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**OBC BILL COMING UP, CONG SAYS WON'T OPPOSE**

## Last week of House session, no sign of thaw, Opp wants to be heard on Pegasus

Tharoor says time for no-trust motion; TMC puts out video of Opp in House

72 seconds out of 45 min: Lok Sabha TV coverage of Opp in House last sitting

**MANOJ CG**  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

AS THIS Monsoon session of Parliament enters its final week, there is little possibility of both the Houses functioning smoothly as Opposition parties Sunday made it clear they will continue to insist on a discussion on the Pegasus spyware issue — a demand that the Government is unlikely to accede to.

Senior Congress leader

Shashi Tharoor said the Opposition should now move a no-confidence motion against the Government. "Rather than just continuing disruptions, we should probably seriously consider other parliamentary manoeuvres... including a vote of no-confidence, because I think there is genuinely no confidence among the bulk of the Opposition parties in this Government," Tharoor told *The Indian Express*.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**LIZ MATHEW & HARIKISHAN SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

SCHEDULED TO end August 13, Parliament's monsoon session has been disrupted by the row over alleged surveillance through the use of the Pegasus spyware.

Accusing Lok Sabha TV of shutting it out, the Opposition, which has been seeking a discussion on the Pegasus issue and



Friday, 11.07 am. Oppn MPs in the well of the House

farm laws that triggered the farmer agitation, says its protests are only shown on screens inside the House, and not beamed across the country.

On Friday, when Lok Sabha last met, LSTV showed Opposition protests for all of 72 seconds — House proceedings lasted a total of 45 minutes over two sittings that day.

Opposition MPs, however, were not in their seats, except

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



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## Fully vaccinated people can travel in Mumbai local trains from Aug 15

**VISHWAS WAGHMODE**  
MUMBAI, AUGUST 8

PEOPLE WHO have been fully vaccinated and completed 14 days after receiving the second dose of an anti-Covid vaccine will be allowed to travel in Mumbai suburban local trains from August 15, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray announced Sunday.

Mumbai has fully vaccinated 19 lakh people, most of whom are entirely dependent on public transportation. At present, only government employees and essential services staffers are allowed to travel in local trains.

Thackeray said a meeting with the state Covid Task Force will be held Monday to discuss steps to ease curbs for places of worship and provide more relaxation to the hotels, restaurants and malls.



As of now, 19 lakh people in Mumbai are fully vaccinated, said Uddhav

"We are allowing the local trains to the general public from August 15. In the first phase, those who have taken both the doses of vaccines and have completed 14 days after taking the second dose, will be allowed to travel by the local trains. We have prepared a mobile application where fully vaccinated people can register to get a railway pass," Thackeray said while addressing the state through social media Sunday.

The CM said people will have to provide details of the two doses of vaccines, completion of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Tokyo brings curtain down on Games held in the time of Covid: 'We did it'

**MIHIR VASAVDA**  
TOKYO, AUGUST 8

THE OLYMPICS bubble didn't burst. And the Games did happen.

The strangest Olympic Games ended the same way they began: in front of empty stands, in a state of emergency, and with hundreds filling the streets, imagining what it must feel like to be inside the giant cauldron that Tokyo's National Stadium is.

There was one slight difference, though.

Compared to the sombre, downcast opening, the closing ceremony was peppier, with a lot more razzmatazz, reaching a crescendo that is usually associated with Olympics ceremonies.

But then, the organisers had reasons to feel good. The Covid Games, after all, didn't turn out to be a super-spreader event — not yet. There were only 430 cases related to the Olympics since the



A support staff of the women's hockey team (taking selfie) with athletes during the closing ceremony at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo on Sunday. From left, wrestlers Deepak Punia, Ravi Dahiya and Bajrang Punia, and hockey player Lalremrsiami (middle). AP

REPORTS P13, 14

start of July, with the positivity rate within the bio-bubble where 624,000 screening tests were conducted, at 0.02 per cent.

The relief was palpable in the voice of International Olympic

Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach, when he said: "We did it".

There weren't any grand remarks of these being the "most successful" Games. Bach, how-

ever, did call it the "most challenging".

It wasn't just the pandemic. The athletes had to deal with the brutal summer heat, sidestep the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Despite red flags, Rly university gave contract to firm of Board member

**AVISHEK G DASTIDAR**  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

DESPITE RED flags raised by officials of potential conflict of interest and propriety, contracts worth Rs 6 crore were given to firms promoted by educationist Pramath Raj Sinha by the "Railway University" even as Sinha is a member of the Board of Management of the same university run by Indian Railways.

Sinha's company, 9dot9, of which he is founder and managing director, has been awarded a consultancy contract for the National Rail and Transportation Institute (NRTI), a deemed uni-



Conflict of interest cloud over Pramath Raj Sinha

versity of the government, worth Rs 65 lakh per month plus GST for nine months ending December 2021, according to records reviewed by *The Indian Express*.

This happened despite Railways officials flagging the potential conflict of interest in written deliberations and pointing towards possible circumvention of provisions of the General

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Better immune response from mixing Covaxin, Covishield, says ICMR study

**KAUNAIN SHERIFF M & ANURADHA MASCARENHAS**  
NEW DELHI, PUNE, AUGUST 8

A GROUP of 18 people, who had "inadvertently received Covishield as the first jab and Covaxin as the second", showed better immunogenicity — the ability to generate an immune response — than those who received two doses of the same vaccine, according to a new study by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

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**INSIDE**

**FIR AGAINST SP MLA FOR VIOLATING COVID GUIDELINES**

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## Houseboats to hotels, Kerala tourism feels the pinch after months of curbs

**PAGE 1 ANCHOR****SHAJU PHILIP**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUGUST 8

LAST YEAR, the Covid slump pushed TVinod out of his job as Operations Manager at a resort in Munnar, the popular hill station in Kerala. The 38-year-old, hailing from the upper reaches of Idukki, tried his hand at several small jobs to feed his family of three — from working in the construction sector to selling cloth masks — and shifted his son from a private school to a



At Kerala's Kovalam beach, an employee of a hotel, which has been closed down after pandemic, staring at sea. Express

government institution to cut costs.

Down south near the coast,

Devassia Varghese, who was a driver on a houseboat till last year, is now desperately looking

for work as a farm hand. The 56-year-old with a family of five in Chambakkulam village of Kuttanad has been without a job "for the last 14 months".

"Many of my colleagues in the houseboat sector are now going for inland fishing or other daily wage work," says Varghese. "Last week, I signed up for work under the rural jobs scheme (MNREGS)," says Vinod.

From the hill stations of Munnar and Wayanad to the backwaters of Alappuzha, the pandemic has shattered Kerala's tourism industry, which employs about 15 lakh people and contributes 11.5 per cent of the state's GDP.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

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WEB EXCLUSIVE



EXPLAINED: HOW APPLE WILL SCAN FOR CHILD EXPLOITATION IMAGES ON DEVICES, AND WHY IT'S RAISING EYEBROWS

Expected to go live in the United States initially, the features include use of new technology to limit the spread of CSAM online, especially via Apple platform.

TECH



REVIEW: ASUS CHROMEBOOK C223

An excellent budget notebook, with long battery life

HOLLYWOOD REWIND



'GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING'

Scarlett Johansson stuns in this coming-of-age period piece

EXPRESS AUDIO

Neeraj Chopra's historic Olympic gold

NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

In today's episode of the '3 Things' podcast, we discuss javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra's career trajectory, his winning throw, and what the gold medal means for the future of athletics in India

# FROM PAGE ONE

## Lok Sabha TV

during the first few minutes when Speaker Om Birla paid tribute to the victims of the 1945 Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombings and congratulated India's wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya for winning a silver medal at the Tokyo Olympics. Members of the Congress, DMK, Left parties and TMC were in the well of the House, protesting during the proceedings which lasted from 11 am to 11.21 am.

When the House met again at noon, the government passed two key Bills – The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 to do away with the policy of retrospective taxation and The Central Universities (Amendment) Bill, 2021 to provide for the establishment of a university in the Union Territory of Ladakh – amidst slogan shouting by Opposition MPs.

The live telecast of the proceedings did not really reveal what exactly happened inside Lok Sabha. Sources in LSTV said the TV screens in the House are part of the CCTV system, while the camera feed used by the channel is different. "LSTV is responsible for only what is telecast. CCTVs or its cameras are not under our control," sources said.

Manoj K Arora, Editor-in-Chief cum Chief Executive of LSTV, said the channel follows rules laid down for it. "The LSTV transmission is as per the rules which say it should be a true reflection of what's happening inside the House," Arora told *The Indian Express*.

The channel, sources said, is expected to provide an overall view, but when the Speaker or the Chair speaks or the Prime Minister speaks, it has to focus on them. The rules also say the focus should be on the member who is speaking, be it for question-answer, matters of public importance or participation in a debate.

On Friday, *The Indian Express* tracked proceedings, minute by minute, from the press gallery inside Lok Sabha and the telecast on LSTV. This is what really happened:

■ 11 am: Speaker Om Birla enters the House. He recalls the destruction when Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed 76 years ago. He calls for a pledge to live in peace and harmony.

■ 11.02: Speaker congratulates wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya for winning a silver medal in the Tokyo Olympics. MPs join him by thumping the desk.

■ 11.03: Speaker starts Question Hour. Starts with a question relating to institutional deliveries by states during the pandemic. Union Ministers Bhopender Yadav, Pralhad Joshi, Smriti Irani are present. Opposition MPs leave their seats. Congress MP Manickam Tagore is the first to walk towards the treasury benches, shouting slogans, followed by TMC's Aparupa Poddar, Abu Taher Khan and Mahua Moitra, Congress's Jasbir Singh Gill, Benny Behanan, Hibi Eden, TN Prathapan and Dean Kuriaokose.

■ 11.04: Mahua Moitra raises a placard and the slogan of "Pegasus pe jaanch karo (investigate Pegasus)".

■ 11.05: DMK's TR Baalu, NC MP Hasnain Masoodi rise from their seats. Congress MPs Gaurav Gogoi and Ranveet Singh Bittu shout slogans against the government.

