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**Air travel becomes costlier**



**NEW DELHI:** Domestic air travel is set to become costlier as the Civil Aviation Ministry has raised the lower as well as upper caps on fares by 9.83 to 12.82 percent, according to an official order. India had imposed lower and upper limits on airfares based on flight duration when services were resumed on May 25, 2020, after a two-month lockdown due to coronavirus. The lower caps were imposed to help the airlines that have been struggling financially due to coronavirus-related travel restrictions. The upper caps were imposed so that passengers are not charged huge amounts when the demand for seats is high. In an order dated August 12, 2021, the ministry increased the lower limit for flights under 40 minutes of duration from Rs 2,600 to Rs 2,900 - an increase of 11.53 per cent. The upper cap for flights under 40 minutes of duration was increased by 12.82 per cent to Rs 8,800. Similarly, flights with duration between 40-60 minutes have a lower limit of Rs 3,700 instead of Rs 3,300 now, the order said. The upper cap on these flights was increased by 12.24 per cent to Rs 11,000 on Thursday. The flights with du-

ration between 60-90 minutes have a lower limit of Rs 4,500 - an increase of 12.5 per cent. The upper cap on these flights was increased by 12.82 per cent to Rs 13,200 on Thursday. Now, domestic flights of duration between 90-120, 120-150, 150-180 and 180-210 minutes have lower caps of Rs 5,300, Rs 6,700, Rs 8,300 and Rs 9,800, respectively, as per the ministry's order. Till date, domestic flights of duration between 90-120, 120-150, 150-180 and 180-210 minutes had the lower limits of Rs 4,700, Rs 6,100, Rs 7,400 and Rs 8,700, respectively. The lower cap on flights between 120-150 minutes duration was increased by 9.83 per cent to Rs 6,700, as per the new order. On Thursday, the upper caps on domestic flights of duration between 90-120, 120-150, 150-180 and 180-210 minutes were increased by 12.3 per cent, 12.42 per cent, 12.74 per cent and 12.39 per cent, respectively, as per the order. The caps mentioned by the government in its order do not include the passenger security fee, user development fee for the airports and the GST. These charges are added on top when the ticket is being booked by the passenger. **AGENCIES**

# Three more cities fall, Afghanistan govt seeks emergency UN session

**AFGHANISTAN'S SIX PROVINCIAL CAPITALS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN THE PAST 24 HOURS BY THE TALIBAN PUSHING THE NUMBER OF PROVINCES OVERRUN BY THE TERRORISTS TO 18**



**NEW DELHI:** The Taliban have captured over half of the 34 provincial capitals, some of them after surrenders by local governors, even as India along with some other nations are making a last-ditch attempt to mount intense international pressure on the Taliban through the UN Security Council. Many major cities of Afghanistan in the south, west and east have fallen to the Taliban which has formed a virtual ring around Kabul. Many major cities—Kandahar, Herat, Lashkar Gah, Zabul, Nimroz, Farah, Kunduz and Ghazni—have fallen to the Taliban. Apart from a clutch of smaller towns, only the National Capital, Jalalabad and Mazar-i-Sharif are the other major population centres that remain to be taken. In the latest surrender, the Capitals of Goh and Uruzgan provinces were abandoned by local officials and security forces. The Taliban have also captured India's most visible public work in Afghanistan—the Salma Dam—following the surrender of Ismael Khan in



Herat. They are also in control of the power transmission station, also built by India at Pol-e-Khumri, after the capture of Kunduz province on Friday. Embassies in Kabul were

packing up and the US was dispatching 3,000 soldiers to secure the airport to carry out the safe evacuation of its staff. The UK said it would deploy about 600 soldiers to help its

**Evacuate Sikhs, Hindus from Afghanistan: Congress**

In a letter to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Congress leader and spokesperson Jaiverg Shergil, who hails from Jalandhar, condemned recent attacks on a gurdwara in Afghanistan and said, "As you are more than aware, the Taliban offensive has escalated in Afghanistan post the US withdrawal of troops and they are fighting at gunpoint to turn the country once again into a hub for transnational terrorism. The current catastrophic trajectory of violence has caused a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, thus risking the lives of people, including those from India. As per information in public domain, around 650 Sikhs and 50 Hindus are stuck in Afghanistan and have become sitting targets for the Taliban adamant to kill minorities belonging to Indian origin. There have

**Bajwa writes to PM**



Congress MP Partap Singh Bajwa on Monday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, flagging the recent forcible removal of the Nishan Sahib from Gurdwara Tahla Sahib in Afghanistan's Paktia province and urged the government to protect minorities

been numerous episodes of attacks on minorities of Indian origin." **AGENCIES**

embattled Afghan President Ashraf Ghani who then summoned a high-level security meeting. Warlords, Kabul regime vow to fight out First VP Amrullah Saleh said the meeting decided to "continue the fight" against the Taliban though the only voices of support came from ageing insurgent warlords of the north-east

whose Uzbek and Hazara populations are apprehensive of the Pashtun-dominated Taliban. Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum said in Mazar-e-Sharif that he will defend the nation until he is alive. Atta Mohammad Noor also vowed to fight on, saying that Ghani had agreed to provide them with equipment and support. **AGENCIES**

**HIGHLIGHT OF THE WEEK**

- 1 **Single-use plastic items like candy sticks, plates, cups to be prohibited from July 1, 2022: Govt**
- 2 **Prime Minister launches National Vehicle Scrapping Policy to remove unfit vehicles from roads**
- 3 **Landslide blocks flow of Chenab in Himachal's Lahaul-Spiti; 11 villages run risk of being submerged**

# Economy picking up momentum: Prime Minister

**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the country's economic growth is picking up pace again and the domestic industry needs to enhance its risk-taking appetite. He also said taking reforms is a matter of conviction for the government, which is ready to take all risks in the national interest. "We have taken bold decisions. Reforms continued even during the pandemic. The government is bringing reforms not out of compulsion but out of conviction," he said while addressing the CII's annual meeting. Assuring all support to the industry, Modi said India is receiving record foreign direct investment (FDI) because of reforms done in the past few years. He said the government is carrying out major economic reforms, while singling out GST, improvement in ease of doing business and ending retrospective tax as some of the steps in this direction. We have taken bold decisions. Reforms continued even during

the pandemic. These reforms



are not out of compulsion but out of conviction. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister "GST wasn't implemented by the previous governments because of political risk. We didn't just implement it, we're also witnessing record collections," he said. The government "undid a mistake of the past" with retrospective tax and its abolition will strengthen investors' confidence," he observed. The recent reforms done for promoting 'Ease of Doing

Business' were not easy decisions but were enabled due to the industry's support, he said. The several steps taken by the government has led to record FDI in India and forex reserves are at an all-time high. "The situation is changing rapidly. Today, the sentiments of citizens lie with products that are made in India. It is not necessary for it to be an Indian company, but every Indian now wants to use products that are made in India. The nation has made up its mind,"

he asserted. The PM pointed out that startups are showing self-confidence and several unicorns are becoming the face of the nation. As against a handful of unicorns before 2014, today there are nearly 60 out of which 21 have been developed in the past few months. Reiterating that the government stands by the industry, PM Modi said there is rarely a day when a CEO doesn't issue a statement or there's not a report on new opportunities. **AGENCIES**

**Multi-layered security arrangements at Red Fort for Independence Day**



**NEW DELHI:** For 75th Independence Day celebrations, a multi-layered security cover has been arranged to secure the historic Red Fort. Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be addressing the nation from the Mughal-era fort on 15 August. The fort is currently closed for public. As per the police, the security ring, including NSG snipers, elite SWAT commandos, kite catchers, canine units and sharpshooters on high-rise buildings, has been placed around the fort. Anti-drone systems have also been installed in view of the recent terror attack at IAF station in Jammu airport, the police said. Over 350 cameras have been installed and their footage is being monitored round the clock through two police control rooms situated

in and around the Red Fort area, police also said. There will be around 5,000 security personnel at the Red Fort and they will adhere to social distancing norms, they added. Over 70 police vehicles - including PCR vans, 'PRAKHAR' vans and QRT (Quick Reaction Team) vans will be stationed at the Red Fort area as part of security deployment along with intensified patrolling by police personnel on motorcycle, the police said. Patrolling on motorboats will be carried out in the Yamuna river by the Delhi Police to ensure no untoward incident takes place in the national capital. Earlier this month, the city police had erected a huge wall of shipping containers at the fort's main gate for security reasons. **AGENCIES**

# 75th Independence Day: Govt plans to honour 'unsung' freedom fighters



**NEW DELHI:** The government has drawn up a list of 146 names and planned 75 regional, six national and two international seminars under the banner of "Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav", the campaign to mark 75 years of Independence. The names have been compiled separately by government departments and the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), an autonomous body under the Union education ministry. But some historians have criticised the presence of well-known figures such as Subhas Chandra Bose, Birs Munda and Tantiya Tope, and called

programme to celebrate the lives of our unsung heroes," said ICHR director (research and administration) Om Jee Upadhyay. The 146 names have been classified by state of origin, and also include figures from smaller tribes and castes. In the list are Gandhians such as Ghelubhai Naik, agricultural economist Mohanlal Lalubhai Dantwala, former Jana Sangh ideologue Nanaji Deshmukh, and communist leader Ravi Narayan Reddy. The list of also includes several tribal leaders, including Laxman Nayak from Odisha, Telanga Kharia from Jharkhand and Komaram Bheem from Telangana. The list of little-known groups includes Hindu Mahasabha, Andhra Pradesh Library Association, Karnataka Sahitya Parishad, and Bengal's Anusheelan Samiti, among others. The government also drew up lists of lesser-known events and literature. The first list included the Surat salt agitation (1840s), war against the company raj, also known as the sepoy mutiny, (1857-58), Bundelkhand resistance (1808), and Rangpur peasant uprising (1783), among others. **AGENCIES**

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CS ASSAULT CASE

# Court discharges Kejriwal, Sisodia, 9 other AAP MLAs

**NEW DELHI:** A Delhi court discharged Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, his deputy Manish Sisodia and nine other AAP MLAs in a case related to the alleged assault on the then chief secretary Anshu Prakash in 2018.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Sachin Gupta, however, ordered framing of charges against two AAP MLAs -- Amantullah and Prakash Jarwal -- in the case.

The criminal case relates to the alleged assault on Prakash during a meeting at Kejriwal's official residence on February 19, 2018. Besides the chief minister and his deputy, 11 AAP MLAs were also made accused in the case.

Kejriwal, Sisodia and nine other AAP MLAs were granted bail in October 2018.

Amanatullah Khan and



Prakash Jarwal were granted bail earlier by the high court. The alleged assault had triggered a bitter tussle between the Delhi government and its bureaucrats. Truth has won, say Kejriwal, Sisodia

Meanwhile, Kejriwal tweeted "Satyamev jayate" (truth has won) following the court's decision, while Sisodia accused the BJP-led central government of hatching a conspiracy against Kejriwal to weaken the Delhi government that has

“It is a day of victory of justice and truth. The court said that all allegations were false and baseless. The CM has been acquitted today in that false case. We were saying from day one that the allegations were false”

been elected by the people. “It is a day of victory of justice and truth. The court said that all allegations were false and baseless. The CM has been acquitted today in that false case. We were saying from day one that the allegations were false,” Sisodia said at an online press conference.

“It was a conspiracy hatched by PM Modi and central government led by the BJP, and the fake case was lodged on their instructions,” he charged.

“This is the first incident when an elected PM has tried to derail the government of an elected chief minister in this manner. Public has elected both governments, you should not be busy in conspiracies and spying on opposition governments. The PM and the BJP should apologise to the countrymen for this,” he added.

Sisodia said the BJP is scared of Kejriwal's popularity and “a fake FIR was made against him using the Delhi Police, and his house and office were raided. He was treated like a terrorist. The police kept interrogating him for 6 hours continuously.” **AGENCIES**

## Kejriwal launches 33 faceless services of Transport Dept

**ALL TRANSPORT RELATED SERVICES CAN NOW BE AVAILED WITHOUT VISITING TRANSPORT OFFICES, TAKING LEAVE OR SURRENDERING TO MIDDLEMEN**



**NEW DELHI:** Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal launched 33 faceless services of the Transport department that can be availed online by Delhiites, and said it was a revolutionary step.

Kejriwal put a lock on the gate of the IP Estate motor licensing office (MLO) symbolising that people need not visit the office for their work and can get it done now in a faceless manner. He also said on the occasion that services in different departments will be made online and faceless, as was done with the Transport department. “It's a step towards India of 21st century and use of tech-

nology. All Transport related services can now be availed without visiting transport offices, taking leave or surrendering to middlemen,” he said.

Congratulating Delhiites on the occasion, the chief minister said that real freedom for the people in the 75th Independence Day anniversary year will be to get rid of middlemen, bribery and long queues.

Transport minister Kailash Gahlot said the faceless services have been launched after a rigorous trial of five months. **AGENCIES**

## Delhi govt signs MoU with IB board for Delhi Board of School Education

**NEW DELHI:** Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced the signing of an MoU between the Delhi Board of School Education and International Baccalaureate (IB), paving way for students from government schools to access educational facilities of the highest level.

Kejriwal said the International Baccalaureate board is present all over the world and that it is every parent's dream to send their children to IB-affiliated schools.

“With the signing of this MoU, government school students will get access to international level of educational facilities. In India, there are two types of education systems—one for the rich and one for the poor. While the rich send their children to private schools, the poor send their wards to government schools,” he said in an online briefing.

While highlighting how the Delhi government has changed the infrastructure of government schools, Kejriwal

“In India, there are two types of education systems—one for the rich and one for the poor. While the rich send their children to private schools, the poor send their wards to government schools”

said initially the exercise will be started at 30 schools.

“The government school teachers will be trained by international experts. The international experts will decide about the assessment of children and conduct inspect, verification and certification of schools. We are celebrating 75 years of independence and this offers a ray of hope. Our kids will be able to compete at international level, which will pave the way for eradication of poverty in India,” he said. **AGENCIES**

## Communal sloganeering at Jantar Mantar: Delhi court grants bail to former BJP spokesperson

**NEW DELHI:** A Delhi court granted bail to former BJP spokesperson Ashwini Upadhyay, arrested in connection with the communal slogans allegedly raised during a protest at the Jantar Mantar here.

