 per cent higher than the revised estimate (RE) for FY 2023-24. In her Budget for 2019-20, she had laid a roadmap for catapulting the Indian economy to US\$5 trillion by 2024-25. In sync with this target, she had projected an investment requirement of over Rs 100 lakh crore to build the infrastructure over five years.

Out of this, 39 per cent or Rs 39,00,000 crore was to come from the Centre and states each and the balance was Rs 22,00,000 crore from the private sector. The Centre's capital spend during the previous four years was 2020-21: Rs 439,000 crore; 2021-22: Rs 554,000 crore; 2022-23: Rs 750,000 crore; 2023-24: Rs 1000,961 crore. This adds up to Rs 2700,000 crore. Add to this Rs 111,111 crore for 2024-25, the total over five years comes to Rs 3800,000 crore which is more or less close to the amount the Centre intended to contribute. The Central government has also been helping the states to boost their capital spend. During 2022-23, it provided them with 50-year Rs 100,000 crore interest-free loans. During 2023-24, such transfers were Rs 130,000 crore. For the current year, the transfers are kept at Rs 150,000 crore.

To promote investment in the private sector, the Centre has reduced the corporate tax rate to 15 per cent for new manufacturing enterprises and 22 per cent for existing enterprises. In this year's budget, the corporate tax rate on foreign firms has been reduced from extant 40 per cent to 35 per cent. With this and assuming that private consumption/demand remains strong (a relief of around Rs 17,500/- in personal income tax or PIT resulting from the change in tax slabs under the New IT regime and increase in a standard deduction by Rs 25,000/- will give some boost) besides exports getting a leg up, courtesy



THE GROSS TAX REVENUE TARGET OF RS 3840,000 CRORE IS OVER-AMBITIOUS AND THE BUDGET ASSUMES RECEIPTS OF RS 50,000 CRORE FROM DISINVESTMENT OF GOVERNMENT SHARES IN PSUs, A PROGRAM IT HAS DECIDED NOT TO PURSUE. EVEN MAJOR EXPENDITURE ITEMS COULD GET OUT OF CONTROL

rebound in the US economy, India could achieve growth even higher than 6.5 - 7 per cent projected in the Economic Survey for 2023-24. But, there is a flip side to it. This has to do with the fiscal deficit or FD (excess of total expenditure over total receipts). Sitharaman has set it at 4.9 per cent of the GDP which is 0.2 per cent less than a target of 5.1 per cent fixed in the interim budget. This has been made possible due to a mammoth dividend transfer of Rs 210,000 crore by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to the Central Government from its operations during the FY 2023-24 which is Rs 130,000 crore higher than the provision of Rs 80,000 crore made in the interim budget. It won't be easy to achieve the 4.9 per cent target during the current year. This is because the gross tax revenue (GTR) target of Rs 3840,000 crore is over-ambitious and the budget assumes receipts of Rs 50,000 crore from disinvestment of government shares in PSUs, a program it has decided not to pursue. Even major expenditure items could get out of control as the year progresses.

For instance, the 'fertilizer subsidy' is budgeted at Rs 164,000 crore during 2024-25. This is based on the assumption that the declining trend in the international price of fertilizers and raw materials used in their production seen during 2023-24 continues during the current year as well. It takes a small disruption in the global supply chain (given the current highly uncertain geo-political situation, this is quite likely), for this assumption to go haywire. That apart, to go down from 4.9 per cent to 4.5 per cent next year set by the FM her 2021-22 budget (this by itself is far more generous than FD of 3 per cent that was to be achieved in 2020-21 as per the amendment to the FRBM Act, 2018) can be daunting, all the more when the

RBI is unlikely to repeat its bonanza/gift to the Centre. During an interactive with the press, Sitharaman alluded to the Centre's plan to design fiscal trajectory in a manner such that from FY 2026-27 onward, its debt to GDP ratio starts declining. Sans target setting, this may not instil confidence. Yet, she won't set the target as these are often missed. The Centre's debt-to-GDP ratio is currently around 57 per cent against the 40 per cent mandated for 2024-25 under the FRBM Amendment Act (2018).

Meanwhile, to address the concerns on employment, MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) and agriculture, the budget has proposed several initiatives. For MSMEs, it proposes a new credit guarantee scheme to facilitate term loans to enable them to purchase machinery and equipment without requiring collateral or third-party guarantees (a self-financing guarantee fund is mooted that could provide each applicant with guarantee coverage of up to Rs 100 crore); increase in the limit of Mudra (Micro Units Development Refinance Agency, a subsidiary of SIDBI) loans to Rs 2000,000 for those who have repaid previous loans; expanding SIDBI branches to provide the much-needed access to credit and additional support for further growth.

The initiatives on employment all aligned to the EPFO (Employees Provident Fund Organization) enrollments include Scheme A: a one-month wage payout of up to Rs. 15,000 per month (payable in three instalments) to first-timers in the workforce, with all formal sectors with an eligibility limit of a salary of Rs 100,000 per month. Scheme B: meant for creating 'additional' jobs in the manufacturing sector linked to first-time employees; it includes an incentive to employees and employers con-

cerning EPFO in the first 4 years of employment.

These schemes are expected to benefit 240 lakh youth. Scheme C meant support to employers to enable them to give additional employment in all sectors for those earning up to Rs 100,000 per month. The government will reimburse employers up to Rs. 3000 per month for two years towards EPFO contribution for each additional employee. This Scheme will benefit 50 lakh persons. To make the youth employable, Sitharaman has announced a new centrally sponsored scheme for skilling in collaboration with States and industry. 2000,000 youth will be skilled over five years under this scheme. One thousand industrial training institutes (ITIs) will be upgraded in the hub and spoke arrangement, with course content aligned to the skill needs of the industry. In agriculture, the measures include initiating 10 million farmers into natural farming in the next two years; releasing 109 climate-resilient new seed varieties across 32 field and horticulture crops in the next 100 days; Jan Samarth-based Kisan Credit Card in five States to give a boost to shrimp farming and export; launch a national cooperation policy; digital public infrastructure (DPI) to create a registry of 60 million farmers with the details of their land over the next three years; developing large-scale vegetable clusters closer to major consumption centres; promoting FPOs, cooperatives and start-ups for vegetable supply chains; pursuing the mission for pulses and oilseeds production etc. All the above announcements sound like the proverbial 'Many a slip between the cup and the lip'. For instance, on employment, Sitharaman clarified 'the government can only nudge private firms.'

*(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)*

# Flying towards sustainability: The aviation industry's tryst with carbon neutrality

Through technological innovation and green solutions like adoption of sustainable aviation fuel, the aviation sector is becoming environment friendly

The global aviation industry is undeniably a significant contributor to carbon emissions, accounting for about 2.5 - 3.0% of the world's carbon output. Recognising this impact, initiatives like IATA's "Fly Net Zero" are crucial steps towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Airlines are actively pursuing various strategies to reduce their environmental footprint, with fleet modernization being a cornerstone. One key pillar of the industry's sustainability strategy is investment in a modern, fuel-efficient fleet. Jazeera Airways, for instance, has invested in the Airbus A320 neo aircraft, known for its 20% reduction in fuel consumption and emissions. The



ROMANA PARVI

airline was also the first to order over 2000 of the world's lightest aircraft seats from Explicseat. These seats will contribute to a weight saving of 1.2 metric tons per aircraft resulting in enhanced fuel efficiency and reduced emissions per flight. Beyond fleet upgrades, airlines are implementing carbon offsetting programs as part of their sustainability efforts. These programs allow passengers to mitigate the environmental

impact of their air travel by investing in projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere. Jazeera Airways' carbon offsetting initiatives specifically support projects in renewable energy and reforestation, allowing passengers to contribute to environmental conservation efforts directly linked to their flights.