■ 11.06: Health Minister Mansukh Mandavdya says his junior minister Dr Bharati Pawar is going to answer a question. Urges the Opposition to listen to "a tribal" woman minister. Opposition continues to protest.

■ 11.07: Pawar starts her reply. Opposition MPs try to block her. Prathapan holds a placard, seeking a SC-monitored probe into Pegasus, before her. DMK's Veeraswamy Kalanidhi holds another placard.

■ 11.12: Speaker takes up another question. More Opposition MPs join the protest in the well. SAD MP Harsimrat Kaur carries a placard, seeking justice for farmers, and a wheat flower bunch. BJP's Janyang Tsering Namgyal has a question on environmental issues in the Himalayan region. Bhopender Yadav replies.

■ 11.13: Congress MP Gurjeet Singh Aujla leads slogan against the government.

■ 11: 14: Opposition MPs are standing around the desk of reporters in well.

■ 11.15: As Bhopender Yadav replies, Prathapan and Kalanidhi try to block him with placards. The minister's face is not visible on the screens inside.

■ 11.17: Hibi Eden takes the lead in slogan shouting, says the government is scared.

■ 11.18: Minister Jitender Singh replies to a question on exploration of ocean resources.

■ 11.19: Speaker calls for three questions.

■ 11.20: Sukhbir Singh Badal on his feet with a placard in support of farmers. Smriti Irani replies to BJP's Samistha Sethi's query on the national nutrition mission. Opposition intensifies slogan shouting.

■ 11.21: Speaker asks MPs to return to their seats and hold a discussion. Adjourns proceedings till noon.

■ Noon: BJP's Rajendra Agrawal takes the Chair. Mahua Moitra leads TMC MPs to the well of the House. Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury rises to say: "It has been three weeks... the House has not been run-

ning properly. No work is done." At this, Ministers Pralhad Joshi and Arjun Ram Meghwal protest.

■ 12.01 pm: Chowdhury says: "I want to give a warning to the government. Mann ki Baat... What you are doing is not right. You cannot be intoxicated with power."

■ 12.02: Meghwal: "It's wrong. We are ready for discussion. We have listed Covid management to discuss."

■ 12.03: The Chair calls for tabling the papers as listed in the agenda. Meghwal tables the papers. Ministers table action taken reports and other statements.

■ 12.04: Gogoi leads the sloganeering. Opposition MPs surround the Secretary General's table and raise slogans. The Chair asks them to return to their seats.

■ 12.07: Opposition MPs raise slogans in Bangla: "Khela hobe, khela hobe." Congress MP Vishnu Pramod leads them.

■ 12.09: Opposition chants slogans in Tamil, seeking a debate.

■ 12.11: Meghwal presents the Business Advisory Committee report for next week.

■ 12.12: Mahua Moitra leads slogans against the government.

■ 12.13: Chair calls Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to move the Taxation Amendment Bill. She moves the Bill, and makes an opening remark.

■ 12.14: Mahua Moitra and Aparupa Poddar start booing. Other Opposition MPs join them. Some try to block Sitharaman's face from being visible on the screen. Posters are visible on screens inside the House.

■ 12.17: The Chair puts the Bill to voice vote. BJP MPs say aye. The Chair puts the Bill to vote, clause by clause, and it is passed.

■ 12.19: The Chair calls Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan to move the Central Universities (Amendment) Bill 2021.

■ 12.20: Pradhan moves the Bill for consideration and passage. He makes opening remarks. Opposition intensifies slogan shouting.

■ 12.24: Pradhan takes his seat. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury says: "We have raised a genuine demand to roll back the farmers' Bills." Meghwal says: "You are responsible for not having a debate." The Bill is put to vote and passed. Opposition MPs shout: "*Jawab do, jawab do* (give us a reply)". House adjourns for the day to meet again on Monday.

## Rly university

Financial Rules (GFR) of the government which, specifically, deal with conflict of interest in consultancy contracts.

Sinha, the founding Dean of Indian School of Business, is among the founders and trustees of Ashoka University. He has been closely involved in setting up the NRTI, a deemed to be university and loosely termed the "Railway University" in Vadodra. Sinha's 9dot9 consultancy is also the strategic partner of US lobby firm Albright Stonebridge Group, chaired by Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State.

Incidentally, this is the second contract given to Sinha's firms by the institute where he is part of the top management team. Last year, Harappa Education, of which Sinha is also the Founder and Managing Director, got an assignment to impart training to Railway officials on management practices and Artificial Intelligence. Sources said that engagement is for around two years and payment is on the basis of participation of officials. So far, around Rs 40 lakh has been released, sources said. In the case of 9dot9, the Railway Board approved the contract on April 8 after officials put down in writing that it must comply with the "conflict of interest" provisions laid down in the GFR. Significantly, in June, too, this was flagged again when the engagement of 9dot9 was to be formalized through paperwork involving RITES – the Railway PSU engaged by Railway Board to execute the matter. The GFR provisions cited by officials specifically mandate that the consultant hired should strictly avoid conflicts with other assignments or his/its own corporate interests and acting without any consideration for future work.

The provisions say that it is a conflict of interest if the bidding firm or any of its affiliates are either involved in the consultancy contract to which procurement is linked. Records show that RITES informed the Railway Board that the decision to engage 9dot9 was arrived at after competitive bidding and due diligence. Asked for his comment on the contracts, Sinha referred *The Indian Express* to Alka Arora Misra, interim Vice Chancellor of NRTI, and said she is "the best and most appropriate person to speak" on this. When contacted, Misra, who is also Railway Board Additional Member (Human Resources), conveyed through a Railway ministry spokesman that all contracts were awarded as per rules and due process.

## Days after CJI rebuke

Nandigam Suresh and former MLA Amanchi Krishna Mohan were also questioned in the case. "The CBI has arrested two more accused on 07.08.2021 in an ongoing investigation of a

# No sign of thaw, Opp wants to be heard on Pegasus

In 2010, the Winter session was washed out over protests by the BJP, then in the Opposition, demanding a JPC probe into the 2G spectrum license allocation. The party had stalled functioning of both the Houses after the CAG report on 2G allocation became public. This time, the difference is that the BJP Government has managed to introduce 12 new Bills, eight in Lok Sabha and four in Rajya Sabha. All these bills have been passed in the House in which they were introduced.

Overall, ten bills -- including The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2021 and The Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021 -- have been passed by both the Houses. Seven bills have been passed by one of the two Houses, and will come up for discussion this week. The key among them are The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 and The General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill, 2021, which were passed by Lok Sabha last week. These bills will now come for discussion and passage in Rajya Sabha -- as also the important OBC Bill, which is the Constitutional 127th Amendment Bill to restore power to the states to identify backward classes.

On Sunday, the Trinamool Congress put out a three-minute video clip on what Opposition leaders have said on the Pegasus issue and the farmer's protests on the floor of the House during passage of the Bills. Sources said the idea behind the video put out by TMC Rajya Sabha leader Derek O'Brien is to show how Opposition leaders used the words "farmers", "Pegasus" and "spyware" during discussions on various Bills in an attempt to voice these issues. "When the official channels are being denied, this is a new way to reach the masses," said O'Brien.

case relating to making derogatory posts on social media against judges and the judiciary," the agency said in a statement.

The accused, identified as Pattaru Aadarsh and Lavanuru Samba Siva Reddy, were produced before a court in Guntur on Sunday. The CBI said Dhame Reddy Konda Reddy and Pamula Sudheer were arrested on July 28, while Lingareddy Rajasekar Reddy, who was residing in Kuwait, was arrested on July 9 when he landed in India.

On Friday, the Supreme Court had said police and CBI don't respond to complaints from judges. Heading a two-judge bench which took up the suo motu case registered by the Supreme Court in connection with the death of Dhanbad Additional Sessions Judge Uttam Anand, Chief Justice of India NV Ramana said "there are several cases in the country which involve gangsters and where high profile people are accused" and that judges are sometimes "threatened mentally also by sending messages on WhatsApp, SMS" or harassed through social media posts. Though CBI probes were ordered in some instances, he said the agency had "done nothing".

The CJI also flagged what he called a "new trend in this country" to malign the judiciary when adverse orders are passed. "It is a new trend in this country. If an adverse order is passed, then the judiciary is maligned. If judges file a complaint to police or CBI, they do not respond. Intelligence Bureau and CBI are not helping the judiciary at all," he said.

The case in Andhra Pradesh relates to alleged derogatory comments against the judiciary, accusing the judges of bias and incompetence, which began when the High Court set aside a government order making English the medium of instruction at all government schools. More such posts followed when the court set aside an order removing State Election Commissioner N Ramesh Kumar. Some of the posts also referred to the castes of judges.

On November 11 last year, the CBI registered a case against 16 people and took over the investigation of 12 FIRs from the CID, following the Andhra Pradesh HC's orders. The original FIRs were registered on complaints filed by the Registrar General of the Andhra Pradesh HC.

"It was alleged that the accused, by intentionally targeting the judiciary, made derogatory posts on social media platform against hon'ble judges and judiciary, following some court verdicts," the CBI said. "After registration of the case, CBI traced 13 of the 16 accused named in FIRs in the case on various digital platforms. Three of them were found to be abroad. CBI examined 11 of 13 accused, and arrested five of them. Evidence against remaining six accused persons is being evaluated for further necessary legal action," it said.

"It was also found that one accused was allegedly using a passport with a name different from his real identity. To investigate larger conspiracy, CBI has also examined certain persons including an MP, ex-MLA and continued

"PM @narendramodi seems to have lost his nerves. Why is he not keen on answering questions in Parliament? The opposition parties are ready for discussions in Parliament, but @BJP4India govt is stalling the proceedings so that the truth doesn't get to the people," Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge said in a tweet to post the video, which is a compilation of mainly clips from RSTV. "You are not allowing the discussion we have been asking for in the past 14 days... You are passing that Bill now. If you have courage, begin the discussions on Pegasus now," Kharge is heard saying on the floor of the House in the video.