Metropolitan Magistrate Udbhav Kumar Jain granted relief to Upadhyay, who is an advocate, on a bond of Rs 50,000.

The accused was sent to the judicial custody yesterday by a court here, considering that his bail application was pending.

A video showing anti-Muslim slogans being raised during a protest at Jantar Mantar here was widely circulated on social media, following which Delhi Police registered a case in connection with the matter on Monday.

Hundreds of people had attended the protest organised



by 'Bharat Jodo Aandolan' at Jantar Mantar on Sunday.

Shipra Srivastava, media in-charge of Bharat Jodo Aandolan, had said the protest was held under the leadership of Upadhyay. However, she denied any links to those who raised anti-Muslim slogans. Upadhyay too denied any involvement in the anti-Muslim slogan shouting incident.

The video shows a group of people shouting inflammatory slogans and threatening Muslims during the protest at Jantar Mantar. **AGENCIES**

## Delhi Urban Arts Commission gives approval for erecting entry gate at city border points

**NEW DELHI:** Soon, people coming to Delhi from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh by road will be able to witness the city's cultural heritage and its glory when they enter the national capital.

The Delhi Urban Arts Commission (DUAC) has given its nod to a proposal to construct an entry gate at the Tikri Border - Delhi's entry point from Haryana - and beautify a 200 metre stretch at the entry point, government officials said.

The Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation (DTTDC) said the aim of the project is to showcase Delhi's heritage and beauty in a way that people can witness the glory of the city when they enter the national capital.

“DUAC approval has been received for construction of an entry gate at the Tikri border and beautification of the 200 metre stretch. For other four locations, the consultant has been asked for necessary action,” a senior DTTDC official told PTI.



Another DTTDC official said the file will now be sent to the government for final approval.

The beautification of the road stretch will include depiction of Delhi's history, cultural heritage and its evolution over the years, he said, adding that historical monuments like India Gate, Rashtrapati Bhavan and events such as Dandi March will be showcased through sculptures along the stretch at border points. **AGENCIES**

LED screens displaying temperature and pollution level will be installed along the road. Sculptures and decorative plants will also be installed near the entry gates to make it aesthetically appealing, the official said.

The entire project has been divided in two phases in which 12 major entry points will be beautified, the officials said, adding that an expenditure of Rs 25 crore is likely to be incurred on this. **AGENCIES**

## Delhi Police issue traffic advisory ahead of Independence Day

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi Police issued a traffic advisory to ensure safe and smooth vehicular movement across the national capital ahead of the Independence Day function and the full-dress rehearsal ceremony on August 13.

According to the advisory, the traffic around Red Fort—from where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the nation on Independence Day—will remain closed for general traffic from 4 am to 10 am, and will open to only authorised vehicles.

Traffic restrictions for the full-dress rehearsal on August 13 and for the Independence Day function will remain the same, the police said.

Eight roads, Netaji Subhash Marg, Lothian Road, SP Mukherjee Marg, Chandni Chowk Road, Nishad Raj Marg, Esplanade Road and its

Link Road to Netaji Subhash Marg, Ring Road from Rajghat to ISBT, and Outer Ring Road from ISBT to IP flyover, will be closed for general public from 4 am to 10 am on both the days, according to the advisory.

Vehicles without parking labels for the two days have been advised to avoid C-Hexagon India Gate, Copernicus Marg, Mandi House, Sikandra Road, Tilak Marg, Mathura Road, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, Subhash Marg, Jawaharlal Nehru Marg, and the Ring Road between Nizamuddin Bridge and the ISBT bridge, and Outer Ring Road from IP Flyover bypass to ISBT through Salimgarh.

For north-south destinations, commuters will need to take alternative routes from: Aurobindo Marg-Safdarjung Road, Connaught Place-Minto Road, and Nizamuddin bridge to cross Yamuna-Pushpa Road-GT Road. For the east-west corridor, commuters have been advised to follow alternative routes from DND-NH24-Vikas Marg, Vikas Marg-DDU Marg, and Boulevard Road-Baraf Khana. Geeta Colony bridge will be closed towards Shantivan, and vehicles will be barred from taking lower Ring Road from ISBT Kashmir Gate towards Shantivan, and from IP flyover towards Rajghat, the advisory said. Goods vehicles will not be permitted between Nizamuddin bridge and Wazirabad bridge from 12 midnight of August 12 to 11 am on August 13. Similar restrictions will be applicable for Independence Day from 12 midnight of August 14 to 11 am on August 15.

According to the traffic police, inter-state buses will not

## Cremation of remaining human tissue and feet of Dalit girl held: Delhi Police

**NEW DELHI:** The cremation of the remaining human tissue and feet of the Dalit girl, who was allegedly raped and killed in southwest Delhi's Old Nangal area, was conducted by her parents, police said.

The girl died under suspicious circumstances on August 1 even as her parents alleged that she was raped and forcibly cremated by a crematorium's priest.

“The girl's parents received her mortal remains from Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital. They performed the cremation at Old Nangal crematorium in the presence of 15 to 20 people known to them,” Deputy Commissioner of Police (southwest) Ingit Pratap Singh said. **AGENCIES**

During the cremation, around 25 to 30 people from the nearby tent, where a protest against the incident was going on, tried to intrude. The girl's parents, however, objected and the police asked them to leave, he said. The agitated locals, along with the parents of the girl, had blocked a road in the area demanding justice. However, the city police have since cleared one stretch. The tragic incident has led to a nationwide outcry, with many political leaders visiting the parents of the victim.

The case was later transferred to the Crime Branch. The four accused in the case were remanded in the custody of the Delhi Police for three days on Monday, officials said. **AGENCIES**

## 2 criminals killed after 5 hour long encounter in Delhi: Police



**NEW DELHI:** Two criminals were killed in an encounter in Delhi's Khajuri Khas area in the early hours, police said. The encounter, police said, lasted for around five hours.

The criminals - Ramjan and Aamir Khan - were holed up in a residential building where 15 people were present.

The two men allegedly threatened to blow up the building, prompting police to carry out evacuation of the people trapped inside.

The two men were finally killed after a five hour long encounter.

The police has recovered two automatic pistols, four magazines, and 15 live cartridges from the scene. The two men were involved in multiple cases of murder and robbery.

Two police constables--Sachin Khokar and Lalit Tomar-- suffered injuries in the crossfire, police said.

“Based on inputs, a trap was set up to nab the criminals-- Aamir Khan and Raj Maan. The criminals started firing at police in an attempt to escape. During firing from both sides, the criminals were killed while two police personnel were injured,” said Delhi Police was quoted as saying by news agency. **AGENCIES**

## Amid decline in Covid cases, patients return to hospitals with requests for elective surgeries

**NEW DELHI:** As coronavirus cases decline in the national capital, hospitals in Delhi-NCR are seeing patients returning to them for elective surgeries, with some of them saying the current situation is almost similar to the pre-Covid time.

However, the medical facilities said patients put forth special demands like less hospital visits and single room stay as they are still fearful of contracting Covid.

Dr Gurinder Bedi, director and HOD, orthopedic and joint replacement, Fortis Hospital in Vasant Kunj, said the hospital OPDs are back to normal and in some cases, even better placed than how they were in the pre-Covid era. The senior doctor said the hospital has seen an increase in joint replacement

surgeries, spine surgeries for chronic low backache.

“There is a colossal change in the last six to eight weeks. There is also a fear of the third wave and people are more pragmatic thinking that there is a window and they should get issues sorted out,” he said.

Dr Sumeet Shah, director - Minimal Access and Bariatric Surgery - PSRI Hospital, concurred with Bedi and said that there was definitely a dip in the number of elective surgeries during the second wave of Covid but since the number of coronavirus cases have come down significantly the elective surgery numbers are now almost close to the pre-Covid levels.

“There are multiple reasons for it, people sense that there is a gap in the Covid cases and



this provides them the right opportunity to get operated on,” he said.

“Since many patients had already delayed their surgeries, they had reached the point where the surgery could not be delayed further, he said.

“Like we have seen cases of patients suffering from

piles where patients reached to us when their condition became severe with their haemoglobin was as low as five. Consequently, we had to admit them just to restore their hemoglobin level and post that we operated on them,” Dr Shah said.

“There can be a significant

risk in such cases. Similarly, we have patients with gall-bladder stone, hernia who delayed their surgeries and reached the stage where it became an emergency kind of situation,” he added.

Dr Kousar A Shah, COO, Aakash Healthcare in Dwarka, said since mid-May, the hospital has seen a 50 to 70 per cent increase in elective surgeries.

“The increase has been across all the departments, but some departments like orthopaedics have seen more elective surgeries. Although the number of elective surgeries never went to zero, we are seeing more than 50 per cent to 70 per cent rise now,” he added.

Dr Nitin Arora, senior consultant, general surgery, Paras Healthcare in Gurgaon, said

there has been a 200 per cent increase in elective surgeries.

“There is an interesting shift in the demands of patients. Earlier, they would say that we should not discharge them early or before they have fully recovered but now they want a minimum stay in hospital and ask whether the surgery can be done early in the day and they can be discharged before night. We are allowing patients to stay at the hospital for less time,” he said.

Bedi said patients usually want the number of hospital visits to be kept low. “A large number of patients are opting for single rooms despite the cost being higher. They also inquire whether the physiotherapy after the surgery can be done at home or the dressing change can happen at their home,” he added. **AGENCIES**

## NEWSBRIEF

**Told Union Health Minister difficult to ascertain oxygen-related deaths without probe: Sisodia**

**NEWDELHI:** Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said he has written to Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya saying that without a proper probe, it is difficult to ascertain if any oxygen-related death happened during the second wave of coronavirus. Sisodia said the Delhi Government had formed a committee to probe the deaths and prepare a report so that the affected families could be given a compensation of Rs 5 lakh each. “But through the LG (Delhi's Lieutenant Governor), the Centre did not allow that committee to be formed. We are sending the file again to the Delhi LG for approval. We will carry out the probe with full responsibility and even punish those who were guilty,” he told the media in an online briefing. Delhi has recorded over 25,000 fatalities due to the infection, he said, adding it will have to be probed how many of these were linked to the oxygen crisis during April and May. “We cannot say that there was no oxygen crisis. The families of patients, hospitals were sending out SOS messages for help at that time,” he said. **AGENCIES**

**2 held for celebratory firing during birthday celebrations in Delhi**

**NEWDELHI:** The police have arrested a man along with his friend for firing shots during a birthday celebration here, officials said. The arrest of the accused comes after the police took cognizance of a widely circulated video showing the man firing shots in the air at the birthday celebration organised on the rooftop of a house in outer Delhi's east Paschim Vihar. The police said the purported video, posted on the social media on the intervening night, showed the accused—Sumit Tanwar—firing shots in the air. **AGENCIES**

**Murder of 9-yr-old: Farm unions protest against Central Govt**

**NEWDELHI:** Members of various farm unions staged a protest against the brutal rape and murder of a 9-year-old girl in Delhi at Bhandari Bridge. The farm leaders condemned the incident and demanded strict action against the miscreants. Protesters raised slogans against the Central Government and asked it to take responsibility for deteriorating law and order situation. The farm leaders alleged that such incidents wherein victims were burnt to cover the crime had been reported earlier as well during the incumbent government. Rattan Singh Randhawa, a farm leader, said earlier, a similar incident was reported from Hathras, in Uttar Pradesh. **AGENCIES**

**RT-PCR accounted for over 70% of total tests conducted in last 3 months to detect Covid**

**NEW DELHI:** RT-PCR tests accounted for over 70 per cent of the total tests conducted to detect coronavirus in Delhi in the last three months, according to government data. In July, 21.79 lakh Covid tests were conducted in the capital. Of this, 15.18 lakh were conducted through the RT-PCR method. RT-PCR tests accounted for 71.42 per cent of the total 21.88 lakh tests conducted in June and 75.17 per cent of the 21.41 lakh tests conducted in May. In February, March and April; 64.81 per cent, 64.29 per cent and 66.02 per cent tests were conducted through this method. Over 20 lakh tests were conducted in January, of which 11.78 lakh (57.65 per cent) were RT-PCR tests. Real Time Polymer Chain Reaction test (RT-PCR) and Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) are two main methods used to detect coronavirus. The RT-PCR is the most recommended test for tracing the virus. It detects the viral genetic material (RNA) and is quite accurate. **AGENCIES**

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# Govt accommodation meant for serving officials, not retirees as benevolence: SC

**NEW DELHI:** Government accommodation is meant for serving officials and not retirees as a "benevolence" and distribution of largesse, the Supreme Court has said while setting aside an order of the Punjab and Haryana High Court allowing a retired public servant to retain such premises.

Right to shelter does not mean right to government accommodation, the apex court said, observing that direction to allow a retired public servant to retain such premises for an indefinite period is distribution of state largesse without any policy.

While allowing the appeal filed by the Centre, a bench of justices Hemant Gupta and A S Bopanna set aside the high court order and directed the retired Intelligence Bureau officer, a Kashmiri migrant, to hand over vacant physical possession of the premises on or before October 31, 2021.

The bench also directed the Centre to submit a report of action taken against retired public servants, who are in government accommodation post their retirement by virtue of orders of the high courts, by November 15, 2021.

ferred to Faridabad where he was allotted a government accommodation, had attained the age of superannuation from service on October 31, 2006.

"The right to shelter does not mean right to government accommodation. The government accommodation is meant for serving officers and officials and not to the retirees as a benevolence and distribution of largesse," the bench said in its judgement passed last week.

The top court was hearing a plea against the July 2011 order of a division bench of the high court which had dismissed a petition against its single judge order. The single judge had said it was not possible for the retired officer to return to his own state due to which the order of eviction shall be kept in abeyance. The high court had also said the authorities were at liberty to provide alternative accommodation to him on nominal licence fee in Faridabad. The officer had earlier given representation to the concerned authority to allow him to retain the government accommodation and he was allowed to retain the house for another one year.