Technological innovation also plays a pivotal role in enhancing operational efficiency and passenger experience. Airlines are increasingly adopting digital solutions such as paperless ticketing, digital baggage tracking, and personalized sustainable travel options. These technologies not only streamline operations but also minimize waste and carbon emissions associ-

ated with traditional paper-based processes. Addressing plastic waste is another important aspect of the industry's sustainability efforts. Airlines are replacing single-use plastics with biodegradable alternatives and exploring sustainable options like Palmade products made from palm leaves. Energy efficiency is another critical focus area for airlines, extending to both aircraft operations and airport infrastructure. State-of-the-art airport terminals are designed with sustainability in mind, incorporating energy-efficient lighting, climate control systems, and renewable energy sources.

The airline industry is actively leading the way towards a more sustainable future for air



travel, setting a precedent for environmentally responsible practices that extend beyond its operations. The adoption of CORSIA (Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation) marks a substantial advancement in its commitment to mitigating environmental impact and combat-

ing climate change. CORSIA ensures that international aviation contributes to global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while continuing to support global connectivity and economic growth. Additionally, the development and adoption of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and the utilization of

advanced software solutions like those offered by NAVBLUE are critical milestones in the airline industry's efforts to achieve net-zero emissions and address climate change.

Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 requires collaboration among airlines, governments, and passengers. Through ongoing innovation, investment in sustainable technologies like SAF, reduction of plastic waste, and improvements in operational efficiency, the aviation industry is actively leading the way towards a more environmentally friendly future for air travel. These efforts not only aim to reduce the industry's carbon footprint but also set a precedent for sustainable practices

that can inspire broader global initiatives beyond aviation.

Aviation industry today is dedicated to collaborating closely with partners, passengers, and communities to foster a greener and more sustainable future for air travel. This commitment drives us to innovate and implement initiatives that reduce our environmental footprint, promote sustainable practices, and contribute positively to the global effort against climate change.

Together with our stakeholders, we aim to lead by example and inspire lasting change in the aviation industry and beyond.

*(The writer is regional manager South Asia - Jazeera Airways; views are personal)*





# Ukraine strikes oil depot in Russia, Moscow claims new gains

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine on Sunday said it struck an oil depot in southern Russia that supplies the Kremlin's troops as Russian strikes in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, where Moscow claimed further gains, left five civilians dead and 15 others wounded.

to the oil depot in the Kursk province. Firefighters were battling the blaze on Sunday morning after three fuel tanks went up in flames, according to acting regional Gov Alexey Smirnov. Smirnov said nobody was hurt.

the province this month. Russia started its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in Feb 2022, sending millions of people fleeing to neighbouring countries. Taking control of all of Donetsk, part of the country's industrial heartland that now bears the scars of years of fighting, is one of the Kremlin's main war goals.

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russia may deploy new strike weapons in response to the planned US stationing of longer-range and hypersonic missiles in Germany, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Sunday.

## Putin pledges 'mirror measures' in response to US missiles in Germany



Russian President Vladimir Putin, centre, Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov, second right, and Russian Navy Commander-in-Chief Admiral Alexander Moiseyev, right, greet sailors prior to the main naval parade marking Russian Navy Day in St. Petersburg, Russia, on Sunday

tests that violated it. The allegations, which Russia denied, came as tensions mounted between Moscow and the West in the wake of the

downing of a Malaysian airliner carrying 298 people over war-torn eastern Ukraine. Two Russians and a pro-Moscow Ukrainian were ultimately con-

victed over their role in the attack. Washington and Berlin said in a joint statement this month that the US weapons to be

placed in Germany would ultimately include SM-6 missiles, Tomahawk cruise missiles, and "developmental hypersonic weapons", including those with a significantly longer range than the ones currently deployed across Europe.

## Lawmakers from 6 countries pressured not to attend conference in Taiwan

AP ■ BEIJING

Chinese diplomats are pressuring lawmakers from at least six countries not to attend a China-focused summit in Taiwan, participants told The Associated Press.

ers, and reviewed texts and emails sent by Chinese diplomats to the lawmakers asking whether they were planning to participate in the summit.

showed me the message from them. He said, I will advise you not to go, but I cannot stop you, it's something you have to make a decision."

annexed by force if necessary. Last week, Beijing criticized Taiwan for its annual Han Kuang military drills, saying that Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party was "carrying out provocations to seek independence."

## Mobile internet restored in B'desh

PTI ■ DHAKA

The mobile internet connection was restored in Bangladesh on Sunday, 10 days after it was restricted by the authorities across the country to stop the spread of fake news on social media amidst the deadly nationwide violence over reforms in the quota system in government jobs.

report said. On July 18, the government shut down mobile internet following the escalation of violence across the country.

remained unavailable until Sunday. Regarding access to social media platforms, Palak said the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has sent letters to authorities of social media platforms, including Facebook, Tiktok and YouTube.

the countrywide violence. On Monday last, the apex court slashed the veterans' quota to just 5 per cent. Thus, 93 per cent of civil service jobs will be merit-based while the remaining 2 per cent reserved for members of ethnic minorities, transgender and physically challenged people.

## Reformist formally takes over as Iran president



In this photo released by an official website of the office of the Iranian supreme leader, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, centre, gives his official seal of approval to newly elected President Masoud Pezeshkian, as acting President Mohammad Mokhber stands at left, in an endorsement ceremony in Tehran, Iran, on Sunday

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran's supreme leader on Sunday formally endorsed Masoud Pezeshkian as president, allowing the reformist politician and heart surgeon to take charge of a country weakened by economic sanctions over its nuclear programme.

its ugliest face as a war criminal," said Khamenei, accusing Israel of setting a "new record in assassinations" and cruelty.

Khatami. Aref holds a doctorate in engineering from Stanford University. Pezeshkian takes over from his predecessor Ebrahim Raisi whose death in a May helicopter crash that sparked the early election.

## Meloni aims to reset ties on China visit

Beijing (AP): Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is on an official visit to China this week to try to reset relations as fears of a trade war with the European Union are interwoven with continued interest in attracting Chinese investment in auto manufacturing and other sectors.

for China, giving it an inroad into Western Europe and a symbolic boost in a then-raging trade war with the United States. But Italy says the promised economic benefits didn't materialise, and its membership created friction with other Western European governments and the United States.

## Bilawal's party says ready to talk with Imran Khan

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan Peoples Party-led by Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has said that it is ready to talk with jailed former prime minister Imran Khan if the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder is willing to engage, amidst heightened political instability in the cash-strapped country.

tations, and the PPP would play its role if needed," Shah was quoted as saying by the Express Tribune newspaper.

the PTI has maintained a strong opposition to the PPP-PML-N alliance. Political tensions increased after the February 8 elections, which saw the two parties forming a coalition government in the Centre.

## Venezuelan poll to have ripple effects throughout Americas

AP ■ CARACAS

Polls have opened in Venezuela, where people are voting Sunday in a presidential election whose outcome will either lead to a seismic shift in politics or extend by six more years the policies that caused the world's worst peacetime economic collapse.

Whether it is President Nicolás Maduro who is chosen, or his main opponent, retired diplomat Edmundo González, the election will have ripple effects throughout the Americas.

lion. Authorities set Sunday's election to coincide with what would have been the 70th birthday of former President Hugo Chávez, the revered leftist firebrand who died of cancer in 2013, leaving his Bolivarian revolution in the hands of Maduro.

International Monetary Fund forecasts will grow 4% this year - one of the fastest in Latin America - after having shrunk 71% from 2012 to 2020.

helm. Plummeting oil prices, widespread shortages and hyperinflation that soared past 130,000% led first to social unrest and then mass emigration. Sanctions from US President Donald Trump's administration seeking to force Maduro from power after his 2018 reelection - which the US and dozens of other countries condemned as illegitimate - only deepened the crisis.