The compilation includes Opposition speakers such as Vandana Chavan (NCP), Manoj Jha (RJD), Deepinder Hooda (Congress), Sukhendu Shekar Roy (TMC), Priyanka Chaturvedi (Shiv Sena), Elamaram Kareem (CPM) -- and Lok Sabha MP Manish Tewari (Congress) among others

"We had demanded discussions on three important issues -- Covid management, farmer's issues and price rise," Congress leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury told *The Indian Express*. "The Government tried their best to scuttle any discussion on price rise. Then the issue of Pegasus came, it was a key issue of national security. We wanted a discussion but the Government has so far not agreed despite our repeated pleas. They are more interested in trying to divide the Opposition," he said. Referring to the OBC Bill, Chowdhury said: "Even now, the Government is trying to do that."

The Congress, however, does not plan to oppose the Bill and may even pause the protests to allow a discussion to prevent the Government from projecting it as a party that is opposing a key legislation related to OBCs.

investigation into the role of other persons who were not mentioned in the FIR," it said.

The CBI said it had taken action to get the objectionable posts removed from social media platforms and other public domains. "Investigation is continuing, including through the channels of MLAT, Interpol to collect evidence from abroad," it said.

— WITH ENS INPUTS, HYDERABAD

## Tokyo downs curtains

thunderstorm warnings and, amidst all this, focus on what they were here for: be the best at what they do.

But the Tokyo Olympics went much beyond merely going faster, higher and stronger. They served another reminder that even during tense, highly competitive moments, there is space for spirit and solidarity.

Tai Tzu Ying was reduced to tears when P V Sindhu, in a touching gesture, consoled the player who beat her in the semifinal but went on to lose the gold medal match -- a feeling the Indian shuttler can very well relate to.

The story of Gianmarco Tamberi of Italy and Qatar's Mutaz Barshim, who chose to share the high jump gold instead of forcing a playoff, is sure to go down as one of The Olympics stories.

These Games will also be remembered for the women taking centre stage.

Dutch runner Sifan Hassan completed her journey from a refugee to one of the greatest athletes of all time, becoming the first to win medals in 1500m, 5000m and 10,000m.

The USA's Allyson Felix lived up to the lofty expectations, becoming the most successful sprinter at the age of 35.

And, gymnast Simone Biles and tennis star Naomi Osaka didn't even have to be on the field of play to leave a mark, telling the rest of the sporting world that it is okay to say 'no' if you aren't up for the challenge psychologically.

Women's power was reflected in India's best-ever medals tally, too. Weightlifter Mirabai Chanu, Sindhu and boxer Lovlina Borgohain set the stage for a grand finish, before Neeraj Chopra became the country's first athletics gold medalist. India's tally of seven medals, which placed them 48th, is still glaringly low when one looks at the 113 medals, including 39 gold, won by table-toppers USA and second-placed China's tally of 88 (38 gold).

But it was Japan's march that really changed the mood around these Olympics. As the host nation's athletes raked in the medals -- 27 gold to finish third -- the public began to lap up the event. Banned from entering the venues, Tokyoites started lining up outside the stadiums to support their athletes.

Inside the empty arenas, the polite volunteers doubled up as cheerleaders. They were the only link to the local population for the thousands of athletes who were not allowed to step outside the Olympic Village and their venues. In the closing ceremony, the organisers tried to give the competitors a taste of the city that they never got to experience. They recreated the famous Yoyogi Park -- a massive green

"We have no opposition to the Bill. It is our issue, because we had warned the Government in 2018 that you are committing a mistake... taking away powers of the states. Now they are being forced to bring the Bill... but the Government is trying to be too clever by half... we will point it out. We will not stand in the way of passage of the Bill," Chowdhury said.

The Opposition parties made it clear that they will continue to demand a discussion on the Pegasus issue. "The Government does not want the words 'Pegasus', national security', 'repeal farm laws' and 'price rise' to be mentioned on the floor of the House. They are running scared. The Opposition is united in holding them accountable," O'Brien told *The Indian Express*.

"They have bulldozed 25 bills at an average of ten minutes per Bill. It's a disgrace that just one out of ten Bills passed are being scrutinised. They are making popcorn, not legislating. PM (Narendra) Modi has not answered a single question on the floor of Parliament in the last five years. We want to say, 'Come listen to us, Mr Modi'. Also importantly, another session of Parliament will conclude without a Deputy Speaker being appointed," he said. "We expect the House to resume its business at least from tomorrow onwards. We are insisting on a discussion on Pegasus... We cannot be a party to just participating in legislative business," DMK's Tiruchi Siva said.

Summing up the Opposition mood, Tharoor said: "The Government's refusal to be answerable in any way, shape or form on an issue of national and international importance has made a mockery of democracy and ordinary Indians which the Government claims to represent. Avoiding discussion and accountability is a real insult to Parliament."

space in the city's centre -- complete with fake grass and everyday scenes: dance troupes, joggers, freestyle footballers, yogis and picnickers.

And for the first time, a confident Tokyo was prepared to show what it really was. They showcased the Ainu culture, and set the feet tapping with a dose of Japanese song and dance before handing over the stage to Paris, which will host the next Olympics, for 10 minutes.

But it was again a reminder of these strange times that just as the organisers spoke about the "hope" these Games brought, the trailer for the Paris Olympics was remotely done due to the pandemic. So remote that they went as far as outer space, from where French astronaut Thomas Pesquet helped perform the national anthem on his saxophone from the International Space Station.

It was all very unusual, but then what isn't about these Games?

Paris tried to charm with a video of the city's romantic sights, packed rooftops, jets painting the skies around Eiffel Tower in the country's colours and a little bit of break dancing, which will make its debut as an Olympics sport in 2024. The scene finally cut back to Tokyo, where the flame was extinguished, and the athletes sauntered off the field to feel-good music.

Then, the volunteers, the real heroes of these Games, took centre stage. They posed for selfies, ran mock races on the track and shed a tear when the word '*Arigato*' (Thank you) appeared on the big screen. The Games that few thought could take place, and the build-up for which went on forever, were finally closed.

*Arigato Tokyo. Bonjour Paris.*

## ICMR study

In May, 18 villagers in Siddarthnagar, Uttar Pradesh, had received Covaxin as the second dose, six weeks after they got Covishield. The study compared their reaction to 40 recipients of two doses of Covishield and 40 recipients of two doses of Covaxin.

"We compared the safety and immunogenicity profile of them (the group of 18) against that of individuals receiving either Covishield or Covaxin. Lower and similar adverse events following immunisation in all three groups underlined the safety of the combination vaccine-regime," said the study which is yet to be peer reviewed. "Immunogenicity profile against Alpha, Beta and Delta variants in the heterologous group was superior; IgG antibody and neutralising antibody response of the participants was also significantly higher compared to that in the homologous groups," it said.

"Overall, this study demonstrates that immunisation with a heterologous combination of an adenovirus vector platform-based vaccine followed by an inactivated whole virus vaccine is safe and elicits better immunogenicity than two doses of homologous vaccination, using the same vaccines," it said.

While Covishield is built on a viral vector

vaccine platform and uses a weakened version of adenovirus, a common cold virus that causes infection in chimpanzees, Covaxin is built on an inactivated whole virus vaccine platform.

The study is the first scientific evidence emerging from India on superior immunogenicity profile demonstrated in mixed-vaccine doses. However, the researchers have underlined that to conclusively prove these preliminary findings, "multi-centre" randomised control trials need to be carried out. They have also flagged the study's limitations: the sample size of 18 participants is small; follow-up period is only 60-70 days after first dose; baseline serological and immunological data of participants is not available.

According to the study, the findings have an "important implication" for the Covid-19 vaccination programme wherein "heterologous immunisation will pave the way for induction of improved and better protection against the variant strains of SARS-CoV-2".

"This is the first report of heterologous immunisation with an adenovirus vector based and an inactivated whole virion vaccine in humans demonstrating safety and significantly improved immunogenicity... Immunogenicity profile studied against the variants of concerns, Alpha, Beta and Delta variants, demonstrates significantly higher titers in the heterologous group," it said.

The researchers have said such mixed regimens will help to "overcome the challenges of shortfall of particular vaccines" and "remove hesitancy around vaccines in people's mind that could have genesis in programmatic 'errors' especially in settings where multiple Covid-19 vaccines are being used".

On safety, reactivity analysis showed that in the heterologous group, 11 per cent reported pain at the injection site; however, during the second dose, no such local adverse event was reported, it said.

The most commonly reported systemic adverse event was pyrexia (raised body temperature) and malaise (discomfort): 33.3 per cent reported this during the first dose, and 5.5 percent during the second dose.

## Mumbai local trains

14 days after the second dose and a QR code, which will help the railways to verify authenticity, to obtain the travel pass. People who have smartphones can download the pass from the specially-created app. Those who don't have smartphones, the CM said, can get a pass through the BMC offices and Mumbai suburban railways offices.

"At present, there are around 19 lakh people in Mumbai who have taken the two doses of (Covid) vaccines and have completed 14 days after the second dose. This number will go up daily till August 15. And once we become habituated to the pass system, then we will open up restaurants, malls and others in a phase-wise manner," the CM added.

Referring to his recent meeting with the hotels and restaurants associations demanding more relaxations, Thackeray said, "The decision about (easing of curbs) for the hotels, restaurants, malls and places of worship will be taken after the discussions in a meeting with the state Covid Task Force tomorrow. That decision will be announced soon." However, he said the announcement may take around 8-10 days.

On August 2, the Maharashtra government allowed malls, gymnasiums, yoga centres, salons, beauty parlours and spas to reopen with 50 per cent capacity, while shops and establishments were allowed to remain open till 8 pm on weekdays and till 3 pm on Saturday in 22 districts. Restaurants have also been allowed to remain open with 50 per cent seating capacity till 4 pm on weekdays only. In Mumbai, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, however, has allowed shops and establishments to remain open till 10 pm on all days while all hotels and restaurants can remain open till 4 pm through the week.