Later, he submitted another representation in June 2007 to allow him to retain



the house allotted to him on a nominal licence fee till the circumstances prevailing in Jammu and Kashmir improve and the government makes it possible for him to return to his native place. He was served with a notice under the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupant) Act, 1971 and later, an order for eviction was passed but it was stayed by a district court in Delhi.

When an objection was raised about territorial jurisdiction of Delhi court, he withdrew his appeal and filed it in Faridabad court which dismissed it in August 2009. Later, the matter reached the

high court. In its verdict, the apex court referred to several judgements delivered earlier and said it was held that government accommodation is only meant for in-service officers and not for the retirees or those who have demitted office. "The compassion howsoever genuine does not give a right to a retired person from continuing to occupy a government accommodation," it said.

It noted that according to a policy framed by the government, a displaced person is to be lodged in a transit accommodation and if it is not available, then cash compensation is to be provided. "There is no policy of the

**Q** The compassion howsoever genuine does not give a right to a retired person from continuing to occupy a government accommodation"

central government or the state government to provide accommodation to displaced persons on account of terrorism in the state of Jammu and Kashmir," it said. "The hardship faced by them does not lead to a corresponding duty of the state to provide them alternative government accommodation."

It noted that a section of society, more so retired public servants who have earned pension and drawn retirement benefits, cannot be said to be in such condition where the government should provide government accommodation for an unlimited period.

"A section of the migrants cannot be treated as preferential citizens to give them the right to shelter at the cost of millions of other citizens who do not have a roof over their

heads," it said.

The bench said right of shelter to a displaced person is satisfied when accommodation had been provided in the transit accommodation.

The bench said in terms of the policy, which was considered in an earlier verdict of the apex court, Kashmiri migrants are entitled to transit accommodation and if transit accommodation could not be provided then money for residence and expenses.

It said the retired officer in the matter and such persons are not from the poorest section of migrants and have worked in the higher echelons of the bureaucracy.

"To say that they are enforcing their right to shelter only till such time the conditions are conducive for their safe return is wholly illusory. No one is sure that at what point of time the condition will be conducive to the satisfaction of the migrants. Such benevolence and preferential right to section of the citizens is unfair to the serving officers," it said.

It set aside the high court's order and restored the writ petition challenging the order under the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupant) Act, 1971. **AGENCIES**

## Govt working to ease overseas travel restrictions: Jaishankar



**NEW DELHI:** External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said his top priority was to make sure Indians were able to travel abroad with the least number of restrictions and hoped that Covaxin, one of the two vaccines being primarily used in India, would get WHO approval by next month.

"As a country whose people look at the world as a global workplace, it is up there in my priority," Jaishankar said, while responding to Tech Mahindra CEO CP Gurnani's observation about travel impediments at the CII's virtual annual session on Thursday.

Jaishankar said a lot of talk about travel impediments was "speculation" and "not fact based". Many countries, including the US, don't insist on being vaccinated before boarding the plane.

"At the moment, it is an India issue. They (the US)

are not allowing people who have stayed for a length of time here to go to the US directly. The general practice is testing-based rather than vaccine-based," he added.

He also acknowledged the issue about vaccines at some places, saying Europe started the problem by exempting people only with certain kinds of vaccination from quarantine. "We got Covishield in. Covaxin is still a problem. Maybe in September, we should get some kind of indication," he added.

The solution was a vaccination certificate on the lines of the "Yellow Fever" certificates where there was no insistence on a particular type of injection.

"I do see it as a challenge. Some countries try to get across their viewpoint that their vaccine is a must to deal with them. There will be a push and pull over there," the minister observed. **AGENCIES**

## Red Fort gears up to host I-Day celebrations

**NEW DELHI:** The historic monument of Red Fort in the national capital is gearing up to host the nation's Independence Day celebrations on August 15. All security arrangements including extra precautionary and preventive measures against Covid-19 are being put in place to ensure a seamless event.

A two-day vaccination camp was organised for all the staff present in the Red Fort in a step towards taking guard against the coronavirus whose first wave last year and the second wave earlier this year went on to create rampage.

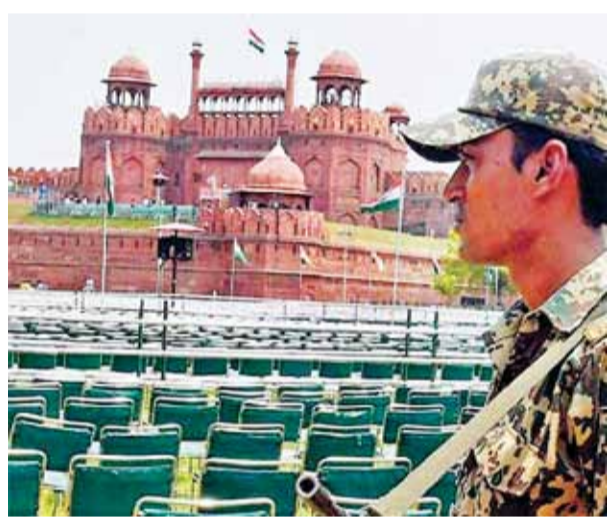
The Prime Minister hoists the flag every year on Independence Day and addresses the country from the ramparts of the Red Fort.

The security personnel and other staff engaged in security near the Prime Minister will be tested for Covid-19 two days before August 15. Also, those who have not been vaccinated will be given the jabs.

Similar to last year's arrangements, limited chairs have been placed this time as well. The chairs of all the leaders sitting around the Prime Minister have been installed, maintaining a distance of two yards.

Students of NCC will be called on Independence Day, although their number will also be limited.

According to the information, athletes who won medals



at the Tokyo Olympics will also get a place near the Prime Minister this time. A separate corridor has been made for their movement and arrival.

Meanwhile, tight security arrangements are being put in place.

The Delhi Police have put up containers (around 15-20) outside the main gate of the Red Fort for security reasons.

Security agencies have already issued an alert on August 15. The Delhi Police have taken this step in view of the farmers' agitation and threats from the Khalistani terrorists.

In view of Independence Day, Delhi Police and central security agencies have made strict arrangements.

Apart from this, an anti-drone radar system will also

be used, so that no drone of any kind can fly around the Red Fort. The system has a range of up to 5 km.

Delhi Police have also pasted posters of terrorists around the Red Fort. The name and address of six terrorists have been mentioned in the posters.

The police are also wary of the potential challenge posed by the farmers sitting on the Delhi borders, who are protesting against the agricultural laws. On January 26 this year, on the occasion of the Republic Day, things turned ugly and violent as the farmers' agitation was at its peak during that time. Keeping these episodes in mind, all efforts are being made this time to avoid any kind of negligence. **AGENCIES**

## Marshals were pushed and attacked during passage of insurance amendment Bill: Govt

**NEW DELHI:** Rejecting Opposition charges that marshals prevented their protests, the government on Wednesday said security personnel were pushed and attacked in the Rajya Sabha during the passage of the insurance amendment Bill.

"The marshals were pushed and attacked and attempts were made to strangle them," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralad Joshi said leveling serious charges on certain Opposition MPs who he did not name.

### PM, Sonia Gandhi share smiles at Speaker's meet

**NEW DELHI:** After days of disruptions and bad blood between the government and the opposition in the Monsoon Session of Parliament, there were happy faces today at a meeting of leaders called by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla post the adjournment of the House this morning.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress President Sonia Gandhi, seated not too far apart, shared smiles and space after 17 days of bickering between their parties over the Pegasus snooping issue.

Also present in the meeting held at the Speaker's chamber were Home Minister Amit Shah and leaders of all Opposition parties in the Lok Sabha.

Birla later tweeted a picture of the happy faces, a departure from norm in the just-concluded session of Parliament, where the Opposition and the government remained daggers drawn. **AGENCIES**

## Decades after 1984 riots, UP cops examine crime scene

**NEW DELHI:** Decades after two men in Kanpur were allegedly murdered and their bodies set on fire during the 1984 riots, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Uttar Pradesh Police re-visited the crime scene last week.

Critical evidence, including blood samples, was collected from a locked house in Kanpur's Govind Nagar, SP Balendu Bhusan is reported to have said. The SIT was set up on the SC orders.

Teja Singh (45) and his son Satpal Singh (22) were killed on November 1, 1984, and an FIR was registered. Teja Singh's surviving son Charanjeet Singh (61), who now resides in Delhi, gave



his statement to a special magistrate. He disclosed the identities of those "involved" in the murders. The SP said the crime scene was "undisturbed" as the new occupants resided on the first

floor and the ground floor rooms were locked. Earlier this year, the SIT had collected blood samples from a house in Kanpur's Naubasta area. It too had been locked after a similar attack. **AGENCIES**

## PM announces ₹1,625 crore for women self-help groups



**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with members of women self-help groups (SHGs) across the country through video-conference and released capitalisation support funds to the tune of Rs 1,625 crore to over 4 lakh SHGs.

Besides, he released Rs 25 crore as seed money for 7,500 SHG members under the PMFME (PM Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises) of Union Food Processing Industries and Rs 4.13 crore as funds to 75 FPOs (Farmer Producer Organisations) being promoted under the National Livelihood Mission.

Modi also announced that now the limit for loans available to self-help groups without guarantee had been doubled to Rs 20 lakh.

"The condition of linking your savings accounts with the loan account has also been done away with," Modi said.

The event in which he interacted with SHG members was christened "Aatmanirbhar Narishakti se Samvad". These members/community resource persons are promoted under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM).

He released a compendium of success stories of women SHG members along with a handbook on universalisation of farm livelihoods. The PM noted the contribution by these SHGs in making masks and sanitisers and providing food to the needy and spreading awareness. **AGENCIES**

# MAHARASHTRA MUSINGS

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
Mumbai

## Maharashtra Road/Rail sector jointly building flyovers

The Roads and Railways sector in Maharashtra are working together in reducing transport load on roads through rail support and use of durable modern technology including Flyovers on the Broad Gauge rail line costing Rs 304 crore.

Recently, the Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari had - along with Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray through video conferencing - laid the foundation of the Maharashtra State Railway Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (MAHARAIL) Rs 146 crore, 3-km-long railway flyover between Kadi Chowk and Golibar Chowk in North Nagpur to reduce the transport traffic load on roads.



Similar ceremonies were also held for four other new flyovers on the Nagpur Itwari to Nagbhid railway line at a total cost of Rs.158 crore - including from Kalmama Market to Nagpur connecting road, Railway gate number-73 (Rs 69 crore)

, near Bhandewadi Railway gate number-69 (Rs 25 crore), near Umed city connecting road near bus stand Railway gate number-34 (Rs 26 crore) and on Umed Bivapur bypass road Railway gate number-33 (Rs 38 cr)

Recalling memories of visiting his grandparents who were living in such chawls, the Maharashtra Chief Minister said that the last few months had

witnessed five lakh houses being constructed in rural areas by the rural development department and mill workers would also be given such houses.

Former Chief Minister and MP Sharad Pawar - while highlighting the BDD Chawl's history of being dwelling places of great personalities and revolutionaries including Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, Prabodhanekar Thackeray, Sahitya Ratna Lokshahir Annabhau Sathe and Acharya Atre -- underscored the need to preserve this structure history that showcased +diversity in unity+ in the era of towering skyscrapers.

Maharashtra Tourism and Environment Minister Aditya Thackeray has called for creation of a "Museum of Chawls" alongside the chawl's redevelopment. Noting the BDD Chawls' historical and cultural heritage, he said one of chawl structures should be preserved and converted into a museum for the knowledge of future generations.

Maharashtra Revenue Minister Balasaheb Thorat said the State's various developmental projects included historical loan waivers to farmers, construction of Samruddhi Mahamarg, coastal roads, Skywalks, mono-rail works with "redevelopment of BDD Chawls project" adding another feather in its cap.

## Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray assures aid to OBCs

The Maharashtra Chief Minister directed the concerned State officials to prepare a detailed report on the OBCs while also disseminating empirical data to the central government.

Thackeray met a delegation led by ex-MLA Prakash Shendge, which demanded caste wise census like in Tamilnadu and Karnataka. Food and Public Supplies minister Chhagan Bhujbal, Bahujan Welfare minister Vijay Vaddetiwar, Industries minister Subhash Desai, chief secretary Sitaram Kuntek were present.

Directing opening of "mahajyoti" organisation sub-centres at divisional levels, he also assured funding for Maharashtra state Other Backward Finance and Development Corporation, Shamrao peje konkan other backward classes corporation, Vasantao Naik denotified classes and nomadic tribes development corporation, and the Punyashlok Ahilya



Devi Maharashtra Sheep and Goats Development Corporation. Bahujan Welfare minister Vijay Vaddetiwar said that 72 hostels for OBC students have been decided to be started shortly.

Meanwhile, aid amounting to Rs 28 crore will be provided at Rs 5,000 each to around 56,000 artists belonging to 847 cultural organizations in Maharashtra facing financial crises amidst COVID-19. These include: Shahiri, Khad-

igammat, Sangeethari, Tamasha Phad full time, Tamasha Phad - seasonal, Dashavatar, Natak, Zadiptari, Vidhinatya, Circus and Touring Talkies, according to Cultural Affairs Minister Amit Deshmukh. Maharashtra Textiles Minister and Mumbai Guardian Minister Aslam Shaikh said the city's development projects were underway including the "Coastal Road," besides people's dreams of affordable housing becoming a reality.