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But most Venezuelans have not seen any improvement in their quality of life. Many earn under \$200 a month, which means families struggle to afford essential items. Some work second and third jobs. A basket of basic staples - sufficient to feed of family of four for a month - costs an estimated \$385. The opposition has tried to seize on the huge inequities arising from the crisis, during which Venezuelans abandoned their country's currency, the bolivar, for the US dollar.

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# Making exaggerated, bogus claims to get refunds punishable offence: I-T Department

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The I-T Department has asked income tax return filers to not make bogus claims for expenses, under-report their earnings or exaggerate deductions as this is a punishable offence and causes a delay in issuance of refunds.

The ITR filing season for assessment year 2024-25 will open on July 31 for all categories of taxpayers whose accounts are not supposed to be audited.

According to the Income Tax Department and its administrative body Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), over five crore ITRs have been filed, as of July 26. In a recent public communication, the Income Tax Department asked taxpayers to file their returns correctly to get timely refunds. "Refund claims are subject to verification checks, which may cause delays. Accurate filing of ITR leads to quicker processing of refunds. Any discrepancies in the claims made will prompt a request for a revised return (to be filed by the taxpayer)," it said.

It cautioned ITR filing



taxpayers to not claim "incorrect" Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) amounts, not "under-report" their income or "exaggerate" deductions or submit claims for "bogus" expenses.

The department informed the taxpayers that their claims should be "correct and accurate."

"Filing a false or bogus claim is a punishable offence," the public communication said.

Taxpayers can claim a variety of deductions and exemptions to lower their tax liability under the old ITR filing regime while those opting for the new regime will get a lower tax rate but cannot avail

these benefits.

CBDT Chairman Ravi Agrawal had recently told PTI during a post-Budget review that more than 66 per cent of ITR filings this time were under the new regime which is being promoted by the government to make the direct tax system better and simpler.

The communication stated that in case due refunds are delayed, taxpayers should check their e-filing account to see if the I-T department has sent them any message in this context and if yes, then it should be responded through the "pending action and worklist section" tab.

CBDT chief Agrawal was also asked about the recent Budget proposal of withholding the refund being extended up to 60 days, from the existing thirty days, from the date on which such assessment or reassessment is made.

He said such cases "would not be very substantial in numbers."

"This is basically in those cases where there is already a demand in the case of the same assessee or the demand is likely to arise," Agrawal said. "Suppose, he said, the refund has been generated but the assessment proceeding is going on and it is felt that there is a demand that is likely to come.

"The provisions are that once the assessment is completed, then an assessee gets 30 days to pay the demand. So, demand gets due 30 days after the assessment and therefore, to adjust the refund, that 30-day period has to be there, and therefore, this timeline.

"It is just rationalising that effectively. But then those refunds would be not very substantial in number, they would be very minuscule. It is only enablement," the head of the direct taxes body said.

# PSU banks may get another 2-year extension to comply with MPS norms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Public sector banks are expected to get another two-year extension to comply with Sebi's minimum public shareholding (MPS) norms, a top Government official has said.

Out of 12 public sector banks (PSBs), five are yet to comply with MPS norms and the government's holding is beyond 75 per cent.

As per the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), all listed companies must maintain an MPS of 25 per cent.

However, the regulator gave special forbearance to state-owned banks till August 2024 to meet the requirement of 25 per cent MPS.

"We have written to the Department of Economic Affairs for the extension," Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi told PTI in an interview.

Generally, he said, a two-year extension is given and hopefully it should come sooner than later. Five banks have minimum public shareholding of less than 25 per cent.

Currently, government holding in Delhi-based Punjab & Sind Bank is 98.25 per cent. It is followed by Chennai-based Indian



Overseas Bank at 96.38 per cent, UCO Bank 95.39 per cent, Central Bank of India 93.08 per cent, Bank of Maharashtra at 86.46 per cent.

It is expected that the government holding in Bank of Maharashtra could come below 75 per cent during the current fiscal, he said.

However, Joshi said, the banks will take decision on share sale through Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) or other route depending on their capital absorption needs.

Depending on market conditions, each of these banks will take a call in the best interest of shareholders, he added.

Asked about the Budget announcement of the financial sector vision and strategy document, Joshi said

it will be anchored by the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) and released during the current fiscal.

"The strategy we have for Vision 2047 will be covered in this document. For example, how many banks will be needed for a Viksit Bharat, and how many global banks like SBI and ICICI Bank will be required by 2047.

"We need a strategy to modernise regulations and regulators in anticipation of changes where banks will not only be banking companies but also information-technology companies," he said.

The Department has done some work while legislation is another big area being reviewed, he said, adding, the document would be completed during the current financial year.

# WTO accepts India, Taipei's request on ICT import duty dispute ruling

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The WTO's dispute settlement body has accepted a request from India and Chinese Taipei not to adopt the ruling against New Delhi's import duties on certain information and technology products till October-end, as both sides are engaged in resolving the matter mutually, an official said.

The issue came up during a meeting of the dispute settlement body (DSB) in Geneva on July 26.

"The DSB agreed to the latest requests from Chinese Taipei and India," the Geneva-based official said.

At the July 26 meeting, India and Chinese Taipei once again requested additional time from the DSB to consider the adoption of the panel rulings in the case initiated by Chinese Taipei regarding India's tariffs on certain high-tech goods.

The two sides had asked that the DSB further delay consideration of the panel reports until October 28, 2024, to help facilitate the resolution of the disputes.

The dispute body had earlier agreed to four previous such requests from India and Chinese Taipei to delay consideration of the reports.

As per the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the panel's ruling will have to be adopted by the DSB for implementation within 60 days of the release of the order. However, countries can mutually request the body to delay the adoption of the ruling.

In its report, a dispute panel of the WTO on April 17, 2023, said import duties imposed by India on certain information and technology products violate global trading norms.

The ruling followed a case filed by the EU, Japan and Taiwan against these duties in WTO.

In May 2019, Chinese Taipei filed a case against India in the WTO over the import duties imposed on certain electronic goods, including telephones for cellular networks; machines for reception, conversion and transmission or regeneration of voice, images or other data; and parts of telephone sets.

India has stated that these ICT products are part of WTO's Information Technology Products (ITA-2) agreement, and New Delhi is not a part of this pact. India is a part of ITA-1, signed in 1997, which did not have any obligation to eliminate customs duties on these products.

# DLF-GIC JV firm DCCDL's office rental income rises in April-June

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm DLF's rental arm DCCDL has posted an 11 per cent annual increase in office rental income to Rs 942 crore during the first quarter of this fiscal on better demand for its premium workspace.

DLF Cyber City Developers Ltd (DCCDL) is a joint venture between DLF and Singapore sovereign wealth fund GIC.

DLF holds a 66.67 per cent stake, while the GIC has a 33.33 per cent stake in DCCDL.

According to the latest investor presentation, DCCDL's rental income from office buildings rose to Rs 942 crore during the April-June period of the current fiscal from Rs 851 crore in the year-ago period.

The rental income from retail real estate space grew 9 per cent to Rs 210 crore in the first quarter of this fiscal from Rs 192 crore a year ago.

On the commercial real estate segment, DLF said it has achieved "double-digit rental



growth through organic growth and new developments".

"Significant increase in retail presence; portfolio to grow to 2 times in the next 4-5 years," it added.

DLF said it is unlocking the development potential and also modernising existing assets.

At present, DCCDL has a portfolio of 42 million square feet with occupancy levels at 93 per cent.

On the financial performance front, DCCDL's revenue has grown 10 per cent annually to Rs 1,553 crore in the April-June period of 2024-25 from

Rs 1,411 crore in the year-ago period.