Currently, the state government has not granted any relaxation to the places of worship in the state.

Citing Covid cases, Thackeray said precautions were needed in the districts of Pune, Ahmednagar, Solapur, Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara, Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri and Beed reporting a higher number of cases. "Even though we are implementing the oxygen self-reliant policy, there are limitations to the immediate oxygen production. Now, other states are seeing a rise in Covid cases. So, if there is an increase in the number of cases in the state, then we will have no option but to impose the lockdown," he added. The CM has also urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to relax the 50 per cent reservation ceiling to provide reservations to the Maratha community. "If the 50 per cent ceiling is not relaxed, then it is not possible to provide reservation. While the Centre has proposed to grant powers to the states to give reservation, it will have no meaning if the reservation ceiling is not relaxed," he said.

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# 3 MAHARASHTRA



## MUMBAI CONFIDENTIAL



### WHILING AWAY

SINCE HIS fall from grace after being arrested in March for his alleged involvement in planting of explosives outside industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence, the now-dismissed assistant police inspector Sachin Waze is cooling his heels in Talaja Central jail playing carrom and chess with fellow undertrials.

### HONORARY TITLE

AT A time of shortage of doctors, Mumbai Municipal Commissioner IS Chahal has green-lighted a policy to retain retired heads of departments as professors emeritus. Bestowing this title does not affect anyone else's seniority or promotion chances. In the BMC-run KEM Hospital, Atul Goel was appointed professor emeritus in the neurosurgery department. Next in line is Dr Prafulla Kerkar, the head department of cardiology in KEM. He was scheduled to retire in August 2020 and was given a year's extension, but with the cardiology department of the hospital reluctant to let him go, now he, too, maybe in line for the honorific.

### NCB 'SIGN' BOARD

APART FROM its architecture, the Ballard Estate area is well-known for housing the headquarters of many central government offices, including the Mumbai Port Trust and the Enforcement Directorate. In a probable sign of the times, the Narcotics Control Bureau, the other central agency located in the area, but was not easy to locate has now fixed the signage on the building of its Mumbai headquarters.

### BACK TO OLD WAYS

THE MAHARASHTRA Forensic Science Laboratory that finally had a full-time director a few weeks back finds itself without a director again. Dr Krishna Kulkarni, who was recently promoted as director after heading FSL for four years as a joint director did not get an extension and retired in July-end. Now a deputy director, Dr SV Ghumatkhar, has been asked to look after the day to day affairs of the forensic directorate.

COMPILED BY YOGESH MALIK,  
SADAF MODAK & MOHAMED THAYER

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Man manipulates cash deposit machine, dupes SBI of Rs 60,000

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
MUMBAI, AUGUST 8

THE STATE Bank of India (SBI) lodged an FIR with the Marine Drive police station after a man allegedly manipulated one of their Automated Deposit cum Withdrawal Machines (ADWM), also known as Cash Deposit Machines and withdrew Rs 60,000 while ensuring that the transaction is not processed.

An assistant manager of the bank's Madam Cama Road branch in the Marine Drive area lodged an FIR in the case. There is an ATM kiosk near the branch in it there is a passbook machine, an ATM and an ADWM.

According to the complaint, on June 15 the assistant manager of the branch checked the balance of the ADWM around noon and saw that there was a difference of Rs 60,000 in its balance and the bank's balance. While investigating the missing amount it was found that an unidentified man withdrew the amount in the morning.

The fraudster was seen on CCTV cameras near the kiosk checking if anyone is near it before entering. He used three ATM cards to withdraw the money in six transactions. While withdrawing the amount he manipulated the machine due to which it failed to process the transactions.

As a result, the amount never got deducted from the accounts linked with the ATM cards used for the transaction, thereby causing loss to SBI. A police officer from the police station said, "No arrest has been made so far."

**The accused ensured that the amount is not deducted from accounts linked with the ATM cards**

### DAY AFTER GAS LEAK

## Kasturba hospital gets go-ahead to resume operations, residents allowed to return home

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
MUMBAI, AUGUST 8

RESIDENTS FROM buildings and chawls located nearby Kasturba Hospital in Chinchpokli East were allowed to return home late Saturday night after the Mumbai fire brigade and a team of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) successfully completed decanting of the leaked LPG tank.

The fire brigade officials have also given a go-ahead to the hospital to occupy a building that was vacated after gas leakage.

On Saturday, 58 patients, including 28 Covid-19 infected, were shifted from building number 148, located on the hospital premises, to another following



On Saturday, 58 patients were shifted following leakage of gas from an LPG storage tank at the hospital premises. File

leakage of gas from an LPG storage tank at the hospital. Residents of nearby buildings and chawls, too, were asked to vacate their premises to ensure

cording to the regulations. We are also giving free ration to all the affected people.

The loss of public infrastructure especially in schools, anganwadis, government buildings and electricity infrastructure were immense and we have attempted to rebuild the same.

**Why is reaching assistance to the people at the mercy of natural disasters still so tough in these times of proliferation of technology-enabled rescues, social media apps, artificial intelligence, etc?**

India is a vast country and most of its population still lives in villages, which are far away from the power generation centres. Access to modern technological tools in rescue and relief is most often post-disaster and not before a disaster. In disaster-affected rural areas, telecommunication facilities get adversely impacted. In the recent landslide at Taliye, which happened around 5 pm, we got the information but due to inclement weather, no helicopters could fly.

Our efforts of sending Navy, Coast Guard and NDRF team through boats also failed because of flooding in the Savitri river. The teams were stranded for 10 hours due to flooding and massive landslides on multiple locations. In such unprecedented floods and landslides, the administration couldn't reach in time.

Nevertheless, compare our response with the most technologically advanced nations like Germany and China, which had massive casualties due to floods in recent times. Somewhere, it is not just technology but compassion and empathy, which plays a more critical role in disaster handling.

**As the government's top representative in the district, what lessons have you learnt from the last year?**

I always believed in leading from the front and doing the right thing. I knew that my team will be as strong and committed as I am. One has to shed off all fears while handling disasters and try every possible opportunity to



### MONDAY INTERVIEW

NIDHI CHAUDHARI  
RAIGAD DISTRICT COLLECTOR

help people, provide relief and plan well even during chaotic times. It wouldn't have been possible for us to tackle large-scale evacuation during Cyclone Nisarga and Tauktae if the teams were afraid of contracting Covid.

Besides, I learnt that true character is tested during calamities and that people share and care when it is most needed. There are amazing people in the ground putting their lives at risk to save others. There are houses, which open their doors for sheltering evacuated people, there are women who cook for the entire community, there are doctors/nurses who go to remotest areas walking miles to treat people, there are talathi/police constables performing beyond the call of duty. Also, I learnt that natural disasters cannot be stopped or predicted but we can arm ourselves with knowledge and make attempts to save lives. For example, the district administration has sent detailed proposals for cyclone shelters, measures for landslide prevention, lightning arresters, desilting of rivers etc.

We are also planning to have Village Disaster Management Committees in every village and train local people on rescue work. This will certainly enable in saving lives during the golden hour of a rescue operation.

**Even after being such a big district, Raigad still has no multi-speciality hospital. What are the plans for improving the**

**health infrastructure and facilities?**

This district indeed has weak health infrastructure and it was the biggest worry factor while handling Covid. We had brought a lot of private facilities onboard for the Covid management. To strengthen public health infrastructure land was granted for a medical college in Alibag. The district administration has also given land for 66 sub-centres/PHCs, which were approved in 2013 but could not be started due to land issues.

Additionally, the district administration is working on identifying suitable land for women's hospital, ayush hospital, trauma centre in Pen and Mangaon areas. During the pandemic, the administration attempted to improve public health facilities like SDH/RH and PHCs also. Necessary diagnostic facilities, testing facilities were created but any sustainable and quality work on public health would require continuous efforts and adequate funding in the long run.

**It was revealed that Taliye village was not on the list of the landslide-prone villages. When was the last geological survey done in the district and are you planning to do it now?**

Yes. Since the 2005 floods and landslides in Raigad, the GSI survey has been conducted on different occasions. According to the recent GSI report of 2018, we have 103 landslide-prone villages, 9 in Class I, 11 in Class II and 83 in Class III category.

Taliye village was not on this list hence, it couldn't be imagined that such a massive landslide would occur here. Unfortunately, science has not advanced so much on the prediction of landslides.

We can only get surveys of GSI conducted on recurring intervals. In this regard, the district administration had intimated GSI to send its team for a survey of Taliye and other recently landslide-affected villages. Accordingly, the survey was done. We have also requested them to do a survey of Mahad & Poladpur taluka.

**What kind of relief and rehabilitation plan is there for all the families who are currently living in landslide-prone areas like in Mahad and Poladpur?**

For landslide-affected people of Taliye, MHADA has come forward with a rehabilitation plan. It is paramount to find a suitable location, which is agreeable to affected people. In the case of Taliye, Kevanale and Sakhar Sutarvadi where houses got damaged, suitable government land is not available and therefore, private land is being identified. In the case of private lands, a detailed proposal of land acquisition is to be prepared by the sub-district officer, which will be submitted to the state government for approval of funds.

After the land identification, a layout with necessary amenities as per R&R Act is to be planned. Once rehabilitation layout is approved, work gets commenced following due process.

As an immediate relief, the district administration approached the affected citizens and suggested container-based accommodation to which they agreed principally. We are placing such 24 containers in Taliye and 4 each in Kevanale and Sakhar Sutarvadi. This is only a temporary measure and permanent rehabilitation will be done according to the R&R norms. The Chief Minister has directed the administration to make best efforts for a model rehabilitation in the landslide-affected areas and we are working on the same.

**What are your preparations for the third wave? How many Covid care centres were affected due to the recent flood?**

To tackle the third wave, we have planned three jumbo facilities through CSR. Around 200 beds with oxygen facilities were set up by JSW and Reliance each in Wadkhal and Nagothane. Likewise, CIDCO is building a large 680 beds oxygen-supported facility with adequate paediatric and general ICU in Kalamboli, which is nearing completion.