## India's inflation outlook isn't benign as it may seem

How would covid, which has driven commodity and oil prices lower and deeply affected the labour market, affect inflation? One would expect inflation to be well within limits, if not actually slip into the deflationary zone. Yet, India's inflation numbers for June suggest that it has breached the upper tolerance limit of 6% set out by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The reported 6.09% headline inflation is driven by high year-on-year protein inflation, especially meat and fish at 16.22% and pulses at 16.68%, resulting in a food inflation of 7.29%. In June 2020, the prices of pan, tobacco and intoxicants were up 9.7%, and personal care and effects, 12.43%, compared to the same period the previous year. However, such inflation data appears to present a completely different picture if we study the monthly change in the consumer price index (CPI) over the six-month period of January to June 2020. During this period, food and beverages witnessed a -0.26% inflation rate, with vegetables leading the downward trend at -22.18%. Four items have been above the 6% mark, including meat and fish (12.54%), pulses and products (6.62%), pan, tobacco and intoxicants (6.91%), and personal care and effects (6.11%). Overall CPI headline inflation was just 0.93%. Has the decline in demand imposed by the lockdown over much of the past six-month period resulted in the fall of inflation below the 2% mark, even as the year-on-year number suggests high inflation? How does one make sense of these differing numbers and what does the future hold for us? Going by a recent study of the impact of covid-19 on inflation risks in 43 countries, including 31 emerging market economies (EMEs), it appears that India's experience of higher inflation amid covid is actually representative of that of most EMEs. It identifies falling output, oil prices, financial conditions and exchange rates as the variables most likely to impact inflation risks.

### FIVE OBSERVATIONS

#### TAXATION LAWS (AMENDMENT) BILL IN THE LOK SABHA

- CAME AFTER TOO LONG**  
Though the NDA government has been reiterating its opposition to retrospective taxation ever since it came to power in 2014, it kept banking on arbitration for too long
- BACK ON TRACK**  
It is hoped that the new legislation will usher in a fair and predictable tax regime and boost investors' confidence, which is a prerequisite for bringing the country's Covid-battered economy back on track.
- BUSINESS INDEX**  
India is ranked a middling 63rd on the Ease of Doing Business index, way behind other Asian nations such as Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, UAE, Japan and China.
- TAXATION**  
Foreign investors have many options, and they won't prefer countries where they are likely to face uncertainty and intimidation on the taxation front.
- BIG INVESTMENT**  
The challenge for India will be to optimally use the new law to attract big-ticket investments.

**LETTERBOX**  
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## THE FINANCIAL WORLD

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MRITYUNJOY KUMAR JHA THE SUPPLIES ARE THROUGH SHAH SALIM PASS. HAJI FURQAN IS OF THE ETIM OR COMMONLY KNOWN AS TIP

## Foreign militants in Taliban ranks playing key roles in gaining control

Although the Taliban has been denying the presence of fighters from different foreign militant groups, the monitoring group of the UN has estimated about 8,000-10,000 militants mainly from Central Asia, the north Caucasus region of the Russian Federation and Xinjiang Uyghur region of China. As far as terrorists from Pakistan are concerned, the number could be around 10,000 because thousands of militants from Pakistani based terror organisations like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Taliban Pakistan have heavily embedded with the Taliban.

According to UN reports, most of the fighters in Taliban ranks were asked to wear masks to hide their identities. Afghan intelligence sources have reported that they have seen foreign fighters in the ranks of the Taliban descending on new crusiers. Rahmatullah Nabil, Former Director of National Directorate of Security (NDS) shared a few pictures of these foreign militants. "Taliban have taken territories in Northern AFG specifically Badakhshan with the help of Al-Qaeda & ETIM fighters. Qari Fasehuddin has the support of foreign elements. Jaish ul Nasr brigade of Al-Qaeda & others are fully active. Haji Furqan is leading ETIM in the North," he said in a series of posts. "Remnants of IMU aligned with Taliban commanded by the son of Tahir Yaldshev are actively engaged in battle. ETIM was also instrumental in the first fall of Kunduz in 2015. Taliban rely on advisory & training role of foreign elements. The supplies are through Shah Salim pass. Haji Furqan is of the ETIM or commonly known as TIP,"



Nabil said.

The rapid and lightning advancement of the Taliban in the last seven days is due to active support of the Pakistani army and ISI and these foreign militant groups, mainly with the support of Al-Qaida and allied groups, including the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), a Uyghur Muslim rebel group; Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP); and Central Asian militant outfits such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Jamaat Ansarullah, militants outfit also known as the Tajik Taliban. Despite repeated denial by the Taliban that they don't have any foreigners in their rank, an UN Security Council report on July 21 noted

that, "the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) consists of several hundred members, located primarily in Badakhshan and neighbouring Afghan provinces. A number of Member States identify this group as the Turkistan Islamic Party, which is a widely accepted alias of ETIM. Many Member States assess that it seeks to establish a Uighur state in Xinjiang, China, and towards that goal, facilitates the movement of fighters from Afghanistan to China".

"The Taliban and Al-Qaeda remain closely aligned and show no indication of breaking ties," the report says. This nexus continues despite the US-Taliban deal signed in 2020, which called for severing ties with the

group. Officials in Kabul told Nikkie Asia that the alliance of transnational militants has helped the Taliban cement their territorial gains. "Highly trained members of Al-Qaeda or its allied groups embed with Taliban units to act as military advisers in key operations, and train them in planting explosives and other types of makeshift mines." Senior Afghan officials claimed that ETIM fighters, led by their commander, Haji Furqan, working with Jamaat Ansarullah, have helped the Taliban seize territory in northern Afghanistan.

Last month, The Taliban recently assigned Tajik leaders from Jamaat-e-Ansarullah to monitor Afghanistan's northern border with Tajikistan. In the last 24 hours social media platforms are filled with horrifying videos of the Taliban hanging people to death. Afghans have been pleading and begging to the US, UN for help. While the US has "stopped" worrying about Afghanistan, the UN chief is saying, "following escalation in fighting is a deep concern". The Secretary General Antonio Guterres expressed hope that discussions between the Government of Afghanistan, Taliban and regional and international envoys underway in Doha "will restore the pathway to a negotiated settlement of the conflict", underscoring that the UN "stands ready to contribute to such a settlement".

The world leaders are apprehensive about the bleak future of 35 million Afghans but they have left them to fight on their own.

(The content is being carried under an arrangement with indianarrative.com)

YAJURVINDRA SINGH 'ONE HOPES THAT THE ONES WITHOUT A MEDAL TO SHOWCASE TAKE THEIR FAILURE WELL'

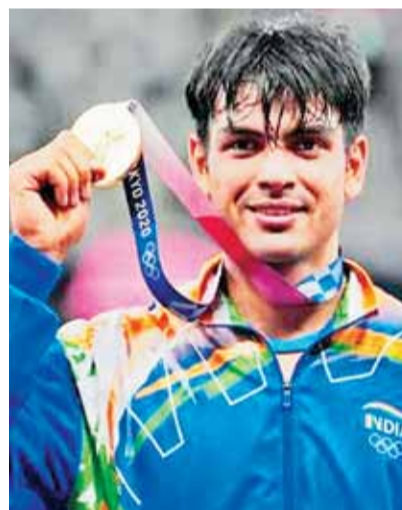
## Mental issues in sports in 'Times of Plenty'

The adulation and financial generosity that is being rightly bestowed on our very first Olympic gold-medallist in athletics, the javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra, is wonderful. He deserves every bit of it for making every Indian proud. However, all the other Indian Olympians have also worked as hard to qualify and participate. One hopes that the ones without a medal to showcase take their failure well and without any future mental repercussions. This is where sports administrators and coaches play a major role in keeping them going.

Mental issues relating to sportspersons has become an essential topic to dwell upon. In the earlier days, if one could not stand up to the pressures and failed to perform, one was typed as a person with a weak temperament and one who did not have the strength to compete.

Sports is being inundated with a regular flow of superstars succumbing to pressure which eventually leads to mental illness. Simone Biles, the famous gymnast from USA, was one such victim at the Olympics in Tokyo, and the world's leading cricket all-rounder, Ben Stokes of England, was another. He opted out of playing an important Test series against India and has still not given any confirmation of his return. These are just two examples. One wonders whether in the past, sportspersons and sportswomen faced similar mental issues but were scared to reveal it.

The very concept of playing a game and partaking in a sport was to teach and familiarise youngsters to integrate and form a bond with one another, create teamwork



and friendship and learn to ride the good days with the bad. Winning was important but participating was just as good. Sportsmanship and good ethical values of competing against one another and playing according to the set rules was what made sports special.

Even the great battle in the Mahabharata had norms wherein the charioteer, the mahout and other unarmed individuals were not attacked.

The huge, phenomenal rise in sporting encounters being telecast through multimedia channels to one and all has sportspersons and sportswomen facing a situation like never before. Winning at all costs has taken precedence and therefore, an athlete, is now

faced with pressures galore.

"The mental trauma being faced by leading sports personalities now is very worrying," said Dr. Roma Kumar, the acclaimed clinical psychologist from emotionally.in.

The pressure to perform can cause fear, excessive stimulus as to what to do or what not to do and confusion in one's mind. This, she says, leads to stress, anxiety, negative thoughts that effect the basic processes of a sportsperson. This, therefore, also leads to low concentration and reduced coordination of movements hampering their normal performances.

If one analyses Dr. Kumar's thoughts, these could have been some reasons why our top rung shooters, archers and even gymnasts who had brought laurels in World Championships earlier, failed. Our leading archer, Deepika Kumari, rightly said on return that she seemed to buckle down due to the pressure of the five circles. This was her 3rd Olympics and even though she was considered one of the front-runners to win gold, she unfortunately, failed to live up to her billing. Both the Indian hockey teams, women's and men's did extremely well at the Olympics. However, bronze medal has got the men's team far more generosity from well-wishers than the gallant women's team which narrowly missed a medal.

The mental and emotional state of the women's team came to light when Prime Minister Modi spoke to them to give them solace. He meant well to give them comfort in their defeat, but it led to tears and the coach had to stop the interaction before some of

the women broke down completely.

The thought of not being able to win a medal for the country made some of them even more depressed. Similarly in golf, Aditi Ashok was a worthy 4th place finisher against the best in the world. However, with no medal to boast of, she got no recognition from her state government. These are the athletes, who now require to go through sessions with a psychologist as one never knows what mental issues may surface in the future.

It has become imperative that a serious thought be given to tackle mental issues of a sportsperson right from school to the International level. Sachin Tendulkar, the icon of Indian sport, has also revealed recently the pressure that he went through mentally. So did Virat Kohli earlier. One wonders as to what must be going through in the minds of thousands of upcoming sportsmen aspiring to follow in their footsteps. To read about their international sports heroes struggle through such problems may make some of them worried about pursuing their dream.

This is a time of plenty of choices and options for individuals. Sports coaches at all levels need to be mental, qualified and educated to assess the mental condition of their students. Individual sports is an area that puts even more pressure on a sportsperson. Therefore, it has become important to monitor a sportsperson on a regular basis about all aspects of their health -- physical, emotional and mental. This, one hopes, will reduce the possibility of deterioration in mental health which was never encountered so much before.

### BOOKS: REVIEW

## Roots of 're-branding' India were laid under the campaign of Atal's govt

Whether ends justify all means is a question which is relevant for both individuals and societies. This question is often posed as a counterfactual while discussing post-independence India's development trajectory. Was non-alignment a worse choice compared to a pro-US tilt in terms of opening up economic opportunities? Is India less developed than China today because of having to accommodate myriad concerns in a democratic set-up? Is the current government laying the basis of long-term growth by undertaking hitherto impossible reforms?

Over time, mass opinion in India has shifted towards blaming what was left undone (due to weak leadership) for the country's collective predicament.

Data from the World Value Surveys show that support for rule by a strong leader increased from 45% to 56% between 2005-09 and 2010-14; the latter coinciding with the rise of Narendra Modi on the national political scene. It is this growing trust which political scientist Neelanjan Sircar has termed as Modi's politics of vishwas (trust) in a recent paper.

While this bit is pretty persuasive, a more intriguing question is how did this preference for an authoritarian leader gain ground? The existing analyses are divided into hagiographical (Modi's wide appeal) or conspiratorial (it is ultimately majority communalism behind the garb of development) accounts. Both these explanations do not offer much help in getting closer to the truth.

It is here that Ravinder Kaur's

**It is this growing trust which political scientist Neelanjan Sircar has termed as Modi's politics of vishwas (trust) in a recent paper**

book offers a new, enriching, and also, counter-intuitive perspective. Kaur has followed a unique and unexpected process and site for reaching her conclusions: India's efforts at selling herself at the World Economic Forum at Davos, the annual jamboree of the high and mighty of global capitalism. Her reading of the state of play in politics and society is far more nuanced than the binaries referred to earlier. She argues that while



Brand New Nation: Capitalist Dreams and Nationalist Designs in Twenty-First-Century India By Ravinder Kaur ₹599.00

Narendra Modi might have had the political genius of exploiting the growing consensus for the "re-branding" of India, the roots of this process were laid in the India Shining campaign under the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government. The last bit is ironic, as most commentators see the India Shining campaign as a liability for the BJP, which created a huge backlash ultimately leading to a shock defeat of the BJP in the 2004 elections.

"The spirit of India Shining, then, embodied a new subjectivity constitutive of the self-centered individuals who had succeeded from the collective. This possibility appealed to the newly prosperous middle class and legitimized that appeal in the public discourse...What appeared to be a

failure in the aftermath of the 2004 electoral defeat was, in fact, a decisive turn towards a broad consensus in favour of economic reforms", Kaur writes.

Moreover, Kaur also argues that the growing legitimacy for an exclusivist Hindu image of a "New India" is in keeping with the brand building process rather than inimical to it, as is believed by many commentators. In a global marketplace (Davos) where each country is trying to out-compete the other to woo capital, it is precisely the mix of an ancient Hindu culture with the modern-day capitalist appeal that defines India. "The uncommon difference, the exclusive identity not shared with others is the prime ingredient on which a successful brand is built... This also means that in order to market the exclusive inner self, the brand needs to evict the other - the Muslims, the poor, the Dalits - from the image frame, to seek the uncommon in what had once been a common cultural existence", the book says.