Its profit after tax increased 20 per cent to Rs 470 crore from Rs 391 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year.

"We continue to have a positive outlook on the rental business and are accelerating our capex commitments to further strengthen our rental portfolio and deliver healthy growth," DLF said.

DLF is India's largest real estate developer in terms of market capitalisation. In the past seven decades, DLF has developed more than 178 real estate projects comprising more than 349 million square feet of area.

DLF Group has 220 million square feet of development potential across residential and commercial segments.

It is primarily engaged in the business of the development and sale of residential properties (the Development Business) and the development and leasing of commercial and retail properties (the Annuity Business).

# FPIs invest ₹33,600 cr in equities in July amid continued policy reforms, good earnings season

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors injected over Rs 33,600 crore into Indian equities so far this month on the expectation of continued policy reforms, sustained economic growth and a better-than-expected earnings season.

However, they pulled out over Rs 7,200 crore from equities in the last three trading sessions (July 24-26) after the government hiked taxes on Futures and Options trades (F&O) and capital gains from equity investments in the Budget.

Market experts believe that Indian equity is well-positioned for the year to attract foreign investments. However, there may be some monthly volatility due to short-term news.

"Indian equity market and bond market are favourably placed for the year. This should attract foreign flows into the country. There could be some volatility in the flows on a month-on-month basis due to short-term news flows," Nimesh Chandan, CIO of Bajaj Finserv AMC,



said.

According to the data with the depositories, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have made a net inflow of Rs 33,688 crore in equities this month (till July 26).

This came following an inflow of Rs 26,565 crore in equities in June, driven by political stability and the sharp rebound in markets.

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

sustained rise in US bond yields.

"Economically, India stands on a strong footing. Moreover, the better-than-expected earnings season so far has improved corporate India's balance sheet that would help in building investor confidence.

"Furthermore, there is growing anticipation of an interest rate cut by the US Federal Reserve in September," Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research at Morningstar Investment

# UltraTech to acquire additional 32.72% stake in India Cements

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leading cement manufacturer UltraTech will acquire an additional 32.72 per cent stake in India Cements Ltd from the promoters of the South-based company for Rs 3,954 crore.

The board of the Aditya Birla firm on Sunday approved the proposal to acquire the promoters' 32.72 per cent stake at Rs 390 per share, UltraTech said in a regulatory filing on Sunday.

It has entered into three share purchase agreements to acquire 32.72 per cent of the equity share capital of ICL from the promoter family led by Srinivasan N and Gurunath, along with the holding entities.

After the completion of the Rs 3,954 crore deal, UltraTech's stake in India Cements Ltd (ICL) will reach over 55 per cent, mandating it to go for an open offer as per the Sebi regulations.

The board UltraTech has also approved an "open offer for up to 8.05 crore equity shares representing 26 per cent of the equity share capital of the target, at a price of Rs 390 per equity share from the public shareholders of Target", the filing said.

The price offered by UltraTech is 4.1 per cent higher than the ICL shares' closing price of Rs 374.60 last Friday.



"Post signing of SPA and obtaining regulatory approvals, UltraTech will pay Rs 3,954 crore at Rs 390/share for buying 32.72 per cent stake in India Cements from the promoters & their associates.

"This will trigger a mandatory open offer at Rs 390/ share. The Open Offer will be done subsequently after obtaining all regulatory approvals," said a statement from the company.

Earlier, in June, UltraTech acquired 23 per cent shares of ICL. It had acquired Damani-group's stake in India Cements Ltd (ICL) through two block deals, estimated at around Rs 1,900 crore.

"The proposed transaction is, therefore, an endeavour to extend the company's footprint and presence in the highly fragmented, competitive and fast-growing Southern market in the

country, particularly Tamil Nadu, where it has limited presence," said UltraTech.

This primary acquisition is subject to the receipt of applicable statutory and regulatory approvals from the Competition Commission of India and others.

Aditya Birla Group Chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla said the India Cements opportunity is an exciting one as it enables UltraTech to serve the Southern markets more effectively and also accelerates our path to over 200 MTPA capacity.

"UltraTech Cement's investments over the years, both organic and inorganic, have been designed to propel India to become a building solutions champion globally. Every investment in a core sector like cement accelerates economic activity and drives progress." These investments have also

facilitated India's nationwide infrastructure upgrade, powering the country's growing need for housing, roads, and other vital infrastructure. This, in turn, has had a tremendous impact on the lives and aspirations of people," he added.

ICL has a total group capacity of 16 MTPA, including 1.5 MTPA from its subsidiary Trinetra Cement Ltd. While UltraTech has a consolidated capacity of 152.7 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) of grey cement.

It has 24 integrated manufacturing units, 33 grinding units, one clinkerisation unit and 8 bulk packaging terminals. Its capacity, over the past two decades, "has grown 11x, far outpacing the industry growth of 4x", according to an earlier statement by the company.

"It took 36 years for the cement business of Aditya Birla Group to get to a capacity of 100 MTPA. And UltraTech has subsequently added the next 50 mtpa in less than 5 years with an investment of around Rs 32,000 crore," it added. In the last AGM in 2023, Birla had set a target for 200 MTPA, aiming to become one of the largest cement companies in the world. UltraTech Cement Limited is the cement flagship company of the Aditya Birla Group.

# Removal of angel tax for startups to help attract investors: Goyal



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Sunday said that removal of angel tax, which was introduced in 2012 by the UPA government, for all classes of investors will help startups attract investments.

He also said that the customs duty reduction for gold and silver from 15 per cent to 6 per cent will not only help small artisans but also promote the country's gems and jewellery exports.

"The Budget 2024-25 has removed the angel tax and through it, we will be able to attract investors into the country," he said here at a post-budget interaction with the industry. Further Goyal informed that the budget has announced the setting up

of 12 industrial townships in the country.

He said that one of these will be in Maharashtra and it will help create jobs and a strong ecosystem for the industry and trade.

The budget has also announced steps to promote diamond trade. India is a world leader in the diamond cutting and polishing industry, which employs a large number of skilled workers.

The budget has announced that India would provide for safe harbour rates for foreign mining companies selling raw diamonds in the country. Angel tax (income tax at 30 per cent rate) was imposed on funding raised by unlisted companies, or startups, if their valuation exceeded the company's fair market value.

# Bill for NFIR at advanced stage, likely to be introduced in next session: DEA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Bill for setting up a National Financial Information Registry (NFIR) is in the advanced stage of preparation, and it may be introduced in the next session of Parliament, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth has said.

"It is at an advanced stage. It is in the closing stages of inter-ministerial consultation. We will finalise the Bill soon," he told PTI in a post-budget interview.

However, he said, it cannot be introduced in the ongoing session of Parliament but may be in the next session.

The objective is to build a public infrastructure for credit-related information, and the right information can be made available by the NFIR to lending agencies.

A National Financial Information Registry will serve as the central repository of financial and ancillary information. This will facilitate the efficient flow of credit, promote financial inclusion, and foster financial stability.

The passage of the Bill will enable in setting up of a registry and thus help in consolidating all financial information and facilitating financial inclusion, and take the Indian economy onto a faster growth trajectory. The Budget 2023-24 proposed setting up of NFIR as a central repository of



financial information to facilitate the efficient flow of credit, promote financial inclusion and foster financial stability in the country. Talking about growth projection in the Budget, Seth said it has assumed a reasonable nominal GDP growth rate of 10.5 per cent, as a higher assumption could have led to a larger fiscal deficit.