Additionally, the district has commissioned two PSA plants

### TWO HELD UNDER ATOMIC ENERGY ACT

## No material to show accused intended to misuse uranium: Court

SADAF MODAK  
MUMBAI, AUGUST 8

IN ITS detailed order granting bail to two men arrested allegedly for possession of uranium in May, a special court said there was no material to show that the accused intended to misuse the radioactive substance for explosives or antisocial activities.

Jigar Pandya and Abu Tahir were booked under provisions of the Atomic Energy Act for allegedly trying to illegally sell uranium online for around Rs 21 crore. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) had taken over the probe in the case from the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) in May.

Tahir had submitted that seven years ago his father, who is a scrap dealer, had bought industrial scrap from a factory. The scrap included uranium which he was not aware of and had kept aside to make a hammer due to its weight.

"SPP (Special Public Prosecutor) has tried to argue on the assumption of probable misuse of prescribed substance uranium for explosives or antisocial activities. But such an assumption is not based upon the entire prosecution case. Moreover,

from government funds at Alibag and Panvel, while eight are in progress. Of the eight, two PSA plants at Karjat and Pen are sanctioned from the PM CARES Fund and are being monitored by NHA while six other plants will come up at Chowk, Kashele, Uran, JNPT, SDH Panvel and MMA Mahad. These six plants are commissioned from CSR funds.

We have made adequate paediatric wards in all government facilities like RH/SDH/DH besides creating village-level isolation facilities. Raigad is a hub of LMO manufacturing in Maharashtra as JSW, Linde and INOX have their biggest LMO plants in Raigad. We have directed them to keep their buffer stock full and increase their capacities to the maximum. During the recent flood, seven Covid care facilities were disrupted. As of now, most of them are restored on priority by sending generators and necessary medicines and equipment.

**How much disaster response force is with the district currently and how important is a permanent base camp of NDRF in Raigad and where?**

We have a team of NGOs, which work during different natural disasters. Their mapping is complete and most often these local rescue NGOs are first respondents. For example, as a precautionary measure, Mahesh Sanap and his team were sent to Mahad city before the flood and his team helped in rescuing several stranded people. Likewise, the Salunkhe rescue team was the first respondent in the Mahad building collapse incident in 2020.

Last year, the administration submitted a proposal to SDMA for a permanent NDRF basecamp in Raigad district because of its high vulnerability to natural disasters. Our recent experience tells that arrival of NDRF from Pune or Mumbai to Mahad takes time and therefore having a permanent camp at a conspicuous location in Raigad district is of utmost need. This camp can cater to Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg as well. At present, the proposal was sent for Mahad but a final decision in this regard from NDRF is still awaited.

none of the prosecution witnesses or any other material reveals that same was the intention of the present applicant as per said assumption. Therefore, no prima facie case in that regard is evident," the special court, which granted them bail recently, said.

The NIA filed a chargesheet alleging that the two men were searching for buyers online to sell uranium knowing its value.

Apart from statements, including that of Tahir's father, the NIA had said that evidence showed that they had browsed the Internet to find sellers.

Uranium can be used in nuclear power plants, counterweights in aircraft and industrial machinery as well as radiation shields in medical equipment.

The ATS had claimed that based on a tip-off a dummy customer was sent by the state agency after which the substance was seized and tested at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre.

The court took into consideration that the maximum punishment for the offence was five years and the accused are "well-educated youth".

It also said that the trial will take time to complete due to the number of prosecution witnesses to be examined.

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**Registrar**



# 4 HARDLOOK

## HIGHWAY SAFETY PATROL DATA, 2020

# Despite lockdown, no big drop in accidents, deaths on road during 2020 in Maharashtra

Over 24,000 mishaps left 11,569 people dead last year; least cases in April



An accident on Mumbai-Pune Expressway left one person dead and 15 others injured in November last year. *File*

JAYPRAKASH S NAIDU  
MUMBAI, AUGUST 8

THE CORONAVIRUS-induced lockdown shut down Maharashtra for the better part of 2020 but an analysis of the Highway Safety Patrol (HSP) data has found that while road accidents across the state dropped by a quarter from 2019, fatalities came down by just 10 per cent.

A total of 24,971 road accidents were reported in 2020 that left 11,569 people dead. Despite the lockdown restrictions on movement, accidents dropped 24 per cent, and fatalities remained high in comparison to 2019 when 32,925 crashes had led to 12,788 deaths.

Of the 10,773 fatal accidents, an average of over 1,000 accidents was reported in January and February alone. Between March and September, this number fell below a thousand. The lowest number of 282 fatal accidents was reported in April, causing 303 fatalities. The highest number of 1,368 accidents took place in December, in which 1,462 people were killed.

The reason behind this high number of accidents, a senior HSP official said, could be attributed to the high volume of vehicles on the road due to the discontinuance of the train services and speeding.

The massive numbers of people walking on the highways, trying to escape the Maharashtra lockdown and reach home in other districts within Maharashtra or in other states, were also vulnerable to road accidents.

Across India, most of the horrific road accidents reported in 2020 were the ones that claimed the lives of migrant workers on their way back home on foot amid the lockdown, and Maharashtra was no exception. While the worst tragedy took place when a freight train mowed down 16 migrant workers walking on the tracks, four other labourers were crushed to death and three injured in the early days of the lockdown when a speeding truck ran over them at Bharol village in Virar on Mumbai-Ahmedabad Highway on March 28. The men were headed to their villages in Rajasthan on foot but had been turned back from the

**“It is a worrying trend in Pune rural if over one out of every two crashes are fatal, unlike Mumbai where it could be possibly ascribed to many factors, including the high vehicle density”**

— DHAWAL ASHAR  
WORLD RESOURCES  
INSTITUTE, INDIA

Maharashtra-Gujarat border. The truck hit them from behind.

According to the HSP road accident data for 2020 accessed by The Indian Express, of the total road accident fatalities in the state, 2,214 were pedestrians who died after being hit by vehicles — the second-highest fatality after 5,868 two-wheeler riders who accounted for over half the total fatalities. Four-wheeler accidents, too, led to 1,576 fatalities.

A bulk of the fatalities (9,152 deaths or 79%) were caused by speeding. Another 3,160 deaths were reported in hit-and-run cases but the type of collision could not be ascertained in these deaths.

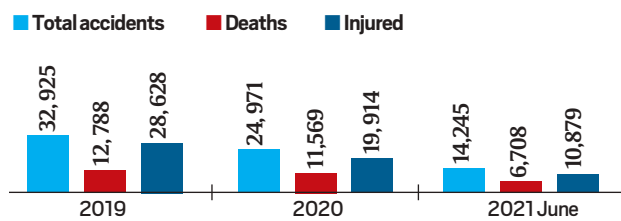
The highest fatalities were reported from Pune rural (696 deaths in 1,230 accidents), Nashik rural (801 deaths in 1,239 accidents) and Ahmednagar (642 deaths in 1,225 accidents). At 1,812, Mumbai recorded the highest number of accidents in the state but fewer deaths at 349.

Dhawal Ashar of World Resources Institute (WRI), India, a non-profit group that works to prevent road accidents in Mumbai, said, “It is a worrying trend in Pune rural if over one out of every two crashes are fatal, unlike Mumbai where it could be possibly ascribed to many factors, including the high vehicle density.”

“In Mumbai, the speed of vehicles is less as compared to highways and so the severity of accidents and injuries are more on highways. Further, in Mumbai trauma care is easily accessible but on highways, this is a major concern,” said Rajeev Choubey, risk management specialist of Resilient India, a non-profit group helping the state government to reduce accidents.

## Bulk of fatalities due to speeding, driving on wrong side

### FATAL ACCIDENTS



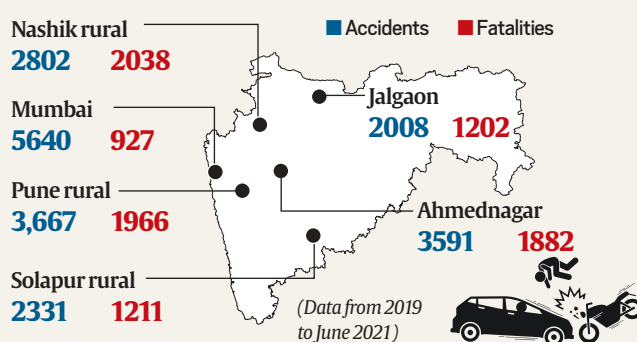
### KEY FEATURES

- 70%** of accidents took place between 9 am and 9 pm
- Over 80%** of bikers who died in road accidents were not wearing helmet. The figure assumes significance as 50% of fatalities in Maharashtra involves bikes
- 70%** of the vehicles involved in road accidents were fewer than five years old, followed by those fewer than 10 years old
- A majority** of drivers involved in road accidents are in the age group 25-35 years followed by those in 35-45 years.