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## NEWSBRIEF

Telcos need support:  
Sunil Mittal

**NEW DELHI:** Airtel chief Sunil Mittal has expressed hope that the government will step in to ensure that the sector remains a viable place for continued investments, and said the industry requires "long overdue" support to maintain its current 3+1 (three private players and one state-owned operator) structure. Issues such as unsustainable pricing, low returns, coupled with legacy legal issues, "have extracted their toll", he said in Airtel's annual report. **AGENCIES**

Salary cut for Google  
WFH staff

**NEW YORK:** Google staff based in the same office before the pandemic could see different changes in pay if they switch to work from home (WFH) permanently, with long commuters hit harder, according to a company pay calculator. "Our compensation packages have always been determined by location, and we always pay at the top of the local market based on where an employee works from," a Google spokesperson said, adding that pay will differ from city to city and state to state. **AGENCIES**

IRCTC posts turnaround  
results in June quarter

**NEW DELHI:** The Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) announced its April-June quarter results for the financial year 2021-22, reporting a net profit of Rs 82.52 crore, compared to a net loss of Rs 24.60 crore in the corresponding quarter last year. Shares of IRCTC touched a record high of Rs 2,727 on the BSE after the company announced that it returned to profit in the June quarter. IRCTC opened on the BSE at Rs 2,595, swinging to an intra day high of Rs 2,727.95 and an intra day low of Rs 2,571.70, in the trading session so far. The Indian Railways' e-ticketing and catering arm's revenue from operations in the first quarter of the current fiscal stood at Rs 243 crore, compared to Rs 131 crore in the corresponding period last year, marking a growth of 85.4 per cent year-on-year. IRCTC's board also approved a stock split of 5:1, subject to the approval of the Railway Ministry. **AGENCIES**

SC refuses to stay Competition Commission  
of India probe against Amazon, Flipkart

**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court refused to stay an investigation by the Competition Commission of India against e-commerce giants Amazon and Flipkart for alleged predatory practices, saying they must volunteer for the probe.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice N V Ramana said that challenging the enquiry is like wanting a notice before the registration of an FIR under the criminal law and asked the e-commerce giants to submit themselves to the probe by the CCI.

"We will ensure it's done," a Bench led by Chief Justice of India NV Ramana said even as it gave four weeks to the companies to prepare for the probe.

"We expect big organisations like Amazon and Flipkart to offer themselves for the inquiry and you do not want that. You have to submit and enquiry has to be permitted," said the bench which also comprised justices Vineet Saran and Surya Kant.

Amazon and Walmart-owned Flipkart had moved the top court against the July 23 order of the Karnataka High Court allowing the CCI to go ahead with its investigation against the



## HIGHLIGHTS

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companies for alleged violations of the competition laws.

On being told by senior advocate A M Singhvi, appearing for Flipkart, that the time to

respond to the CCI was expiring on August 9 itself, the Bench extended the time by four more weeks which was objected to by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta,

representing the CCI.

The Karnataka High Court had rejected the plea of Amazon and Flipkart against the CCI probe for alleged violations of the competition law.

"The inquiry cannot be crushed at this stage. If the appellants aren't involved in violations of any provisions of the competition law, they should not feel shy in facing an inquiry by the Competition Commission of India," it had noted.

The CCI's January 13, 2020 probe was ordered on a complaint by Delhi Vyapar Mahasangh, comprising traders dealing in smartphones and related accessories. The CCI is looking into alleged malpractices by the two companies, including deep discounting and tie-ups with preferred sellers on their platforms.

Challenging the order, the two e-commerce giants had approached the Karnataka High Court but a single judge bench of Justice P S Dinesh Kumar had dismissed it saying that it would be unwise to prejudice the issues raised by the petitioners in these writ petitions at this stage and scuttle the investigation. **AGENCIES**

Apple challenges patent troll targeting  
Maps navigation: Report

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Apple in a counter-complaint filed in California is seeking to nullify a new assertion from patent holdings firm Traxcell, which is suing the tech giant in Texas for alleged infringement of intellectual property covering navigation systems, the media reported.

Traxcell, a non-practicing entity, sued Apple in January on claims that the company's Maps product infringes on US Patent Nos. 9,918,196 and 9,549,388.

The IP covers locating and providing directional assistance to devices on a mobile network and hardware that facilitates such capabilities, reports AppleInsider. It appears, however, that Traxcell is attempting to slip in claims from a third, heretofore unmentioned invention in US Patent No. 10,820,147 for a "Mobile wireless device providing off-line and on-line geographic navigation information".

As explained by Apple in a complaint filed with the US District Court for the Northern District of California, Traxcell served the iPhone maker with its preliminary infringement



contentions as related to the lawsuit in Texas. Despite not asserting the 147 patent in its original filing, the NPE included attached claims in the document and in July said it intends to assert the IP against Apple, the report said.

On Wednesday, Traxcell sent Apple a draft complaint set for filing in the Western District of Texas. Apple is looking to win a declaratory judgment that it does not infringe on the '147 property. "This Court should not allow the threat of a future lawsuit and uncertainty surrounding Traxcell's allegations to harm and cause unpredictability to Apple's business," Apple asserts.

Apple lists several reasons why Maps does not infringe on the '147 patent, mostly leaning on the fact that it does not own or operate the cellular network through which its devices access mapping tools. That stipulation is detailed in multiple claims of the '147 property, Apple argues.

As for jurisdiction, Apple said California is the appropriate venue given Traxcell continues to communicate with the company's offices in the state, the report said.

Further, one of the named inventors of the '147 patent participated in prosecution activities while living in Redondo Beach, Apple alleges. **AGENCIES**

Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba fires manager  
accused of sexually assaulting employee

**SHANGHAI:** Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding Ltd has fired a manager who allegedly sexually assaulted a female employee and will establish policies to prevent sexual harassment, Chief Executive Daniel Zhang said.

The manager at Alibaba's City Retail unit, which offers grocery delivery from local supermarkets, "has been fired and will never be rehired," Zhang said in a memo published on Alibaba's intranet that was seen by Reuters and later made public.

The man told management there were "intimate acts" with the employee when she was inebriated, Zhang said in the memo, adding that the police are investigating the matter.

Reuters was unable to reach the individual for comment. "Alibaba Group has a zero-tolerance policy against sexual misconduct, and ensuring a safe workplace for all our employees is Alibaba's top priority," a company spokesperson told Reuters when asked about the memo.

Over the weekend, a female staffer posted an 11-page account on Alibaba's intranet in which she said her supervisor and a client sexually assaulted her while on a business trip, and that managers had failed to take action.

Threads related to the in-



cident subsequently ranked among the top-trending on Weibo, China's Twitter-esque microblog, which has been alight with discussion of the #MeToo anti-sexual harassment movement following a celebrity sex scandal last week.

Zhang said the City Retail unit's president and human resources head had resigned over the incident, and that Alibaba's chief people officer has "received a demerit".

Investigations into other individuals referred to in the victim's account are ongoing, Zhang added in the memo.

Alibaba will conduct company-wide training for the prevention of sexual harassment and launch a channel for staff to report incidents, Zhang said in the memo. It will also issue a formal, zero-tolerance anti-sexual harassment policy.

Zhang also said Alibaba is staunchly opposed to "the ugly culture of forced drinking".

The memo detailed the victim's account of the incident, in which she recalled superiors ordering her to drink alcohol with coworkers during dinner on a business trip. "Regardless of gender, whether it is a request made by a customer or supervisor, our employees our empowered to reject it," Zhang said in the memo. "This incident is a humiliation for all Alibaba employees. We must rebuild, and we must change," he said. On a group chat on Alibaba's workplace messaging app DingTalk dedicated to the issue, staff have demanded justice for the victim and rigorous measures to prevent sexual harassment, an employee told Reuters. **AGENCIES**

## SpiceJet passengers can now book cabs during flight

**MUMBAI:** Budget carrier SpiceJet said its passengers can now book cabs for airport transfer during their flight, using the airline's in-flight entertainment platform SpiceScreen.

In the first phase, the new service will be available to passengers arriving at the Delhi airport, starting August 12. The airline will further extend the service to all major airports, including Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Goa, Chennai, Kol-

kata, Ahmedabad and Pune in a phased manner.

This first-of-its-kind initiative in the domestic aviation industry would help the passengers avoid any waiting for their transport, post-arrival at the cab transfer area, the airline said.

Once a passenger books a cab on SpiceScreen, they will get the cab-booking OTP message via SMS, WhatsApp and automated inbound call confirmation on their mobile phone on arrival.

It will also allow customers the flexibility to pay via any payment options (online or cash) at the end of the journey, it added.

SpiceJet launched SpiceScreen, a complimentary in-flight entertainment system in August last year, which is can be accessed on any of the passengers' handheld devices, including a smartphone, tablet or laptop, by simply connecting to the onboard wireless network. **AGENCIES**

Coal India net profit rises 37 p c  
to Rs 3,170 crore in June quarter

**NEW DELHI:** Coal India announced its April-June quarter results for the financial year 2021-22 reporting a net profit of Rs 3,170 crore on a consolidated basis, compared to Rs 2,079 crore in the corresponding period last year. The state-owned coal mining and refining company's net profit increased 52 per cent year-on-year mostly driven by revenue and operating income.

Coal India's revenue from operations in the first quarter of the current fiscal stood at Rs 25,282 crore, compared to Rs 18,486 crore in the same quarter last year, marking a growth of 36 per cent year-on-year. The country's largest coal mining firm produced 123.98 million tonnes of raw coal in the April-June quarter, compared to 121.04 million tonnes of production in the corresponding period last fiscal. The company's sales in the



June quarter stood at Rs 23,293.65 crore, compared to Rs 17,007.10 crore in the year-ago period, according to a regulatory filing by the company to the stock exchanges.

Coal India's total expenses in the June quarter stood at Rs 21,626.48 crore, compared to Rs 16,470.64 crore in the corresponding quarter last year, registering a rise of 31 per cent year-on-year. The sharp increase in expenses during the quarter was due to the cost of raw materials.

The company said in its statement that it will continue to closely monitor any material changes arising out of future economic conditions and the resultant impact on its business amid the COVID-19 pandemic. On August 10, shares of Coal India settled 0.73 per cent lower at Rs 142.25 apiece on the BSE. Coal India opened on the BSE at Rs 144.15, inching to an intra day high of Rs 144.25 and an intra day low of Rs 140.85, throughout the trading session. **AGENCIES**

## Facebook paid \$400 Million for a firm it may now be forced to sell

**CALIFORNIA:** Britain might require Facebook to sell GIF website Giphy after the country's competition regulator said its investigation found the deal between the two companies would hurt the display advertising market.

Facebook, the world's largest social media company, bought Giphy, a website for making and sharing animated images, or GIFs, in May last year to integrate it with its photo-sharing app, Instagram. The deal was pegged at \$400 million by Axios.

The UK's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) began a probe into the deal in January, and in April referred the deal to an in-depth investigation.

"Giphy's takeover could see Facebook withdrawing GIFs from competing platforms or



requiring more user data in order to access them. It also removes a potential challenger to Facebook," said Stuart McIntosh, chair of the independent investigation for the CMA. Another major provider of GIFs is Google's Tenor.

The CMA found that, before the Facebook deal, Giphy was considering expanding its paid advertising services offered in the United States to other countries, including the UK. However, Facebook terminated

Giphy's ad partnerships following the deal, according to the regulator.

"We disagree with the CMA's preliminary findings, which we do not believe to be supported by the evidence. As we have demonstrated, this merger is in the best interest of people and businesses in the UK - and around the world," a Facebook spokesperson said.

The representative added that the California-based company would continue to work with the CMA. Giphy declined to comment.

This is not the first time the CMA has raised concerns about major deals. The \$9.2 billion eBay-Adeventa deal has caught its attention, and the CMA has asked the new owners of supermarket chain Asda to fix fuel competition concerns. **AGENCIES**

Despite net loss  
in June quarter,  
Zomato's order book  
crosses 1 billion

**NEW DELHI:** The country's leading food aggregator - Zomato, which announced its first quarterly earnings update since its stellar stock market debut in July, delivered its one billionth order last week, according to Deepinder Goyal, Co-founder, and Chief Executive Officer, Zomato. In a blog on August 10, Mr Goyal said that it took Zomato six years to achieve the milestone. He added that more than 10 per cent of these billion orders were delivered only in the last three months.

In the June quarter, the company's India food delivery business reported the highest ever gross order value (GOV), transacting users, the number of orders, active restaurant partners, as well as active delivery partners to date in any quarter in its history. Zomato's India food delivery's gross order value in the April-June quarter grew by 37 per cent to Rs 4,540 crore on a sequential basis, compared to Rs 3,310 crore in the preceding January-March quarter.

The gross order value is the total monetary value of all food delivery orders placed online on the platform in India including taxes, customer delivery charges, gross of all discounts, excluding tips. Zomato reported a net loss of Rs 356 crore on a consolidated basis in the first quarter of the current fiscal, compared to Rs 99.8 crore in the year-ago period, due to higher expenses and impact on the dining-out business due to the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, Zomato reported a jump in revenues in the June quarter as its revenue from operations stood at Rs 844 crore, compared to Rs 266 crore in the corresponding quarter last year, marking a three-fold increase year-on-year, driven by growth in its core food delivery business. **AGENCIES**

## DoT engages with banks to find solution to stress in telecom sector

**NEW DELHI:** The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has initiated discussions with banks to address financial stress in the telecom sector, particularly Vodafone Idea Ltd (VIL) that urgently requires fund infusion to stay afloat.

There was a meeting of DOT officials and senior bankers on the issue of Vodafone, sources said, adding that banks have been asked to look for a solution within the prudential guidelines.

According to sources, senior officials from the country's biggest lenders State Bank of India and Bank of Baroda were also present among others in the meeting. More such meetings are expected to take place in the coming days, they said.

Meanwhile, the Finance Ministry has asked public sector banks to collate and submit data related to their debt exposure to

the telecom sector in general and VIL in particular.

Lenders, both public and private, stare at a loss of Rs 1.8 lakh crore in case VIL collapses. A large part of the loans to the lender is in the form of guarantees with public sector banks having a lion's share of the debt. Among the private sector lenders, Yes Bank and IDFC First Bank may be impacted the most. As a precursor, some private lenders with a funded exposure have already started making provisions.

For example, IDFC First Bank has marked the account of VIL as stressed and has made provisions of 15 per cent (Rs 487 crore) against the outstanding exposure of Rs 3,244 crore (funded and non-funded).