"As far as the current year is concerned, fiscal prudence places the demand on us that we are realistic or a bit conservative in assuming what the potential revenues may be while at the same time providing adequate provisions for productive priorities of the government. That is what this Budget does," he said. Compared to the interim Budget, he said, there is a higher provision of about Rs 90,000 crore, including for newer schemes. In that context, he said, "10.5 per cent, we feel, is a reasonable estimate of nominal growth in the economy."

# India set for double-digit medal haul at Paris Olympics, says Nita Ambani

**PTI ■ PARIS**  
 After the highs of Tokyo Olympics where India secured their best ever medal haul, the country is poised to get medals in double digits in Paris, sports administrator and IOC member Nita Ambani has said.  
 Talking to PTI in an exclusive interaction on the sidelines of the opening of 'India House' at La Villette, she also said the day India hosts the Olympics is "not far".  
 In October last year, Prime

Minister Narendra Modi had announced India's bold intent to bid for the 2036 Olympics, pledging to spare no effort to fulfil the dream of 1.4 billion people in the country.  
 "We are going to do very well. Forty seven per cent of our athletes are girls. All for women power and all for our young boys and girls, we are rooting and cheering for them. I hope we can see double digits in medals for the first time. Go India go, make India proud," Nita said.  
 A day after the Paris Olympics began with a



glimmering opening ceremony that had the attention of the world, the India House, the first-ever country house at the Olympics, had a star-studded opening ceremony attended by BCCI secretary Jay Shah and IOC officials and administrators.  
 "India has arrived. It is time that the flame that was first lit in Athens must light the sky in our ancient land - Bharat. The day is not far when India will host the Olympic Games. Let this be our collective resolve at the

opening of the India House," she added.  
 "For the first time, India has its own house at the Paris 2024 Olympics. It's a place where we are going to honour our athletes, celebrate their achievements, and wish them well.  
 "We will celebrate our heritage and our culture, with many of our artisans present and cultural programs scheduled. This is going to be a home away from home for our athletes.  
 Asked how this idea came to her mind, she said: "When I

went to Brazil, Korea Winter Olympics, and then Tokyo, we didn't have an India House. "I just felt that India, with its 1.4 billion people, needed a house of its own. So that's when I started thinking about having an Indian House at the Olympics for our athletes and everyone to see what the spirit of India really is.  
 "Envisioned as a symbol of India's Olympic aspiration, we hope that it becomes a home away from home for our athletes where we honour them and salute their achievements," she added.

## Ramita qualifies for women's 10m air rifle final at Olympics



**PTI ■ CHATEAUROUX (FRANCE)**  
 India's Ramita Jindal gave a strong display of marksmanship to qualify for the women's 10m air rifle final in fifth place even as Elavenil Valarivan succumbed to pressure to miss out despite being among the contenders, finishing 10th at the Olympic Games here on Sunday.  
 Ramita, the Hangzhou Asian Games bronze medallist in the event, aggregated 631.5 to become

the second shooter from the country after pistol exponent Manu Bhaker to secure a berth in the final, while Elavenil scored 630.7. Ramita had a sluggish start and was not among the top-eight till the sixth and final series but she rallied superbly to book a berth in the final while stalwart Elavenil, who had finished 16th at the Tokyo Olympics three years back, held on to the fifth position for much of the qualification round. But a poor last series of 103.8 saw the 24-year-old former

junior world champion take a mighty tumble from fifth to 10th slot and miss the eighth-shooter final.  
 Ramita, who had scored 636.4 points, 0.1 more than the world record during the Olympic Selection Trials in New Delhi and Bhopal, was patchy initially, shooting a below-par 104.6 in the opening series before she shot 106.1 in the next round. Another ordinary 104.9 was followed by two successive 105.3 and a 105.7 which fetched her a dream entry into the final.  
 South Korea's Ban Hyojin smashed the Qualification Olympic Record (QOR) with a superb score of 634.5, eclipsing the previous mark of 632.9 set by Norway's Jeanette Hegg in Tokyo Games.  
 Elavenil, who had struggled following the Tokyo Games and could not enter the squad for the Hangzhou Asian Games last year, kept averaging a score of 10.5 throughout the qualifying round as she shot superb series of 105.8, 106.1, 104.4, 105.3, 105.3 but a rank poor final series of 103.8 saw her bowing out.

## Sindhu opens campaign with dominant win over Fathimath

**PTI ■ PARIS**  
 Two-time Olympic medallist Indian shuttler PV Sindhu began her Paris Olympics campaign with a resounding straight games win over Maldives' Fathimath Abdul Razzaq in the women's singles group stage match, here on Sunday.  
 The gulf of class between the two players was evident as Sindhu, who is vying for a third Olympic medal, took just 29 minutes to dispatch her lower-ranked opponent 21-9 21-6 in the Group M fixture.  
 "It was a good start, I am happy. I was able to get used to the court and the atmosphere. It has been a long time, coming back after three years, it's a very special one. 2016 (Olympics) was different and 2020 (2021) was completely different. It is a sort of mixture of both," said Sindhu about her Olympic journey.  
 "I am enjoying and looking to the second match." After a couple of unforced errors, Sindhu was quick to assess the condition and took control of the proceedings, racing to a 11-4 lead.  
 The world No 111 Fathimath



was no match against the former world champion who finished the first game in a mere 13 minutes.  
 The second game followed a similar manner with Sindhu claiming the first four points in the blink of an eye to take an early lead.  
 However, Razzaq capitalised on Sindhu's error to bridge the gap to make it 3-4. But it became a one-sided contest once again as the Indian increased the gap to 10-3. In the end, Sindhu had as many as 14 match points but the world No 13 needed only one to seal the tie.  
 The 10th seeded Indian, who won the silver medal in the Rio Games in 2016 and a bronze in the last edition in Tokyo, will take on World No 75 Kristin Kuuba of Estonia in her second group match on Wednesday.  
 Sindhu has been mentored by the legendary Prakash Padukone in the past few months, and she said the association has been beneficial to her.  
 "I have been with Prakash sir for more than six months now and it's going on very well. Everything is coming together. We have to know each other very well to work together," she said.  
 "Prakash sir is a legend, he is very experienced and he will come and tell me what is required, what I need to change."  
 Asked about the aspects of her game which has improved since she started working with Padukone, she said, "Overall, it has not changed the way I feel but there have been add-ons. "When after I got injured it was getting difficult to move well on court and it was at times getting hard to get the momentum back. We worked on that, we worked on strokes, not just on net and defence but on overall game. You need to be at your 100 per cent in every big tournament or on every stroke."  
 She said mental strength is very important for players, especially during a big event like the Olympics.  
 "It is very important to be mentally strong. You at times don't know what is happening, everything gone from you. We worked on the mental things also. I tried to be positive, keep myself calm and do yoga."

## US women's Olympic basketball team fine-tunes its defense ahead of first game

**AP ■ PARIS**  
 One of the challenges that the U.S. Women's basketball team faces at the Paris Olympics with limited practice time is getting everyone on the same page defensively.  
 There's no doubt that all 12 players on the roster can score at will, but it takes time to build the chemistry and trust necessary to be a great defensive team.  
 For now, it's a work in progress, with the first test coming Monday against Japan.  
 "We spent a little more time on it," U.S. Coach Cheryl Reeve said before practice Sunday. "Each team that you play poses a different challenge. Certainly Japan, you know plays different than the rest of the group. We have to tweak our scheme a little bit."  
 Japan plays a style with all five players on the perimeter, which negates a little bit of the Americans' interior advantage. That means that players like Brittney Griner, Aja Wilson and Breanna Stewart may have to guard more on the outside with no true post player for the Japanese team.  
 "I know I may have to play



outside more defensively and I'm ready for it," Griner said.  
 The two teams met for the gold medal in the Tokyo Games and the Americans came away with a 90-75 victory. Griner finished with 30 points, making 14 of her 18 shots. It was the most points ever by a U.S. Player in a gold medal game, surpassing the 29 by Lisa Leslie in 1996.  
 While the Americans have been able to outscore their opponents easily during the 55-game Olympic winning streak that dates to the 1992 Barcelona Games, being able to stop the opponent certainly has helped.