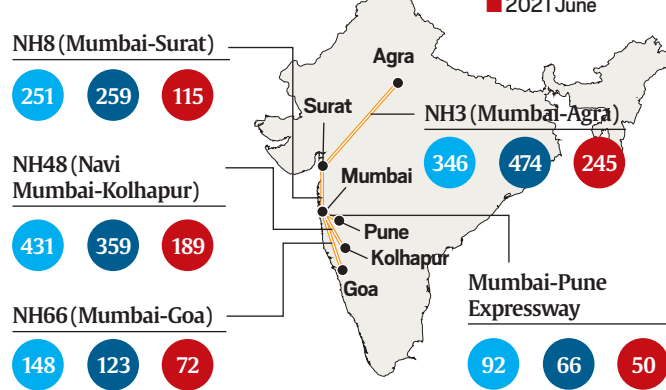
### KEY CAUSES OF ACCIDENTS

CAUSE OF ACCIDENTS	TOTAL ACCIDENTS	DEATHS	GRIEVOUS INJURIES
Over-speeding	19,419	9,152	10,972
Drunken driving	181	45	122
Driving on wrong side	1,113	489	642
Jumping red light	2	0	0
Use of mobile phone	10	3	7
Others	4246	1880	2228
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,773</b>	<b>11,569</b>	<b>13,971</b>

### AREAS WITH HIGH ACCIDENTS & FATALITIES



### DEADLIEST HIGHWAYS



DATA: Highway Safety Patrol (HSP), 2020

### OVERALL ROAD ACCIDENT FATALITIES IN MAHARASHTRA

PEOPLE KILLED	MALE	FEMALE
Bike/scooter	5,322	546
Pedestrians	1,842	372
Cars/Taxi/Van	1,391	185
Heavy vehicles	543	18
Auto-rickshaws	238	33
Bicycles	167	5
Buses	99	7
Other vehicles	731	70
<b>Total killed</b>	<b>10,333</b>	<b>1,236</b>

### ROADS MORE PRONE TO ACCIDENTS

ROAD FEATURES	KILLED	GRIEVOUSLY INJURED
Straight roads	9414	11675
Curvy roads	1289	1411
Under-construction roads	266	283
On bridges	256	300
Steep roads	169	85
Culvert roads	122	153
Pot holes	39	44
Others	14	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,569</b>	<b>13,971</b>

## Mrityunjay mission, e-challans — HSP going all out to curb mishaps

JAYPRAKASH S NAIDU  
MUMBAI, AUGUST 8

THE HIGHWAY police, with a skeletal staff of 2,028 officers and men across 63 taps, booked 19.64 lakh motorists for violating traffic rules and imposed Rs 103.59 crore in fine last year. Till June this year, another 15.72 lakh motorists have been booked and Rs 87.46 crore in fine imposed.

Additional Director General, traffic, Bhushan Kumar Upadhyay told The Indian Express, that they have now started the e-challan system to penalise violators. From March this year, the department has

also started the ‘Mrityunjay’ mission under which small groups of people from petrol pumps, local eateries, hotels, etc, located across highways, will help the HSP to provide immediate medical aid to accident victims and rush them to nearby trauma care centres or hospital in the golden hour period.

“Till now, we have roped in 5,000-odd people who have been provided training on how to give first aid and carry accident victims. They have been provided stretchers, medical kits and contact numbers of ambulances and local hospitals. This has helped us to decrease deaths this year,” Upadhyay said.

### MANPOWER CRUNCH IN HIGHWAY POLICE

Sanctioned strength	Present strength	Vacancy
<b>3,017</b>	<b>2,028</b>	<b>989 (33%)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Highway Safety Patrol (HSP) presently has a dent of young officers of the rank of police sub-inspectors and constables, besides drivers</b></li> <li><b>Of the 163 sanctioned posts of sub-inspectors, 87 (53%) are vacant, of 1,922 sanctioned posts of constables, 841 (44%) are vacant, and of total 304 posts of drivers, 147 (48%) are vacant at present</b></li> <li><b>To compensate for the vacancies, the government has posted an additional 102 assistant sub-inspectors and head constables over the sanctioned strength of 534 personnel. But most policemen in both the ranks are nearing retirement.</b></li> </ul>		

## For a decade, Pune rural, Nashik rural and Ahmednagar accounted for bulk of mishaps

JAYPRAKASH S NAIDU  
MUMBAI, AUGUST 8

FOR A decade, Pune rural, Nashik rural and Ahmednagar have been recording the highest number of road accidents and fatalities in the state each year, data obtained from the Maharashtra Highway Safety Patrol (HSP) also known as Highway Traffic Police states.

Avinash Dhakne, the state transport commissioner, said, “Motorists are not disciplined and lack traffic sense. A majority of fatalities can be attributed to over-speeding, lane cutting and not wearing a helmet. The roads are getting better and so motorists tend to speed. The reason behind Nashik rural, Pune rural and Ahmednagar recording high number of accidents is because major highways pass through these three places and a lot of vehicles enter and exit Maharashtra from the north and south from these places.”

A former DCP of HSP, who did not wish to be named, said more manpower, good CCTV camera surveillance and e-challan system were needed at these places. “Also, the data from FASTag and e-challans should be integrated. This way, the money can be recovered faster and motorists will desist speeding,” the former DCO said.

Harshita Jamba from WRI India, meanwhile, said standardised and accurate data of crash interventions could also lead to



An accident on Ghodbunder Road in Thane earlier this year. *File*

problem identification and evidence-based solutions.

From this year, Dhakne said, two NGOs – Resilient India NGO and Save Lives Foundation – have been roped in by the state government to help the traffic police to curb road accidents at the three places and a few other districts, which recorded a higher number of road accidents and fatalities.

So far, Resilient India has started a survey to find out the reasons behind road accidents in seven districts – Nashik, Pune, Ahmednagar, Thane, Palghar Solapur and Dhule. The Save Lives Foundation, meanwhile, will be working on the National Highway 48 (Navi Mumbai to Kolhapur). Both the NGOs will carry out surveys and submit re-

ports recommending measures that they believe will reduce road accidents.

Rajeev Choubey, risk management specialist of Resilient India said, “In Nashik rural, maximum fatalities are reported on NH3 (Mumbai-Agra highway) where Vulnerable Road Users, such as two-wheeler riders, mix with fast-moving highway traffic. In Ahmednagar, we need to work on the road infrastructure. In Pune rural, maximum fatalities are at the approach periphery of the city as villages nearby are developing. Our survey has started and, in few months, we will prepare an action plan and submit it to the HSP with a focus on reducing the vulnerabilities of the motorists besides elimination/mitigation of risks associ-

ated with various hazards. We will recommend the use of CCTV surveillance at black spots.”

To curb accidents on NH48, Piyush Tewari, founder of Save Life Foundation, said a lot more enforcement will be needed. “The number of vehicles increases each year but the manpower of police cannot be increased in the same proportion. So, we need to use technology as much as possible to curb accidents. We are also planning to provide immediate medical help to victims of road accidents within 10 minutes of the accident or the ‘platinum 10 minutes’. We will find out how many ambulances will be needed and how to place them at strategic locations to optimise their response time,” Tewari said.

## FSL clears DNA test backlog in adoption cases

MOHAMED THAYER  
MUMBAI, AUGUST 8

THE MAHARASHTRA home minister last month had asked officials of the state Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) to ensure that cases of DNA test sent to them by the Children Welfare Committee (CWC) as part of the adoption process are cleared at the earliest. Following the nudge, the FSL has cleared 25 cases over the past few weeks and currently, it has zero pendency.

In cases of parentage claims over children in CWC custody, a DNA test is mandated by the panel to confirm paternity. In such cases, till the time the DNA report comes

in, the child can neither be handed over to the claimants nor can they be considered eligible for adoption.

Also, in cases where police find abandoned infants, the child is handed over to the CWC and an FIR is registered. Later, if the police zero in on probable parents, their DNA samples along with those of the infants are also sent to the FSL.

An official from the Home Department said, “At a meeting with the DG (Legal & Technical), the Home Minister asked them to ensure that pending cases of DNA testing sent by CWC should be cleared at the earliest. The CWC had asked the Home Minister for the same as delays in reports were impacting adoption procedures.”

An official from Maharashtra

FSL has confirmed that around 25 DNA test requests from CWC had been cleared over the last few weeks.

A majority of DNA test cases sent by the police are in cases like rapes or sexual offences against minors which are given priority. Hence other reports sometimes are delayed, an official said. “A circular has now been issued asking centres to expedite such cases,” an official said. An official from CWC said in the past there have been cases where a DNA test report has taken more than a year. “In such cases, neither can the child be handed over to the person claiming paternity, nor can he/she be put up for adoption. Hence, a request was made to expedite cases,” the

official said. Vijay Doiphode, chairperson of CWC for Mumbai, said they normally followed up with the FSL and in the past few years, received results faster. “We now keep in touch with the police and FSL and get reports within three to six months,” Doiphode said.

A police officer said there are times where in cases of unwanted pregnancies they find minors abandoned in toilets or there are cases of trafficking police doubt if the couple claiming to be a child’s parents are genuine. “In all such cases, we register FIRs and hand over the child to the CWC. There have been delays in the past in getting the DNA report from the FSL. Things have, however, improved now,” the officer added.

## Birthday celebration: FIR against SP MLA, 17 others for violating Covid-19 guidelines

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
MUMBAI, AUGUST 8

THE MUMBAI Police on Sunday registered an FIR against Samajwadi Party MLA Abu Asim Azmi and 17 others for allegedly violating Covid regulations during the birthday celebration held for the legislator in Mumbai’s Shivaji Nagar area.

Police have also seized a sword from the MLA and one of his party men. Police believe it was used for cutting the cake.

DCP (Zone VI) K Upadhyay confirmed that an FIR was registered against Azmi.



Abu Asim Azmi

An officer said that between 5 pm and 8 pm on Sunday, Azmi — who represents Mankhurd Shivaji Nagar constituency — along with nearly 25-30 party workers gathered to celebrate his birthday in violation of the Covid guidelines. When a team

from the Shivaji Nagar police station reached the spot, they also found a sword used by the MLA and a party worker, Fawad Khan.

An officer said, “Based on a complaint, we have registered an FIR against Azmi and others for violating the Covid-19 protocol laid down by the government. No arrests have been made in the case.”

When *The Indian Express* called Azmi, the person who answered the call said that it would not be possible to talk to him.

A message sent to the legislator about the FIR did not elicit any response.