"This provision translates to 24 per cent of the funded exposure on this account. The said



account is current and has no overdues as of June 30, 2021," the lender said in its Q1 FY22 investor presentation, referring to the account as "one large telecom account".

According to official data, VIL had an adjusted gross revenue (AGR) liability of Rs 58,254 crore out of which the company has paid Rs 7,854.37 crore and Rs 50,399.63 crore

is outstanding.

The company's gross debt, excluding lease liabilities, stood at Rs 1,80,310 crore as of March 31, 2021. The amount included deferred spectrum payment ob-

ligations of Rs 96,270 crore and debt from banks and financial institutions of Rs 23,080 crore apart from the AGR liability.

In a backdrop of such a large liabilities, both the promoter Vodafone Plc (45 per cent stake) and Aditya Birla Group (27 per cent stake) expressed their inability to bring in additional capital. Writing a letter to Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba in June, Aditya Birla Group Chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla said investors are not willing to invest in the company in the absence of clarity on AGR liability, adequate moratorium on spectrum payments and most importantly floor pricing regime being above the cost of service.

"It is with a sense of duty towards the 27 crore Indians connected by VIL, I am more than willing to hand over my stake in the company to any entity-public sector/government /domestic

financial entity or any other that the government may consider worthy of keeping the company as a going concern," Birla said in the letter.

Birla has quit the post of non-executive chairman post of the floundering telecom giant last week. Giving relief to Vodafone on one front, the government has proposed to withdraw all back tax demands on companies with passage of 'The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021'.

The 2012 legislation, commonly referred to as the retrospective tax law, was enacted after the Supreme Court in January that year rejected proceedings brought by tax authorities against Vodafone International Holdings BV for its failure to deduct withholding tax from USD 11.1 billion paid to Hutchison Telecommunications in 2007 for buying out its 67 per cent

stake in a wholly-owned Cayman Island incorporated subsidiary that indirectly held interests in Vodafone India Ltd.

The Finance Act 2012, which amended various provisions of the Income Tax Act, 1961 with retrospective effect, contained provisions intended to tax any gain on transfer of shares in a non-Indian company, which derives substantial value from underlying Indian assets, such as Vodafone's transaction with Hutchison in 2007 or the internal reorganisation of the India business that Cairn Energy did in 2006-07 before listing it on local bourses. Using that law, tax authorities in January 2013 slapped Vodafone with a tax demand of Rs 14,200 crore, including principal tax of Rs 7,990 crore and interest. This was in February 2016 updated to Rs 22,100 crore plus interest. **AGENCIES**

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# Govt ready to do everything required to revive economy: FM Sitharaman

# Debt burden of Rs 1.97 lakh crore not a cause of concern: Nirmala Sitharaman



**NEW DELHI:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman assured India Inc that the government is ready to do everything required to revive and support economic growth.

There are indicators which suggest that the economy is buoyant and recovery is taking place post lifting of Covid-19 restrictions by states, she said while addressing the CII Annual Meeting 2021.

She further said foreign direct investment has seen a growth of 37 per cent so far this fiscal, while forex reserves increased to USD 620 billion

## Govt doing reforms out of conviction, not compulsion: PM Modi at CII's annual meet

**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the country's economic growth is picking up pace again and the domestic industry needs to enhance its risk-taking appetite.

He also said that taking reforms is a matter of conviction for the government, which is ready to take all risks in the national interest. "We have taken bold decisions. Reforms continued even during pandemic. The government is doing reforms not out of compulsion but out of conviction," he said while addressing the CII's annual meeting.

Assuring all support to the industry, Modi said that India is receiving record foreign



direct investment (FDI) because of reforms done in the last few years.

He added that now Indians want made in India goods irrespective of the origin of the company that is producing the goods. On growth of startups in the country, he said India now has 60 unicorns, 21 of them reaching that status in the last few months. **AGENCIES**

as of July.

The Narendra Modi government has shown commitment to reforms even during the

pandemic, she said, adding last year the Centre announced farm laws and labour reforms, among others. **AGENCIES**

**NEW DELHI:** The Government of India has a debt burden of Rs 1,97,45,670 crore which is 60.5 per cent of the GDP as per the provisional figures available for the year 2020-21. However the Centre has said that it is "not a great cause of concern" as it has adopted various debt consolidation measures.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman while giving an oral response to a question raised in Lok Sabha during Question Hour, seeking to know the debt burden on the country and whether it was a matter of concern for the Government, said, "towards overcoming the debt burden, Government's focus is to reduce fiscal deficit from 6.8 per cent of GDP in 2021-22 to below 4.5 per cent of GDP by 2025-26. Debt consolidation through increasing buoyancy of tax revenues through improved compliance, increased receipts from monetisation of assets including Public Sector Enterprises and land are the additional steps involved to overcome the debt burden."



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She added that these steps coupled with adequate limits on the borrowings of state governments, "the present debt is not a great cause of concern". To another question on whether the Government has assessed its repayment capacity of the public debt, the Finance Minister said that "the strategy of reducing debt involving reduction of fiscal deficit, increasing buoyancy of taxes through improved compliance and increased receipts from monetisation of assets, including public sector enterprises and land, ensures the repayment capacity of the Government". **AGENCIES**

## NEWS BRIEF

**Tencent, SoftBank-led funding pushes Argentina's Uala to US\$2.45b valuation**

**BENGALURU:** China's on-line giant, Tencent Holdings, and SoftBank Group Corp's Latin America-focused fund led an investment round for Argentine firm Uala which took its valuation to US\$2.45 billion, the fintech company said on Friday. The US\$350 million investment comes several months after Uala announced its expansion into Mexico, as it tries to capitalise on the interest around the fast-growing fintech industry in Latin America. Launched in October 2017, Uala offers a Mastercard branded prepaid card and an app that allows users access to a number of financial services including sending and receiving money, online shopping, withdrawing cash at ATMs and requesting loans. The digital banking startup, founded by Harvard University graduate Pierpaolo Barbieri, has a headcount of 1,000, and aims to raise it to 1,500 by the end of the year. In an interview in May, Mr Barbieri said Uala could eventually expand into Peru, Paraguay, Colombia, Chile, US and Europe. In June, the company said it had issued more than three million Mastercard branded prepaid cards in Argentina. Uala is also trying to expand through the acquisition of rival Wilobank, the first fully digital bank approved by the central bank in Argentina. Investment giant SoftBank has doubled down on its bets in South America, with the Japanese conglomerate investing in startups including Mexico's Clip and Brazil's Creditas. **AGENCIES**

**Intel discloses small stake in crypto exchange Coinbase**

**BENGALURU:** Intel Corp on Friday disclosed a stake worth less than a million dollars in US cryptocurrency exchange Coinbase Global. The chipmaker held about 3,014 shares of Coinbase's Class A common stock as of June 30, Intel said in a regulatory filing. The Coinbase shares would be worth around US\$788,191, based on trading price of US\$261.51 at 3.01 pm ET on Friday. Intel did not immediately respond to Reuters request for comment. Major players have doubled down on crypto holdings including star stock picker Cathie Wood and Tesla chief Elon Musk. One of the largest cryptocurrency exchanges in the world, Coinbase went public through a direct listing in April, which saw its valuation rise to as high as US\$112 billion on the first day of trading. **AGENCIES**

## Rupee gains to 74.25 against Dollar amid heavy buying in domestic equities

**NEW DELHI:** After extending losses in the past few sessions, the rupee strengthened by 19 paise against the US dollar on August 12, to settle at 74.25 (provisional) as heavy buying in domestic equities and weakness in the American currency boosted investor's sentiments. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the domestic unit opened at 74.26 against the dollar and registered an intra-day high of 74.24. It witnessed a low of 74.33 during the session. In an early trade session, the domestic unit gained 17 paise to 74.27 against the greenback.

The rupee closed at 74.25 against the American currency, registering a rise of 19 paise compared to its previous close. On August 11, the local unit settled at 74.44 against the dollar. According to forex traders, fresh foreign capital inflows also supported the rupee. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, declined 0.04 per cent to 92.87.

Moving forward, the USD-INR pair is likely to further

squeeze down its momentum in a range of 74.10-74.90 with an immediate resistance of 74.50. The RBI and importers both got another chance to cover the dollar at lower levels.

However, this could be an opportunity for exporters too as they could preutilize their forwards. Overall, we are expecting that USDINR should trade further in a sideways range before giving a breakout. The Reserve Bank of India continues to interfere in currency markets in order to keep the rupee from rising too much. Despite the fact that India's economic data has improved, the RBI has a clear preference for a stronger USD/INR.

Prices didn't close below 74.53-74.51 throughout the day and remained consolidating in the range of 74.53-74.61 throughout the day. We can also see a "Bearish RSI Divergence" on intraday charts where prices are making highs of similar level and RSI is making lower highs, indicating towards the lack of strength among buyers. **AGENCIES**

## Bankers in a huddle as Court rulings threaten over \$6 billion in loans

**NEW DELHI:** Informal talks are taking place to deal with the fall-out from two rulings by Supreme Court that threaten the repayment of loans totalling nearly 500 billion rupees (\$6.73 billion) to some of the country's largest banks, bankers close to the matter say.

Any failure to recoup the money adds to stress in the banking sector, which is already dealing with an increased level of bad loans and reduced profits because of the impact of the pandemic.

Last week, Supreme Court effectively blocked Future Group's \$3.4 billion sale of

retail assets to Reliance Industries, jeopardising nearly \$2.69 billion the retail conglomerate owes to banks.

That ruling was delivered days after the Supreme Court rejected a petition to allow telecom companies to approach the Department of Telecommunications to renegotiate outstanding dues in a long-running dispute with telecom players.

That raises concerns, bankers say, over whether Vodafone Idea will repay some 300 billion rupees (\$4.04 billion) it owes to Indian banks and billions of dollars more in long-term dues to the government. **AGENCIES**

## Income Tax Dept to refund excess interest, late fee paid while filing FY21 ITR

**NEW DELHI:** The Income Tax Department said it will refund the excess interest and late fee paid by taxpayers due to software error while filing ITR for 2020-21.

The last date for filing ITR for last financial year has been extended till September 30, 2021, from July 31 to give taxpayers compliance relief during the pandemic.

However, some taxpayers complained that interest and late fee was charged while filing income tax return (ITR) after July 31, 2021.

The department in a tweet said the ITR software was rectified on August 1 itself to remove the error due to incorrect computation of interest under section 234A and late fee under section 234F of Income Tax Act.

"Taxpayers have been advised to use the latest version of the ITR preparation software or file online. If, by any chance, someone has already submitted the ITR with such incorrect interest or late fee, the same will be correctly calculated while processing at CPC-ITR and the excess amount paid, if any, will be refunded in the normal course," the I-T department tweeted.

Nangia & Co LLP Partner



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Shailesh Kumar said having errors or bugs in ITR or any other e-filing utility is a common phenomenon.

After realising the errors/ bugs, the Income Tax Department releases new version of such e-filing utility, removing the error/ bug.

"Thus, taxpayers are always advised to check the latest e-filing utility, while filing their ITR. If any errors are still found, then it must be reported to the concerned authorities for necessary resolution," Kumar said. **AGENCIES**

## Power Finance Corporation net profit records 28% jump for June-end quarter

**NEW DELHI:** Power Finance Corporation (PFC), the state-owned financing arm of the power sector has recorded a 28 per cent increase in its net profit for June-end quarter of the current fiscal which stood at Rs 4,554 crore, owing to jump in revenues.

The company had recorded a net profit of Rs 3,557.23 crore in the same period of the corresponding year, i.e. the April-June quarter of 2020-21. PFC's total income in April-June quarter of 2021-22 went up to Rs 18,973.93 crore from Rs 16,932.24 crore in the same period a year ago.

The company's board also cleared an interim dividend at the rate of Rs 2.25 per equity share on the face value of the paid-up equity shares of Rs 10 each for 2021-22, an official statement said.

The capital adequacy ratio of the company was 21.16 per cent as on June 30, 2021. The capital adequacy is at a comfortable level with sufficient cushion over and above the prescribed regulatory limits, it stated further.

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cent as on June 30, 2021. The capital adequacy is at a comfortable level with sufficient cushion over and above the prescribed regulatory limits, it stated further.

"The revamped distribution sector scheme with an outlay of Rs 3,03,758 crore provides significant business opportunity to the company going forward," it informed.

PFC Chairman and Managing Director R S Dhillon said in a statement, "we have registered 34 per cent increase in our profits, and our performance this quarter once again showcases the inherent strength of PFC's strong business. I am also particularly pleased that with our consistency performance, we have been able to provide dividend return to our shareholders in the first quarter itself." **AGENCIES**

## Lower lending rates has reduced burden on households: Shaktikanta Das

**New Delhi:** The significant reduction in lending rate on personal housing and commercial real estate sector augurs well for the economy, as these segments are also employment-intensive, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said. While announcing the third bi-monthly monetary policy review, he said, the interest rate transmission has improved.

"The efficacy of RBI's monetary policy measures and actions is reflected in the significant improvement in transmission dur-

ing the current easing cycle. The reduction in repo rate by 250 basis points since February 2019, has resulted in a cumulative decline by 217 basis points in the weighted average lending rate (WALR) on fresh rupee loans," he said.

The Governor also said that the reduction on lending rate has reduced the burden on households. "Domestic borrowing costs have eased, including interest rates on market instruments like corporate bonds, debentures, CPs, CDs and T-bills. "In the credit market, transmis-



sion to lending rates has been stronger for MSMEs, housing and large industries. The low interest rate regime has also helped the household sector reduce the burden of loan servicing," he said.

The significant reduction in interest rates on personal housing loans and loans to the commercial real estate sector augurs well for the economy, as these sectors have extensive backward and forward linkages and are employment intensive, he added.

With regard to the shift from LIBOR as a bench-

mark for export credit, the Governor said the transition away from London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR) is a significant event that poses certain challenges for banks and the financial system. The Reserve Bank has been engaging with banks and market bodies to proactively take steps and the central bank has also issued advisories to ensure a smooth transition for regulated entities and financial markets.