The U.S. Gave up an average of 68.7 points at the Tokyo Games, the most since the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, when the streak of seven straight gold medals started.  
 There is a wealth of talented defenders on the U.S. Team. It just takes a little bit of time to get used to playing with one another and the defensive plan that Reeve has installed. The U.S. Had only about 14 hours of practice time together before the Olympic opener.  
 "I think the biggest thing was taking away our schemes that we may have with our (WNBA) teams where we just know how to guard people and just trust the process," two-time WNBA defensive player of the year Aja Wilson said. "Sometimes we're just so used to schemes and this player wants to get here versus overseas is like literally just play everyone honest."  
 Wilson said the biggest thing is trust and that just takes time. "The more we play alongside each other, the better," she added. "I think we're slowly starting to trust each other and getting an understanding of just knowing we have to have layers and we're starting to get it."

## Olympics pre-race triathlon event in Seine River cancelled over water quality concerns

**AP ■ PARIS**  
 Concerns over the water quality of Paris' Seine River have continued into the 2024 Olympics, with a pre-race triathlon event there canceled Sunday.  
 Organizers said they nixed the swimming leg of the triathlon familiarization scheduled for Sunday morning after a meeting about water quality among authorities tasked with carrying out water quality tests. That included representatives of World Triathlon, as well as city and regional authorities.  
 Swimming in the Seine has been banned for over a century in big part due to poor water quality. Organizers have invested \$1.5 billion to prepare the Seine for the Olympics and the government has said the river would be clean enough to hold events, including the swimming portion of the triathlon and the marathon swimming event.  
 Daily water quality tests in early June indicated unsafe levels of E. Coli bacteria, followed by recent improvements. Parisian Mayor Anne Hidalgo took a famous dip in the river less than two weeks before Olympic events were set to start, fulfilling a promise to show that the long-polluted waterway was clean enough to



host swimming competitions. Heavy rain during the opening ceremony revived concerns over whether the long-polluted waterway will be clean enough to host swimming competitions, since water quality is deeply linked with the weather in the French capital. Since 2015, organizers have invested heavily to prepare the Seine for the Olympics and to ensure Parisians have a cleaner river after the Games. The plan included constructing a giant underground water storage basin in central Paris, renovating sewer infrastructure and upgrading wastewater treatment plants.  
 Triathletes have expressed hope that the waters would be clean enough for them to swim in.  
 "Hopefully we get to swim, bike and run because I don't swim this much to just run and bike," Spanish triathlete Alberto Gonzalez said.

## Australian cyclist undergoes abdominal surgery after fall during Olympic time trial

**AP ■ PARIS**  
 Australian cyclist Lucas Plapp underwent abdominal surgery overnight at a Paris hospital following a hard crash on rain-slicked roads during the Olympic time trial on Saturday, the Australian team said.  
 AusCycling, Australia's cycling governing body, confirmed the procedure early Sunday. No other details were available.  
 Plapp was among the last riders to start on the 32.4-kilometer (20-mile) course and was laying down a medal-worthy ride at the first time check, trailing then-leader and eventual bronze medalist Wout van Aert by just two seconds. But when Plapp reached a technical portion of the course, his bike slid out from under him and he crashed hard onto the pavement.  
 The crash was not shown on the race broadcast, but AusCycling said Plapp was conscious and moving afterward. He was lifted into the team vehicle and taken to the hospital for precautionary scans, and later he required the abdominal procedure.  
 "Plapp slid under a barrier fence shortly after passing the first checkpoint approximately 14 kilometers into the 32-kilometer course," AusCycling said. "His parents



and an Australian team doctor were at the hospital with him."  
 The 23-year-old Plapp, who won bronze at the Tokyo Games as part of the Australian pursuit team, is the reigning national time trial and road race champion. He was supposed to ride alongside Simon Clarke in support of teammate Michael Matthews in the Olympic road race next Saturday.  
 Remco Evenepoel won the time trial, giving Belgium two riders on the podium, while Filippo Ganna of Italy finished second. But both the women's and men's races were marred by a series of crashes on a course made treacherous

by the rain. Among those who fell was American rider Chloe Dygert, the reigning time trial world champion, who remounted her bike and rallied to finish third behind gold medalist Grace Brown of Australia and Anna Henderson of Britain.  
 "If we were in Britain, these (conditions) would be absolutely perfect. The roads are better to take corners on. When we're in Spain, France or Italy, I feel like it's a little more icy," said Dygert, who still plans to compete in the road race and team pursuit this Olympics. "But for sure it definitely plays a factor into the race itself."

## Small town comes to life for Olympics but with fair share of organisational hurdles

**PTI ■ CHATEAUROUX (FRANCE),**  
 Norway shooting coach Tore Brovold, the silver medallist at the 2008 Olympics, is being forced to stay away from skeet shooters in the national team as there are not enough rooms available at the Athletes' Village here.  
 Chateauroux, a quiet town in central France with a population of less than 50,000, is hosting all the shooting events of the Paris Olympics. It is a two-and-a-half hour train ride from the bustling French capital, leaving 340 Olympians pretty much cut off from the Games

hub.  
 After completing the 270km long journey from Paris, one would struggle to commute within Chateauroux due to limited public transport, which is free for everyone. For athletes, coaches, officials and media staying outside the Village, the only way to commute between the Games' venues is via the transport provided by the Organising Committee.  
 "These Games have been a disaster on the transport front. I went to the bus stop near the train station last night but this morning they changed the timings and the athletes had to go ahead with



the training in my absence," Brovold, who has also worked with Indian shotgun shooters, told PTI.  
 Due to limited availability of rooms, he had a choice to make: either stay at the Games' Village at the expense of a shooter or stay at a hotel outside. Keeping in mind the best interest of the team, he chose the latter.  
 "I have also come to know that the organisers are offering free accommodation to visiting teams outside the village as they are short on rooms," said the 54-year-old. Emin Jafarov, the deputy chef de mission of the Azerbaijan

contingent, too is staying in a hotel due to shortage of rooms.  
 "I am staying in a hotel as there are not enough rooms at the Village and the athletes need it more than me," said Jafarov.  
 A majority of Great Britain's shooting squad is staying outside the Athletes' Village by choice as that ensures them the food of their choice.  
 "It just works better for us. The hotel staff takes care of our individual requirements and we can also go out to eat in different places," said a support staff from Team GB on condition of anonymity.

The 21-member Indian team too is going out to eat everyday as the shooters are not getting the food of their choice.  
 "If you want food like home, then it is not possible. The shooters have been going out for meals and that is totally fine," said a coach with the Indian team.  
 On Sunday, a team doctor associated with the Portugal team arrived here due to a transport delay.  
 "It has only been a day so far. I can tell you more about the challenges we are facing here after three four days," the doctor said without wanting to be named.