**63.53 lakh**

### TOTAL COVID-19 CASES IN MAHARASHTRA

Active Cases	71,510
New Cases	5,508
Total Deaths	1,33,996
New Deaths	155
Quarantined	4.25 lakh
<b>Tested</b>	<b>4.95 crore</b>

**7,37,516**

### TOTAL COVID-19 CASES IN MUMBAI

New Cases	323
Total Deaths	15,951
New Deaths	9





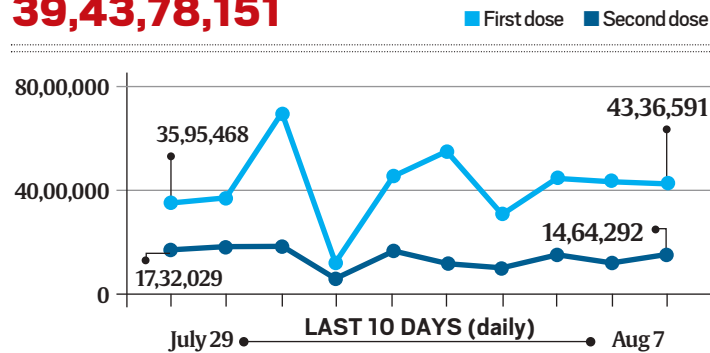
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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to [explained@indianexpress.com](mailto:explained@indianexpress.com)

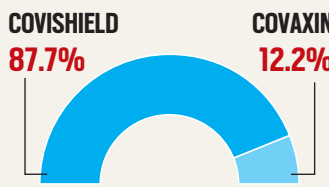
## CORONAVIRUS DASHBOARD

**TOTAL VACCINATED IN INDIA** (at least one dose)  
**39,43,78,151**



**TOTAL DOSES**  
**50,68,10,492**

(Sputnik V's 5,70,957 doses not represented in pie)

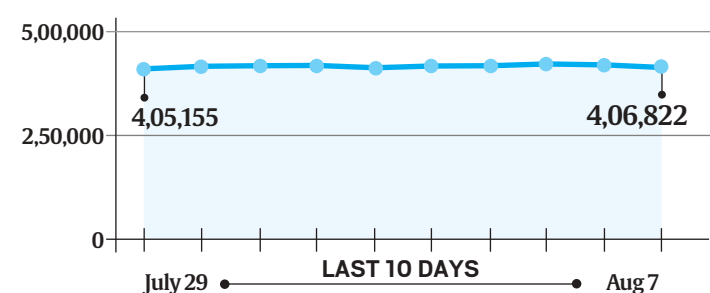


**DOSES ON AUG 07 58,00,883**

**AUG 06: 56,82,014** (1ST DOSE: 44,10,510; 2ND: 12,71,504)

## INDIA ACTIVE CASES

4,06,822



Note: The August 7 figures in these graphs are based on the government updates on August 8

**INDIA TOTAL CASES 3,19,34,455**

Source: Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, updated at 11 pm on August 8

## Device that detects SARS-CoV-2 in saliva sample in one hour

ENGINEERS AT MIT and Harvard University have designed a small tabletop device that can detect SARS-CoV-2 from a saliva sample in about an hour. In a new study in *Science Advances*, they showed it is as accurate as PCR tests, MIT said in a press statement. It said the device can also be used to detect specific viral mutations linked to some of the variants now circulating.

The new diagnostic, which relies on CRISPR technology, can be assembled for about \$15, but those costs could come down significantly if the devices were produced at large scale, the researchers say. It is based on SHERLOCK, a CRISPR-based tool.

First, a pre-processing step disables enzymes called salivary nucleases, which destroy nucleic acids such as RNA. Once the sample goes into the device, the nucleases are inactivated by heat and two chemical reagents.

Then, viral RNA is extracted and concentrated by passing the saliva through a membrane.

This RNA sample is then exposed to freeze-dried CRISPR/Cas components. The reaction amplifies the RNA sample and then detects the target RNA sequence, if present.

The researchers designed the device, which they call minimally instrumented SHERLOCK (miSHERLOCK), so that it can have up to four modules that each look for a different target RNA sequence. The original module detects any strain of SARS-CoV-2. Other modules are specific to mutations including B.1.1.7, P.1, and B.1.351.

The Delta variant was not yet widespread when the researchers performed this study, but they say it should be straightforward to design a new module to detect that variant.

Source: MIT



**PAPER CLIP**

NEW RESEARCH

## EXPERT EXPLAINS

VIRANDER S CHAUHAN

From The Indian Express panel of specialists, exclusive insight

SARS-CoV-2 continues to play havoc in different parts of the world with several of its more virulent forms, particularly the Delta variant, now driving new waves of infections.

Vaccines developed against the virus are the most effective scientific intervention to control the pandemic. Developed at an amazing pace, as many as 19 vaccines have already been approved for immunisation in some part of the world or the other.

### Glaring disparities

These vaccines are the result of intense scientific collaborations among scientists in academia and industry, and early huge funding from many governments. Unfortunately, the initial collaborative efforts did not translate into equitable access, and the trajectory of access has largely replicated the classical paradigm of developed and the underdeveloped parts of the world. Glaring disparities and differences in vaccine types, their availability and distribution have emerged in vaccination programmes across the globe.

The initiative COVAX, led by the World Health Organization (WHO), has struggled to procure and distribute vaccines to low- and middle-income countries.

While the western and resource-rich countries have mostly relied on the novel platforms of mRNA based vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, and viral vector vaccines of AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson, the low- and middle-income countries find themselves relying mostly on vaccines developed in China and Russia.

As of now, around 4.1 billion shots of various vaccines have been rolled out worldwide, with China (1.61 billion), India (455 million) and USA (344 million) accounting for more than half of these. Many developed countries have vaccinated more than half their populations. On the other hand, resource-compromised countries have barely started their vaccination programmes.

The gap between supply and demand of vaccines needs to be filled quickly. Clearly, we need more vaccines, but where will they come from?

### Vaccines in development

Among the 19 vaccines approved for use, a large number have been developed and approved in China, and more recently a few in



Queue for vaccination in Jaipur last week. India has administered over 50 crore doses, and hopes to procure 135 crore vaccines by December. Rohit Jain Paras

developing countries such as Cuba, Iran, Turkey and Kazakhstan. In addition, more than 30 vaccines are in large efficacy trials with a few already waiting for emergency use approval. More than 90 vaccine candidates have entered phase I/II trials. Therefore more than 120 vaccines, including many in the developing world, are under development.

Given the fact that so far only five vaccines have been abandoned following clinical trials, many of these vaccine candidates are destined to reach the regulatory stages in various countries. Although currently there is a huge shortage in supply, the space for introducing new vaccines cannot be unlimited, and only the best may be able to compete with the existing ones.

Also, manufacturers of currently in-use vaccines have announced major increases in production at multiple locations. For example, Pfizer has recently announced production of its vaccine in South Africa, specifically for use in African countries. The most cost-effective vaccine of AstraZeneca, which is approved in more than a hundred countries, is already being manufactured in many countries.

There will be additional challenges for the new vaccines. The current first-generation vaccines were tested against the original strain of the virus, but phase III trials of the new vaccines will have to deal with multiple, highly infectious variants.

Further, organising large phase III trials in itself will become more complex, particularly in locations where a large proportion of adult populations are vaccinated and/or infection rates have significantly declined.

Ethically too, phase III trials with placebo control groups may not be justifiable any more, given that efficacious vaccines are already in use.

### Hopes & challenges

The next generation of Covid vaccines could address the issues of stability at higher temperatures for easy transportation and storage, a real concern in poor countries.

Large-scale immunisation through the injection route has always been complex and at least partly contributes to vaccine hesitancy. To avoid the needle and deliver vaccines through nasal or oral routes will also be an attractive target. Several non-injectable Covid vaccines are under development, including in India.

Perhaps the most exciting development in the new vaccine arena is the recent phase III trial results of the protein-based vaccine of Novavax, which has shown an efficacy of 91.4%. Importantly, these trials were conducted at a time

when several virus variants had already emerged. However, the US regulator is yet to approve its emergency use.

Another protein-based vaccine being developed by Biological E in India, in collaboration with Baylor College of Medicine, US, has shown excellent safety and efficacy results in human trials conducted so far. Such protein-based vaccines will undoubtedly be major game-changers since they are not only safe, time tested, and highly efficacious, but also easy to produce, stable at higher temperatures, and generally very cost-effective.

But the lower-than-expected efficacy of

### THE EXPERT

**VIRANDER S CHAUHAN** is a former chairman of UGC and a former director of the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology. He is best known for his efforts towards developing a vaccine for malaria.

## When a silver disappoints but a bronze thrills

ATIKH RASHID  
PUNE, AUGUST 8

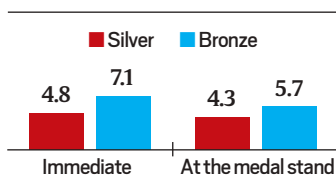
IN AN interview almost 70 years after he won a silver medal at the Stockholm Olympics of 1912, American runner Abel Kiviat described the 1,500m race as a "nightmare". "That race was the biggest disappointment of my life. I never saw Jackson," said Kiviat, who died in 1991. He was referring to Britain's Arnold Jackson, who had defeated him by just 0.1 seconds.

In the 2020 Olympics just ended, Indian wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya voiced similar disappointment after winning silver in the 57 kg freestyle category. "I had come here with only one target, a gold medal. This (silver medal) is okay, but it's not gold," he told reporters.

### Their emotions, on scale

In a 1995 paper in *The Journal of Personality*

### MEAN HAPPINESS RATINGS



In a 1995 study, bronze winners fared better than silver winners on a happiness scale. Medevce et al

and *Social Psychology*, psychologists Victoria Medvec, Thomas Gilovich and Scott F Madey examined why silver medalists may be feeling the way they do. They concluded that silver medalists fare poorly on a happiness scale because of the human tendency to indulge in

'counterfactual thinking' — to think of alternative circumstances to real-life events.

Bronze medalists score better than the silver medalists who had outperformed them.

"We were interested in whether the effects of different counterfactual comparisons are sufficiently strong to cause people who are objectively worse off to sometimes feel better than those in a superior state," Medvec and his colleagues wrote in the paper.

The researchers collated video footage from the 1992 Olympics and edited them in three master tapes, showing the medalists' reaction immediately after the results, while receiving the medals, and during interviews they gave about their performance.

In one part of the study, university students unaware of the results were asked to rate, on a 10-point "agony to ecstasy" scale, the immediate reactions of 41 athletes, and their reactions on the medal stand (see

graphic). In a second part, the participants reviewed television interviews of 22 silver and bronze medalists and rate their expressed feelings on a 10-point scale.