In this context, it has been decided to amend the guidelines related to

export credit in foreign currency and restructuring of derivative contracts, he said. "Banks will be permitted to extend export credit in foreign currency using any other widely accepted Alternative Reference Rate in the currency concerned.

"Since the change in reference rate from LIBOR is a "force majeure" event, banks are also being advised that change in reference rate from LIBOR/ LIBOR related benchmarks to an Alternative Reference Rate will not be treated as restructuring," he said. **AGENCIES**

## NEWSBRIEF

Passenger vehicle sales in India rise 45 per cent in July

**NEW DELHI:** Passenger vehicle wholesales in India increased by 45 per cent to 2,64,442 units in July against 1,82,779 units in the same month last year, auto industry body SIAM said. According to the latest data by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), two-wheeler dispatches from the OEMs to dealerships declined by 2 per cent to 12,53,937 units in July, compared to 12,81,354 units in the year-ago period. Motorcycle sales were at 8,37,096 units last month as against 8,88,520 units in July 2020, down 6 per cent. Scooter sales increased 10 per cent to 3,66,292 units from 3,34,288 units. Similarly, three-wheeler sales surged 41 per cent to 17,888 units last month as against 12,728 units a year ago. The total sales across these categories, excluding commercial vehicles, stood at 15,36,269 units compared to 14,76,861 units in July last year. **AGENCIES**

## Overseas sub-contracted projects may not be tax free in India

**NEW DELHI:** Rendering of service even for international projects would be taxed in India if the location of main contractor is in the country. Such supply will be treated as local supply in this case and chargeable at the applicable GST rates. According to a ruling by the Telangana Authority for Advance Ruling, if the supplier of a service does not have any successive relationship with an overseas recipient of service but the supply is linked to an entity having its headquarters in India, the supply will be deemed to have taken place within the country, and therefore taxable. The ruling had been given on an application of Avantika Contracts that constructed an Institute of Security and Law Enforcement studies at Addu City in the Maldives. The company contended that since the supply of services is outside India, GST should not be applicable on it. **AGENCIES**

## Economic impact of second COVID wave likely to be muted: Finance Ministry

**NEW DELHI:** The finance ministry said the economic impact of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to be muted and there are visible signs of economic rejuvenation. The latest Monthly Economic Review, released by the finance ministry, said the "robust recovery in tax collections cushions the fisc towards meeting the budgeted support to the economy".

It also said the recent seroprevalence results signify that India can reduce the likelihood of severe illness due to COVID-19 if the country sustains the momentum of the vaccination programme. "Having antibodies reduces the probability of acquiring serious illnesses, as is borne by studies. So, any subsequent waves are expected to be mild in terms of severity of disease," the ministry said in the report.

However, it is imperative that COVID-appropriate behaviour and due protocol is



followed. At this juncture, it said, the economy and society are at a crucial inflection point where sustenance of economic recovery, vaccination progress and COVID-19 appropriate behavioural strategies are needed in close synergy with each other.

With the second wave abating in most parts of the country and state governments lifting

the restrictions in phases, there are visible signs of economic rejuvenation since the second half of May, it said. "This resonates with the economic impact of the second wave expected to be muted," the report added.

Noting that inflation has remained above the band of six per cent in May and June, the report said these pressures

are likely to smoothen out in the coming months, with easing of restrictions, progress of southwest monsoon, and recent supply-side policy interventions in pulses and oilseeds market. It said that while systemic liquidity continued to remain in surplus in July, a decline in growth of cash in circulation reflected a shift away from the pandemic-induced precautionary savings. Financial markets demonstrated buoyancy in the month, with post-second wave revival seen in mutual funds, corporate bonds and insurance markets, and volatility in equity markets continuing its downward trajectory.

However, G-sec yield curve steepened mildly owing to inflation pressures, it said. The ministry added that bank credit growth showed encouraging trends with non-food credit growth crossing the 6.5 per cent mark in the fortnight ended July 16 after remaining muted for nine fortnights. **AGENCIES**

## Higher taxes impact auto sector, need to lower GST rates: Revenue Secretary

**NEW DELHI:** Higher taxes on automotive sector have a negative impact and the government needs to look at the solution, Revenue Secretary Tarun Bajaj said.

"I quite agree with automotive sector. Two-wheelers and four-wheelers were not only charged 28 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST) but we also charged cess, which is much more and as I see it will continue for two more years," he said while addressing the annual session of Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

"So all that has a negative impact on the industry. I acknowledge that, but I do not know how to solve that issue."

However, said Bajaj, transparency has been brought into the indirect tax system and the revenue neutral rate has come down significantly



from 15.3 per cent to 11.6 per cent.

Responding to the fact that India's tax-GDP ratio has remained constant, he said the government is focused

on widening the tax base for

which it is not increasing taxes for existing categories of taxpayers to raise revenue.

"The government is looking at unconventional measures

such as matching GST returns with income tax returns to bring the informal and the non-salaried class in the tax net," he said.

On the Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021, Bajaj said it is government policy to give a stable and predictable tax regime to facilitate corporate planning.

Bajaj said the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in formalisation of Indian economy. This is evident from impressive rise in tax revenue from the sector which has helped the government to resist from making calls to tax-payers for payment of advance tax.

The corporate sector posted an excellent performance despite the pandemic which was beyond expectations, he said. **AGENCIES**

## BSE introduces new surveillance measure to curb volatility in mid, small-cap stocks

**NEW DELHI:** To curb excessive volatility in mid and small-cap counters, the BSE has introduced a new surveillance measure for certain stocks having a market capitalisation of less than Rs 1,000 crore.

The new measure, add-on price band framework, will be applicable to companies with a market-capitalisation of less than Rs 1,000 crore and on securities in groups—X, XT, Z, ZP, ZY, and Y, BSE said in a circular.

Under the framework, BSE said "the shortlisted securities, will have 6 monthly, 1 yearly, 2 yearly and 3 yearly price band in place of weekly, monthly, quarterly price band". These add-on price bands will be in addition to the applicable daily price bands of such securities.

The exchange, in a circular on Monday, had said the shortlisted securities will be subjected to additional periodic price limits of weekly, monthly and quarterly.

V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said



that BSE's new surveillance framework with add-on price bands for specified stocks listed exclusively on the exchange is a timely initiative to curb excessive speculative activity in these stocks. "It is a fact that there is froth in the mid and small-cap space. Many stocks in this segment have low liquidity and, therefore, are capable of being manipulated by a group of traders," he added.

According to him, in the present exuberant state of the market, manipulation is easy and appears to be happening. Therefore, this initiative from the BSE is appropriate from the perspective of market integrity.

BSE said that a security placed under add-on price

band framework will remain in the framework for a minimum period of 30 calendar days and will be eligible to move out if it does not qualify the provisions of the framework thereafter. The new framework will come into effect from August 23, the exchange said. The exchange said that review of the shortlisted securities under the framework—inclusion or exclusion—will be carried out on monthly basis.

It further said that shortlisting of securities under framework is purely on account of market surveillance and it should not be construed as an adverse action against the concerned company. "In case of corporate actions of a material nature, like rights issue, bonus issue, merger, amalgamation, takeover etc. the framework shall be applicable on the new adjusted base price." BSE said that the framework will be in addition to all other prevailing surveillance measures being imposed by the exchanges from time to time. **AGENCIES**

## Govt collecting data of people who lost jobs due to pandemic: Minister

**NEW DELHI:** The Government has said that it is collecting data on employment and unemployment with the help of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) to find out the actual number of organised as well as unorganised labourers who lost their employment due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

This response was given by Minister of State for Labour and Employment Rameswar Telu in Lok Sabha, in response to a question on whether the Government has conducted any survey to ascertain the actual number of such labourers and workers who had lost jobs due to the breakout of the infection.

The Labour Ministry was



also asked whether there has been any increase in the number of labourers in the unorganised sector on year to year basis during the last three years.

"The data on employment or unemployment is being collected through PLFS con-

ducted by National Statistical Office (NSO), under the aegis of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. Labour Bureau, an attached office of the ministry has been entrusted with the task of conducting the All India Quarterly Establishment based Employment Survey (AQEES) to capture change in employment in various establishments in the country," the minister informed through a written reply.

The Labour Ministry is also developing a National Database for Unorganised Workers (NDUW) portal seeded with Aadhaar for registration of unorganised workers, the minister informed further. **AGENCIES**

## Karda constructions record 255.03 per cent Qtr growth, PAT ₹6.12cr

DOMINICK RODRIGUES  
Mumbai

Karda Constructions Ltd (KCL), one of India's fastest-growing real estate companies with a predominant focus on the affordable housing segment, reported a whopping 255.03% growth the Quarter ended June 2021.

The company reported Total Revenue of Rs 20.29 crore (14% y-o-y growth), Ebitda at Rs 11.70 crore (106.2% y-o-y growth) and PAT at Rs 6.12 crore, besides Finance Cost reduced by Rs 33.89 lakhs to Rs 3.01 crore.

Noting the company's successful completion and delivery of over 31.18 lakh square feet of saleable area, Naresh Karda, Chairman and Managing Director, Karda Constructions Limited, said that the COVID-19 first wave had prepared the company for emerging through the second wave unscathed and profitable in its real estate recovery.

While the company has a strong project pipeline of Rs 1,185 crore with its 70% projects expected to go live by 2025, Karda said that it had diversified

revenue streams – civil contracts, joint development, government and private contract, besides holding land reserves of 7 lakh square feet with access to prime location across Nashik district and other territories.

Describing Karda Construction Ltd (KARDA) as a client-focused real estate development company with presence of over 25 years in the local construction industry, he highlighted the various projects along with Budget Housing Project that had improved KARDA's presence across all Low, Medium and Premium segments.

Highlighting the driver of its growth being its established and strengthened brand "HARI" that had enabled KARDA to attract positive support for future projects, advance booking, revenue share deals and development rights, he said the result witnessed achievement of the company's best Q1 performance in its history of Sales & Profitability, besides its new launches also aiding in better overall performance.

## Industrial production rises to 13.6% in June due to low base effect

**NEW DELHI:** Industrial production grew by 13.6 per cent in June 2021 from a year earlier, government data showed, August 12, registering a sharp recovery as a result of the base effect due to the COVID-19 lockdown that hit economic activity last year. The industrial output index increased to 122.6 in June from 107.9 in the corresponding month last year. Industrial production - or the factory output, gauged by the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), rose 29.3 per cent in May on jump in manufacturing activity.

The indices for the mining, manufacturing, and electricity sectors for June 2021 stand at 105.5, 121.0, and 169.1, respectively, according to the industrial production data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

The manufacturing sector, which comprises 77.63 per cent of the index of industrial production, grew 13 per cent in June 2021, compared to a de-growth of 17 per cent in the year-ago period. The mining output also climbed 23.1 per cent and power generation increased by 8.3 per cent.



The output of capital goods - a barometer of investment, grew 25.7 per cent in June, compared to a de-growth of 37.4 per cent in the year-ago period. The output of consumer durables increased 30.1 cent last month, compared to a decline of 34.8 cent in the year-ago period. The output of consumer non-durable goods production fell by 4.5 per cent in June 2021, compared to a growth of 6.9 per cent in the year-ago period.

Moreover, the country's output of the eight core sectors - also known as the infrastructural output, grew 8.9 per cent in June 2021, according to

government data released on July 30. The infrastructure output, comprising the eight core sectors including coal, crude oil, electricity, among others recorded a growth of 25.3 per cent in the April-June period of the current fiscal, compared to a de-growth of 23.8 per cent in the corresponding period last year.

The eight core industries comprise 40.27 per cent of the weight of items that are included in the industrial output or the IIP. The growth in the infrastructure output was led by the steel sector, followed by the natural gas and coal sectors in June 2021. **AGENCIES**

## Govt to complete Air India, Bharat Petroleum disinvestment in 2021-22

**NEW DELHI:** The government is aiming to complete privatisation of public carrier Air India and State-owned refiner Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) during the current financial year, a senior Finance Ministry official said.

Addressing the annual session of industry body Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Secretary in the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM), Tuhin Kant Pandey said that the government has also received a lot of interest from prospective bidders on Shipping Corporation of India, Pawan Hans and Neelachal Ispat Nigam Limited.

"We are now at the second stage of due diligence and financial bidding, which we will be able to complete in this financial year," said Pandey. He said IDBI Bank's strategic disinvestment has also been set into motion with the

Cabinet approval. The expression of interest is expected for Container Corporation of India (CONCOR) as soon as the land lease policy is finalised.

"The government is working on a Rs 6 lakh crore asset monetisation plan that will include pipelines of Power Grid Corporation of India and national highways," he informed further, adding that the monetisation plan covers all sorts of assets from power lines to national highways. The Secretary said that tenders for developing railway stations through the public private partnership (PPP) route, too have been announced.

The asset monetisation programme of the Centre is aimed at generating funds by leasing public assets to private bodies for a specific period of time. Even sports grounds and stadia like the iconic Jawaharlar Nehru Stadium in the national capital are also being monetised under this programme. **AGENCIES**

## Retail inflation likely cooled to 5.78 per cent in July: Poll

**NEW DELHI:** Retail inflation likely slowed to a three-month low in July, bringing it back within the central bank's target range, on falling food prices and an easing of supply chain disruptions, a Reuters poll found.

The August 5-9 poll of 48 economists showed consumer price inflation eased to 5.78 per cent last month from 6.26 per cent in June.

If realized, it would be the lowest inflation print since May and within the Reserve Bank of India's tolerance band of 2 to 6 per cent - although well above the mid-point.

"There's a material drop in edible oil and palm oil

prices after tariff reductions and global oil price volatility has eased as well," said Rajni Thakur, chief economist at RBL Bank.

"The inflation trajectory will however continue to remain on the upper end of the RBI's target range for the current quarter given the underlying core pressures." Seven economists in the poll expected inflation at 6 per cent or above.

Although the economic reopening eased some supply chain disruption, cooling inflation, the central bank raised its forecast for the fiscal year 2021-22 to 5.7 per cent at its monetary policy meeting on Friday.