# Suryakumar is a bowlers' captain, says Axar Patel

PTI ■ PALLEKELE

India all-rounder Axar Patel says new T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav is a bowlers' captain who allows them the freedom to execute their plans. The spin all-rounder also said that the team will look to maximise its batting combinations in the ongoing series against Sri Lanka. Suryakumar and India made a winning start to the three-match series here on Saturday when they crushed hosts Sri Lanka by 43 runs in a high scoring opening T20I. "I played in the last Australia series with Surya bhai (as captain). I know that he is a bowlers' captain. He gives you free hand (in a way) that you decide first," Axar said at the post-match press conference on Saturday. "Whenever you get hit, he comes and says that it was a good ball. He keeps giving you inputs. As a player, there is a good bond with him." Axar recalled the experience of playing under Suryakumar in the five-match T20I series against Australia in India late last year which the hosts won 4-1. "As a captain, I have also played with him in the last five matches (against Australia) and when I was playing today, I didn't feel



much change," he said. "In the first three overs when we were going for runs, he was telling me that we can do this or do that and how we can take a wicket. There is no problem if a four or six goes in it. As a bowler, you get confidence from that if the captain is backing you and telling you that you can do

this." Axar said India's batting lineup in the opening T20I which did not feature Rishabh Pant at the top was formulated with the idea that the team maximises its left and right-hand options. In the last assignment, the T20 World Cup which India won, Pant batted at No 3

whereas on Saturday skipper Suryakumar came out at the coveted spot and the wicketkeeper-batter dropped down to No 4. "Our team has four lefties and four righties. If there is a left-right combination (in the middle), it becomes very hard for the bowlers to maintain the line and lengths

consistently especially with rotations with singles." "Now if there are four lefties, how can you use them? If you have that chance (to ensure) that there are no two lefties or two righties (in the middle) at the same time." "If you have that chance, if you have those players in batting, then why not use

them? You also have to keep changing the batting order as per the bowling options that the opposition has got," he added. The spinner said the message from India's new staff under head coach Gautam Gambhir has been that the team will not experience a major overhaul in the way it operated. While fielding coach T Dilip has continued in his role, Abhishek Nayar, Sairaj Bahutule and Dutchman Ryan ten Doeschate are now a part of Gambhir's support staff for this tour of Sri Lanka as positions will be finalised after the tour ends. "I have been playing for 10 years. I have played with different coaches and captains. I don't think a lot will change in the team," he said. "When we were talking in the team meeting, they also said the same thing that the coach and captain keep changing but the team remains the same and the 11 or 15 players who stay, they have to do it," he said. "They have told us that we will play the way we have been playing. Obviously, the coach and his input can be different, they keep telling you here and there. But there is not much change in the team's atmosphere," he added.



## USA Cricket fulfils critical requirement, appoints Jonathan as CEO

PTI ■ NEW YORK

USA Cricket has fulfilled one of the two critical requirements to avoid being disqualified as an ICC Associate nations by appointing Jonathan Atkinson as its chief executive officer effective August 1. The USAC was 'put on notice' by the ICC earlier this month for breaching two norms. While not having a CEO was one, the other was USAC not fulfilling the governance norms which are set by the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC). As per the norm, it is necessary for every sport governing body to earn the National Governing Body (NGB) status which is needed for all sports added in the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games. The International Olympic Committee during its 141st Session and Executive Board meeting in Mumbai last year had given its nod for the inclusion of cricket in the Los Angeles Games. "USA Cricket has announced the appointment of Johnathan

Atkinson as its new CEO, effective August 1st, 2024," the USAC said on its website. Atkinson most recently served as the Chief Operating Officer of USA Rugby. He joins USA Cricket with over 15 years of national governing body experience. "I'm honoured to join the team at USA Cricket. It's an incredible time for the sport here in the United States with the historic performance of the men's national team in the recent T20 World Cup, the completion of the second season of Major League Cricket, and the first opportunity to showcase cricket in the Olympics here on home soil during the LA28 games," Atkinson said. "Our goal is to build a world-class organisation to capitalise on that momentum, and firmly establish cricket's position in the American sporting landscape," he added. Atkinson is credited for leading USA Rugby through a financial restructuring in 2020 followed by a four-year period of rapid growth and development.



## US stays alive with 4-1 win over New Zealand in men's soccer

AP ■ MARSEILLE (FRANCE)

Djordje Mihailovic converted a penalty as the United States pounced early in a 4-1 victory over New Zealand to stave off possible elimination at the Olympics. Mihailovic calmly hit the penalty in the eighth minute after Nathan Harriel was brought down in the box by Matthew Garbett. Four minutes later, senior player Walker Zimmerman, a defender, made it 2-0 when he poked in a goal in a scramble in front of the net following a free kick. Gianluca Busio scored on a rebound at the half-hour mark and celebrated by dancing with teammate Kevin Paredes. Busio later left the game with what appeared to be a hamstring injury, but he said it was just a precaution. Paxton Aaronson added a fourth goal for the United States in the 58th and New Zealand avoided the shutout with Jesse Randall's late goal. New Zealand's 2-1 opening victory over Guinea had put the team in a strong position to advance. The OlyWhites, as they are known, started the day second in the group to France. The United States is set to play Guinea in its final group match Tuesday in Saint-Etienne. New Zealand plays France in Marseille. Mitrovic said he's not scoreboard watching. New Zealand advanced to the quarterfinals of the Tokyo Games three years ago. Ukraine 2, Morocco 1 There was no reprieve for Morocco this time. After the chaos and violence that marred the end of its 2-1 win over Argentina in the Olympic men's soccer tournament, Morocco conceded late again against Ukraine on

## Swiatek, Alcaraz and Djokovic start Olympics with win at French Open's site

AP ■ PARIS

Iga Swiatek and Carlos Alcaraz got the Paris Olympics tennis competition started with first-round victories under closed roofs at Roland Garros, the site of their French Open titles less than two months ago. Novak Djokovic also won in straight sets as he, like Swiatek and Alcaraz, opened a bid for a first Olympic gold medal. Djokovic's second-round opponent could be longtime rival Rafael Nadal, who was scheduled to play his opening singles match Sunday - but said he isn't sure whether he will remain in that event. "Tomorrow, I don't know

what's going to happen," Nadal said Saturday. "I don't know if I'm going to play or not." In Saturday's last match, Angelique Kerber defeated Naomi Osaka 7-5, 6-3 in a contest between two women who have been ranked No. 1 and own multiple Grand Slam titles. Kerber has said she will retire after representing Germany at these Games; Osaka was hoping for a deeper run than her third-round exit at the Tokyo Olympics three years ago after lighting the cauldron during the opening ceremony in her native Japan. Nadal, the Spaniard who won a record 14 of his 22 Grand Slam titles at the French Open

and owns two Summer Games golds, was a surprise torch carrier during the rain-soaked opening ceremony along the Seine River on Friday night. He won his doubles opener alongside Alcaraz on Saturday night. Nadal has not made entirely clear whether or not these Summer Games will be the final event of his career. He is 38 and has been dealing with injuries for much of the past two seasons. Nadal and Alcaraz never had played doubles together, but they got past the sixth-seeded Argentine duo of Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni 7-6 (4), 6-4. The No. 1-ranked Swiatek claimed four of her five career



major championships in Paris and grabbed the last four games to beat Romania's Irina-Camelia Begu 6-2, 7-5, while reigning French Open

and Wimbledon champ Alcaraz defeated Lebanon's Hady Habib 6-3, 6-1. Serbia's Djokovic, who is seeded No. 1 in the men's field after Jannik Sinner pulled out with tonsillitis, needed less than an hour for a 6-0, 6-1 win against Australia's Matthew Ebden - a doubles player participating in a tour-level singles match for the first time in two years. Ebden got into the singles bracket because he was in Paris to play doubles and thus available when 16th-ranked Holger Rune of Denmark withdrew with an injured wrist. Ebden's lone game came after he was already down 6-0, 4-0 - and he celebrated by pulling

the front of his yellow shirt over his head and baring his chest to roars from the flag-dotted crowd. The last time Djokovic was in Paris, early last month, he needed surgery for a torn meniscus in his right knee after getting injured during the French Open. He managed to not only play at Wimbledon but also reach the final before losing to Alcaraz. "I do feel more ready now than I was before Wimbledon and I really do feel better prepared," Djokovic said Saturday. "Olympics, from the beginning of the year, was one of the highest goals and objectives and priorities for this year. So let's see how it goes."