"The central bank has built in a sufficient buffer for potential upside risks with this revision which might mate-

A deadly second wave of coronavirus infections in April and May led to many states reimposing lockdowns, constraining supply chains and leading to a spike in inflation.

However, that did not prompt the Monetary Policy Committee to raise the key repo rate from 4.0 per cent this month as the focus remained more on containing the economic fallout from the pandemic. The RBI also retained its growth estimate at 9.5 per cent for this fiscal year.

"The MPC's confidence on the growth outlook has clearly improved since their June meeting," noted Gaurav Kapur, chief economist at IndusInd

Bank. "While a recovery in economic activity is slowly gaining traction from the bottom of May slack remains in the economy and uncertainty around the pandemic is still quite high, even with a gradual improvement in the pace of vaccination between June and July," Kapur said.

The poll also showed industrial output likely rose 13.5 per cent in June compared with 29.3 per cent in May.

India's infrastructure output, which is comprised of eight industries and accounts for about 40 per cent of the total factories' production, rose 8.9 per cent in June from a year earlier. **AGENCIES**



**S**habana Azmi is over the moon as her short film 'Sheer Qorma' has been selected for a screening at the

Indian Film Festival of Melbourne 2021 (IFFM). Talking about the movie, the veteran actress says love shouldn't be judged, restrictive and confined. Shabana said: "Love

shouldn't be judged, love shouldn't be restrictive, love shouldn't be confined. 'Sheer Qorma' is one such tender story of the freedom to choose who we love." "We are

extremely happy to see our labour of love transcending across borders and getting recognition at a globally celebrated platform like Indian Film Festival of Melbourne. In these gloomy times, this has come as a ray of happiness and hope," added the actress.

Directed by Faraz Arif Ansari, 'Sheer Qorma' is a story of belonging and

only the best platforms and I am excited that the Australian audiences will get to see our powerful story of love and acceptance on the big screen in Melbourne," Divya said.

Swara shared that she is "super excited" that 'Sheer Qorma' will have an Australian premiere.

"This is such an honour for I feel 'Sheer Qorma' is a film that needs to be plat-

## Shabana says love shouldn't be 'judged, restrictive, confined'

acceptance, identity and family, and how it comes together under one roof, as resilient, queer Muslim women and non-binary characters of colour, choose to embrace love that exists beyond their personal beliefs and social moralities.

The film also stars Divya Dutta and Swara Bhasker. Divya calls it a "big deal" for 'Sheer Qorma' to be selected at the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne.

"Sheer Qorma" deserves all the accolades and love that it has been rightfully getting because it deserves

formed well and celebrated across the globe for it champions a story of love and acceptance that should reach out to most audiences across the world for it is such a universal tale of our times," Swara said.

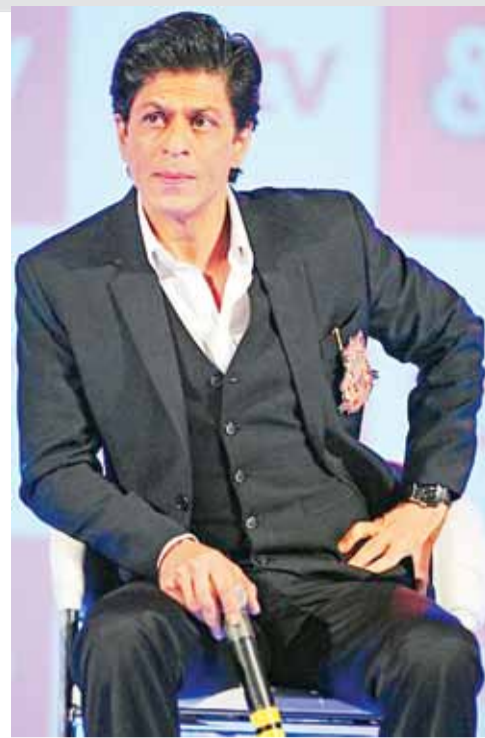
Director Faraz Arif Ansari chipped in and expressed his excitement. "I am also thrilled that Masterchef Australia's finalist Kishwar Chowdhury will be presenting the film in Melbourne... I am most certain that 'Sheer Qorma' is going to win many hearts in Melbourne!" Ansari concluded.

AGENCIES

## POTPOURRI

# SRK thanks 'Chak De India' girls for making him the 'gunda'

THE FILM WAS DIRECTED BY SHIMIT AMIN AND PRODUCED BY ADITYA CHOPRA



**A**ctor Shah Rukh Khan expressed his gratitude to the cast of his 2007 film 'Chak De India' through his social media accounts.

The actor, who played the role of Kabir Khan, coach of the Indian women's hockey team, expressed his love as the film completed 14 years of release on August 10.

The actor uploaded a selfie and captioned it: "Just felt like thanking all the young ladies of Chak De India for making the film such a beautiful experience. And Shimit, Adi, @yrf, #MirRanjanNegi, @jaideepsahni, @sudeepdop, @Sukhwinder-music and all involved with this labour of love for making me the 'Gunda' of the film."

The film was directed by Shimit Amin and produced by Aditya Chopra. 'Chak De India' traced the struggle of Indian women's hockey team as they battled sexism and personal issues and won the World Cup. Meanwhile, Shah Rukh is shooting for his next film, 'Pathan' here. AGENCIES



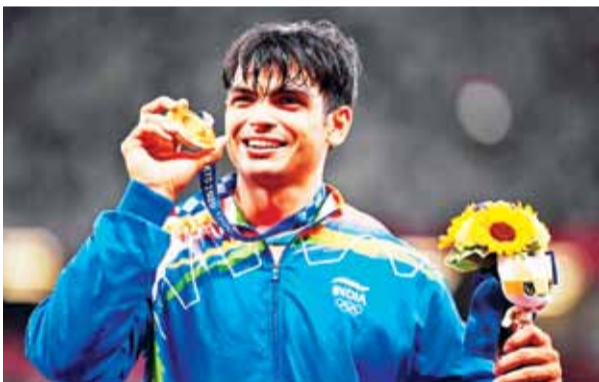
## After Olympic gold, Neeraj Chopra jumps 14 places to 2nd in world rankings

**NEW DELHI:** India's Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra gained a whopping 14 places to occupy the second spot in the men's javelin throw world rankings after his historic gold in the Tokyo Games.

The 23-year-old Chopra, who sent the spear to 87.58m to clinch India's maiden Olympics athletics medal on Saturday, was at a lowly 16 before the Tokyo Games with an average performance score of 1224.

But in the latest rankings issued by World Athletics, Chopra found himself at the second spot with 1315 average performance score behind German Johannes Vetter (1396), who finished a lowly ninth in the Olympics final after coming into the Games as the gold medal contender.

Chopra collected 1296 performance points for topping the Olympic qualification round on August 4 and 1559 points for winning the gold in the final.



Three other events of this year—Federation Cup, Indian Grand Prix-3 and Kuortane Games (Finland) -- where he had come up with big throws were also considered in the ranking process.

Vetter, however, remained on top of the world rankings despite failing to make it to the last eight in the Olympic finals as he was dominating before the Tokyo Games with seven 90m

plus throws this year.

Marcin Krukowski of Poland, who also had failed to make it to the Olympics final despite having the season's second-best throw of 89.55m, was third in the latest world rankings with an average performance score of 1302.

Tokyo Olympics silver winner Jakub Vadlejch of Czech Republic was fourth with a score of 1298. AGENCIES

## Messi dreams of delivering elusive Champions League crown for PSG

**PARIS:** Lionel Messi dashed any thoughts of him taking it easy in his later years as he set his sights on leading new club Paris St Germain to their first ever Champions League title at his presentation in France on August 11.

The Argentine forward, 34, had agreed to stay at former club Barcelona after his deal expired at the end of June, only for the Spanish club to admit they could no longer afford him last week.

He signed a two-year deal with an option for a third with the Parisians on Tuesday.

PSG have hoovered up domestic titles since the investment of their deep-pocketed owners Qatar Sports Investment in 2011. However, they have never won the Champions League, while Messi has won it four times, the last one coming in 2015.

"That's why I am here (to win trophies). It's an ambitious club," Messi, who will wear the No. 30 jersey - which was his first squad number in senior football at Barcelona in 2006, told a news conference.

"You can see they're ready to fight for everything."

"My dream is to win another Champions League, and I think this is the ideal place to be to do that." The Argentine conceded he did not know when he would be able to make his debut given he has not played since winning the Copa America with his country last month.

"I'm coming back from holiday. I need a bit of a pre-season and get myself going. Hopefully debuting can be soon but I can't give you a date. It's up to the coaches."



FRIENDS REUNITED

Messi will join former Barca team mate Neymar in Paris.

The Brazilian left Catalonia for the French capital in a world record 222 million euro (\$259.94 million) deal in 2017, however never hid his desire to link up with his close

**FAN CRAZE**

Eyebrows were raised as to how PSG could afford to sign Messi within UEFA's Financial Fair Play (FFP) regulations. However, club chairman and CEO Nasser Al-Khelaifi, who was sat alongside Messi, insisted the deal was well within their economic scope. "We are always attentive to Financial Fair Play. It's the first thing we check with the commercial, financial and legal people to see if we can do it before signing someone," he said.

"I think the media need to focus on the positives and not just the negatives of these moves, but what positives he brings. He's an unbelievable asset to the club." Al-Khelaifi's point was backed up by thousands of excited fans who had gathered outside the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris, banging on drums, waving flags and chanting Messi's name. AGENCIES

## Nearly four lakh people newly displaced in Afghanistan by conflict since start of year, says United Nation

**UNITED NATIONS:** Nearly four lakh people have been newly displaced in Afghanistan since the start of the year, with a huge spike from May, a spokesperson for UN chief Antonio Guterres has said, amid the deteriorating security situation in the war-torn country.

The US has already pulled back most of its forces from Afghanistan and is looking to complete the drawdown by August 31, ending nearly two decades of its military presence in the country.

Afghanistan has been witnessing a series of terror attacks since the US began withdrawing its troops on May 1. The Taliban insurgents have overrun one-quarter of Afghanistan's provincial capitals.

"Since the start of the year, nearly 390,000 people have been newly displaced by conflict across the country, with a huge spike since May," Spokesman for the Secretary General Guterres, Stephane Dujarric said at the daily press briefing on Wednesday.



food, household items, water and sanitation support.

Dujarric said most of the internally displaced persons staying in Kabul are hosted by friends and family, but a growing number are staying in the open. Ten teams were deployed to assess the situation for people staying outside in parks and open spaces.

"They identified an additional 4,522 displaced men, women and children in need of shelter, food, sanitation and drinking water. A temporary health clinic and mobile health teams are providing health services to these people," he said.

Despite a worsening security situation, humanitarian agencies are staying and delivering to people in need, reaching 7.8 million people in the first six

months of this year.

"The ability of the United Nations and local and international NGOs (non-governmental organisations) to stay and deliver depends on the removal of bureaucratic hurdles by the parties, staff safety, and additional funds being urgently mobilised," he said adding that the USD 1.3 billion humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan remains just 38 per cent funded, leaving an almost USD 800 million shortfall.

The Secretary General's Personal Envoy on Afghanistan and Regional Issues Jean Arnault is in Doha where meetings between representatives of Afghanistan and the Taliban, other regional representatives and envoys are continuing in different formats. "I'm not in a

position to give you details, but I can tell you that he is there and fully engaged," Dujarric said.

Replying to a question on whether there are any plans by the UN offices in Afghanistan to scale down or evacuate staff because of the rapidly changing security situation and number of provincial capitals falling to the Taliban, Dujarric said contingency plans are continuously updated and reviewed in order to keep all UN staff safe while at the same time delivering as much aid as possible.

"But forefront in our mind is helping the people of Afghanistan and keeping our staff safe," he said, adding that there has not been any evacuation of UN staff from Afghanistan.

"Our footprint, as of now... is we have about 3,000 or so

international on the ground. There are more people working... that are working remotely. Because of COVID, they had been working and had been working remotely."

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said in a statement Tuesday that the Taliban must cease their military operations in cities. Unless all parties return to the negotiating table and reach a peaceful settlement, the already atrocious situation for so many Afghans will become much worse.

The Taliban have captured more than half of Afghanistan's 400-odd districts. Their attacks on provincial capitals have violated the 2020 peace deal between the Taliban and the United States, The New



York Times reported.

She said, in Afghanistan, since July 9 in four cities alone - Lashkar Gah, Kandahar, Herat and Kunduz - at least 183 civilians have been killed and 1,181 injured, including children.

"These are just the civilian casualties we have managed to document - the real figures will be much higher," Bachelet said, warning that even before the latest Taliban military offensives on urban centres, the UN had documented a steep increase in civilian casualties.

The situation in the southern city of Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province, "starkly demonstrates the harrowing impact" that hostilities in urban areas have on civilians. In only the two weeks since July 28, when fighting started in the city, the UN received reports of at least 139 civilians killed and 481 injured. The available food supply in the city is fast diminishing and shortages of medical supplies were also reported. Electricity and water were cut off in most parts of the city.



Bachelet said that the sweeping takeover of an estimated 192 district administrative centres by the Taliban, the attacks on provincial capitals including Qala-e-Naw, Kandahar, Lashkar Gah, Herat, Faizabad, Ghazni, Maimana, Gardez, Pul-e-Khumri, and Mazar-e-Sharif, and the takeover of at least six provincial capitals - Zaranj in Nimroz province, Sheberghan in Jawzjan province, Kunduz City in Kunduz province, Taloqan in Takhar province, Sar-e-Pul in Sar-e-Pul province and Aybak in Samangan province "have struck fear and dread into the population."

She also warned that the proliferation of pro-Government militias being mobilised against the Taliban may also put civilians in additional danger.

"People rightly fear that a seizure of power by the Taliban will erase the human rights gains of the past two decades," she said. "The people of Afghanistan are speaking of their deep fears of a return to the worst of the human rights violations of the past," Bachelet said. "Women, minorities, human rights defenders, journalists as well as others who are particularly vulnerable need particular protection. There are very real risks of renewed atrocities against ethnic and religious minorities." AGENCIES