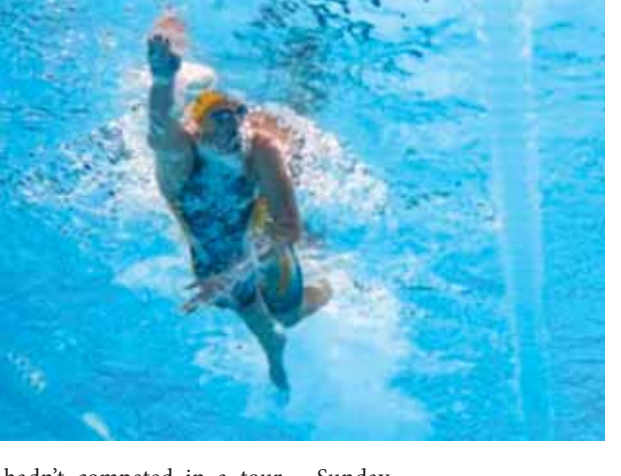
## Australia takes early lead against US On Day 1 of swimming

AP ■ PARIS

Australia took the lead in its swimming showdown against the United States at the Paris Olympics by claiming two of three gold medals on the first full day of competition. Ariarne Titmus turned one of the most anticipated races of the Games into a blowout when she left Katie Ledecky in her wake at La Defense Arena. Titmus led from start to finish in the 400-meter freestyle Saturday night. The Australian star known as "The Terminator" handed Ledecky a second straight Olympic defeat in an event the American won at Rio de Janeiro in 2016. Titmus faced her stiffest challenge from 17-year-old Canadian phenom Summer McIntosh, but she won comfortably as McIntosh claimed the silver. Ledecky settled for bronze. Titmus swept the 200 and 400 free in Tokyo, and she is going for the same double in Paris. Ledecky is going for a double in the 800 and 1,500. Australia then made it 2 for 2 against the Americans in the women's 4x100 freestyle relay, claiming its fourth straight Olympic title in that event. The quartet of Mollie O'Callaghan, Shayna Jack, Emma McKeon and Meg Harris set an Olympic record with a winning time of 3 minutes, 28.92 seconds. The Americans - Kate Douglass, Gretchen Walsh, Torri Huske and Simone Manuel - rallied to take silver. China took bronze. The U.S. Finally got its first gold in the men's 4x100 freestyle relay. The Americans were anchored by Caleb Dressel, who won the eighth gold medal of his

career. Australia took the silver. CHINA TAKES FIRST GOLD OF GAMES The first gold medal of the Paris Olympics went to China when Huang Yuting and Sheng Lihao beat South Korea's Keum Jihyeon and Park Hajun in the final of the 10-meter air rifle mixed team event Saturday morning. Shortly before that, Kazakhstan's Alexandra Le and Islam Satpayev became the first medalists of the games when they beat Germany's Anna Janssen and Maximilian Ulbrich 17-5 for the bronze.

FRANCE'S FIRST MEDALS Luka Mkheidze and Shirine Boukli won France's first two medals of the Olympics when Mkheidze claimed silver and Boukli earned bronze in judo. Mkheidze lost 1-0 to Yeldos Smetov of Kazakhstan in the final of the men's 60-kilogram division - a disappointing result for the raucous crowd at Champ-de-Mars Arena. About 30 minutes before Mkheidze's loss, Boukli claimed France's first medal of its home Olympics with a victory over Spain's Laura Martinez in a bronze-medal match. Paris will have plenty of chances to cheer on its vaunted judo team, which has a competitor in all 14 weight classes in these Olympics. France is one of the world's top judo nations. TENNIS CONTROVERSY Novak Djokovic was perplexed by the Olympics rules after his 6-0, 6-1 rout in less than an hour against an overmatched Matthew Ebden, a 36-year-old doubles player from Australia who



hadn't competed in a tour-level, main-draw singles match since June 2022. Djokovic felt other singles players deserved a spot at the Olympics instead of Ebden. Ebden was in Paris to compete in men's doubles, where he's been as high as No. 1 and currently is No. 3 and has won two major championships. That made him available for the singles competition when 16th-ranked Holger Rune of Denmark pulled out because of a wrist injury. Ebden was not the first doubles player asked to fill in, but he was the first to say yes. He hadn't even practiced singles in about two years until playing a tiebreaker in training on Friday. In other tennis action, Rafael Nadal is not sure whether he will compete in singles, saying after he paired with Carlos Alcaraz to win their first-round doubles match Saturday night that he wants to "make the smartest decision possible to have the best chances to bring (a) medal back home." Nadal's first match in singles, against Hungary's Marton Fucsovics, is scheduled for

Sunday. Also, Angelique Kerber eliminated Naomi Osaka 7-5, 6-3 in the first round in a matchup between former No. 1-ranked players with multiple Grand Slam titles. RAIN DISRUPTIONS Rain continued from the opening ceremony through the first full day of competition and caused several postponements and delays at the Paris Olympics. Men's street skateboarding was supposed to start Saturday but was pushed to Monday because of the showers. The start of play in the scheduled tennis matches on the 10 smaller courts at Roland Garros was delayed because of rain, but action started as scheduled in the two main stadiums that have retractable roofs. The rain could threaten the water quality for swimming in the Seine when the triathlon begins Tuesday with the men's event at the Alexander III bridge next to Grand Palais. 10-TIME OLYMPIAN Georgian shooter Nino Salukvadze made history as

the first woman to compete at 10 Olympic Games in a career which began representing the Soviet Union. She has competed at every Summer Olympics since 1988, when she won gold as a 19-year-old Soviet prodigy. She set her latest record when she stepped into the shooting range for qualification in the women's 10-meter air pistol. Salukvadze placed 38th and didn't advance to Sunday's eight-shooter final. She gets another shot at a medal Friday in qualification for the 25-meter pistol event. In a career spanning five decades, the 55-year-old has competed on three different Olympic teams: the Soviet Union in 1988, then the Unified Team which was organized for ex-Soviet athletes in Barcelona in 1992 after the Soviet Union collapsed. She has represented her home country of Georgia following its independence for the last eight Olympics. HUNGARIAN FENCER LOSES An era-defining streak in Olympic fencing was snapped by an upset when Hungarian fencer Aron Szilagyi lost his opening bout while chasing a fourth consecutive gold medal. Szilagyi won gold medals in men's individual saber in 2012, 2016 and 2021 and was trying to become the only fencer in history to win a fourth. Instead, the streak ended in Szilagyi's first bout of the Paris Games as he was beaten 15-8 by the 27th-seeded Canadian Fares Arif in one of the biggest upsets so far at the 2024 Olympics.



## Boxer Preeti beats Vietnam's Vo Thi Kim Anh to enter pre-quarterfinals

PTI ■ PARIS

Indian boxer Preeti Pawar picked up an unanimous decision win against Vietnam's Vo Thi Kim Anh to enter the women's 54kg category pre-quarterfinals at the Paris Olympics. The Asian Games bronze medalist, competing in her maiden Olympic Games, opened the proceedings for India in the boxing arena as she won her first round by a 5-0 margin on Saturday night. The 20-year-old from Haryana, who had been hospitalised for a few days ahead of the Games due to illness, was unimpressive in the first round as her Vietnamese opponent dictated the proceedings. But the Indian made amends in the next two rounds, attacking and landing clear blows on her opponent. "Happy that we started on a winning note! Despite falling ill before the Games, Preeti not only recovered but fought brilliantly and showed exceptional courage," Boxing Federation of India President Ajay Singh said. Preeti will face second seed and world championships silver-medallist Marcela Yeni Arias of Colombia in the round of 16 clash on Tuesday.