"To the silver medalist, the most vivid counterfactual thoughts are often focused on nearly winning the gold," the researchers explained. "... For the bronze medalist, in contrast, the most compelling counterfactual alternative is often coming in fourth place and being in the showers instead of on the medal stand."

### Similar findings

Three other researchers, who repeated the experiment in the 2016 Olympics, reconfirmed that counterfactual thoughts were higher among silver medalists than bronze winners. They found, however, that the differences in the expressed emotions were trivial or negligible.

## How Apple will scan for child exploitation images on its devices

NANDAGOPAL RAJAN  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

APPLE HAS announced that software updates later this year will bring new features that will "help protect children from predators who use communication tools to recruit and exploit them, and limit the spread of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)".

Expected to go live in the US initially, the features include use of new technology to limit the spread of CSAM online, especially via the Apple platform. There will be on-device protection for children from sending or receiving sensitive content, with mechanisms to alert parents if the user is below age 13. Apple will also intervene when Siri or Search is used to look up CSAM-related topics.

### What is the tech Apple is using?

In a blog post, Apple said it will use cryp-

tography applications via iOS and iPadOS to match known CSAM images stored on iCloud Photo. The technology will match images on a user's iCloud with these known images, provided by child safety organisations. And this is done without actually seeing the image, and only by looking for what is like a fingerprint match. If there are matches crossing a threshold, Apple will "report these instances to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)".

Apple clarified that its technology keeps user privacy in mind, and hence the database is transformed into "an unreadable set of hashes that is securely stored on users' devices". The technology will determine a match without revealing the result.

At this point, the device creates a "cryptographic safety voucher" with the match result and additional encrypted data, and saves it to iClouds with the image. Threshold

secret sharing technology ensures that these vouchers cannot be interpreted by Apple unless the iCloud Photos account crosses a threshold of known CSAM content. This threshold, the blog claimed, has been put in place to "provide an extremely high level of accuracy and ensures less than a one in one trillion chance per year of incorrectly flagging a given account". So a single image is unlikely to trigger an alert.

But if the threshold is exceeded, Apple can interpret the contents of the safety vouchers and manually review each report for a match, disable the user's account, and send a report to NCMEC. Apple said users will be able to appeal if they think they have been wrongly flagged.

### How do the other features work?

Apple's new communication safety for Messages will blur a sensitive image and warn a child about the nature of the con-

tent. If enabled from the backend, the child could also be told that their parents have been alerted about the message they have viewed. The same will apply if the child decides to send a sensitive message. Apple said Messages will use "on-device machine learning to analyse image attachments and determine if a photo is sexually explicit" and that Apple will not get access to the messages. The feature will come as an update on accounts set up as families in iCloud for latest operating system versions.

Also, with the update, when a user tries to look up potential CSAM topics, Siri and Search will explain why this could be harmful and problematic. Users will also get guidance on how to file a report on child exploitation if they ask for it.

### Why is Apple doing this, and what are the concerns being raised?

Big tech companies have for years been

under pressure to crack down on the use of their platforms for exploitation of children. Many reports have over the years underlined how enough was not being done to stop technology from making CSAM content available more widely.

However, Apple's announcement has been met with criticism, with many underlining how this is exactly the kind of surveillance technology many governments would want to have and love to misuse.

Also, cryptography experts like Matthew Green of Johns Hopkins University have expressed fears that the system could be used to frame innocent people by sending them images intended to trigger the matches for CSAM. "Researchers have been able to do this pretty easily," he told NPR, adding that it is possible to fool such algorithms.

But *The New York Times* quoted Apple's chief privacy officer Erik Neuenschwander as

saying these features will not mean anything different for regular users. "If you're storing a collection of CSAM material, yes, this is bad for you," he told the publication.

### Do other big tech companies have similar technologies?

Yes. Microsoft, Google and Facebook have been alerting law enforcement agencies about CSAM images. Apple has been lagging behind because any such technology would have gone against its much-touted commitment to user privacy. As a result, in 2020, when Facebook reported 20.3 million CSAM violations to the NCMEC, Apple could report only 265 cases, *The New York Times* reported.

It is only now that it has been able to find the technology sweet spot to do this without impacting regular users, or at least spooking them. However, as the initial backlash has shown, it is still a tightrope walk.







# 7 EXPRESS NETWORK

## Hopeful of IT panel taking up Pegasus issue, says Tharoor

**MANOJ CG**  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

ALTHOUGH THE Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology could not take up a discussion on the Pegasus snooping issue at its last meeting after BJP members on the panel blocked proceedings of the meeting citing lack of quorum, panel chairman Shashi Tharoor on Sunday said he was hopeful that the committee will take up the issue going forward.

The last meeting on July 28 also saw, what Tharoor calls, "last minute refusal" by representatives of three ministries to attend it. Tharoor has since then written to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, asking him to take "serious cognizance" of the matter and called the conduct of the officials "unprecedented", "breach of parliamentary privilege" and "contempt of the House".

Talking to *The Indian Express*, Tharoor said the IT committee had been conducting discussions on citizens' data privacy and security for the past two years. He said cyber security topics had also featured in its agenda under the previous

chairman, BJP's Anurag Thakur.

"The Pegasus issue therefore clearly falls under the purview of the IT committee and within these subjects on its agenda. So, it is only expected that members of the IT committee will ask questions about it when these topics arise. It is no secret that the committee's meeting on its established agenda was disrupted by BJP members who did not want Pegasus to be discussed," he said.

Arguing that accountability to Parliament is a cornerstone of India's democracy, Tharoor said "but it is increasingly being tossed aside in the current regime's headlong rush to autocracy".

"Despite this disappointing approach I am hopeful that we will be able to take up the question going forward. And I would say that though we will take it up to the extent that the committee is able to act, I have proposed from the start that what we really need is a Supreme Court monitored inquiry headed by a serving judge or a recently retired judge to conduct a fair, impartial and thorough investigation of the Pegasus issue," Tharoor said.

**FULL REPORT ON**  
[www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com)

## Bengaluru crackdown: Spike in drugs seized, cases booked, arrests

**JOHNSON TA**  
BENGALURU, AUGUST 7

THE DEATH of a 27-year-old Congolese national in the custody of the Bengaluru police after being arrested for alleged trafficking of party drugs comes amidst a crackdown on drug traffickers in the city over the last two years — resulting in a nearly 10-fold rise in registered drug cases, from 285 in 2018 to 2,766 in 2020. 2021 has already seen 2,550 cases being registered.

The wide net cast by police authorities has seen the busting of celebrity drug networks serviced by foreign suppliers, who are believed to bring in drugs via various means, such as parcels to post offices, purchases on the dark net, and from cities like Delhi and Mumbai.

The number of foreigners arrested on drug trafficking charges has also seen a corresponding jump — from 82 in 2018-19 to 184 in 2020-21. In the seven months of the current year, 100-odd foreigners have been arrested. The quantity of MDMA seized in the city has increased from 876 grams in 2018-19 to 2.571 kg in 2020 and 7.777 kg in 2021, police data show.

Lauding the police efforts, former chief minister B S Yediyurappa had said last year, "This is the first time in the country that strong action is being taken against drug usage."

Sources involved with the operations say police have managed to tap into the drug supply and consumer network — a tightly bound unit, with suppliers selling only to known purchasers — "through systematic arrests". The leads from a drug haul in November 2018, of 1.5 kg of heroin and 1,930 Ecstasy tablets worth an estimated Rs 1.5 crore, for example, led police last year

to two actresses and other known names, as well as Loom Pepper, a Senegalese national and allegedly a major drug supplier.

Officers say police call records and WhatsApp data have helped police zero in on users and suppliers. "The network operates on mobile phones and messaging services," said a source.

Police claim to have zeroed in on Congolese national Joel Shindani Malu alias Jon, 27, who died in police custody on August 2, through an informant. His custodial death, resulting in protests, was not the first such incident. In May 2021, a Nigerian national, Peter Ofor, had been found dead near a lake after he was reportedly picked up by police on drug trafficking charges. In 2017, another Nigerian, Ifeanyi Madu, had died reportedly when he fell off a scooter while being pursued by the narcotics wing of the Bengaluru Crime Branch.

"There are rival gangs among foreign drug suppliers. Many times seizures occur due to tip-offs provided to police on account of the rivalries," an officer said.

A senior officer admitted that police have been known to use high-handed measures, particularly against African nationals, many of whom are found to be overstaying after expiry of their visas. In 2019, the Karnataka High Court had ordered that illegal foreigners awaiting trial in the state be lodged in detention centres and not be released after bail.

## CJI: Threat to human rights is highest in police stations

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

POINTING OUT that custodial torture and other police atrocities are problems that still prevail in society, Chief Justice of India N V Ramana Sunday said the "threat to human rights and bodily integrity are the highest in police stations".

He flagged the issues of human rights and dignity, saying these are "sacrosanct".

"The threat to human rights and bodily integrity are the highest in police stations. Custodial torture and other police atrocities are problems that still prevail in our society. In spite of constitutional declarations and guarantees, the lack of effective legal representation at the police stations is a huge detriment to arrested/detained persons," the CJI said, addressing an event organised by National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).

"The decisions taken in these early hours will later determine the ability of the accused to defend himself. Going by the recent reports even the privileged are not spared third-degree treatment," he said.

"To keep police excesses in check, dissemination of information about the constitutional right to legal aid and availability of free legal aid services is necessary. The installation of display boards and outdoor hoardings in every police station/prison is a step in this direction," CJI Ramana said, as he called upon NALSA to carry out nationwide



CJI N V Ramana

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"To keep police excesses in check, dissemination of information about the constitutional right to legal aid and availability of free legal aid services is necessary. The installation of display boards and outdoor hoardings in every police station/prison is a step in this direction," CJI Ramana said, as he called upon NALSA to carry out nationwide

sensitisation of police officers.

He said the concept of free legal aid to the needy has its roots in the freedom movement. "Those days, the legal luminaries rendered pro-bono services to freedom fighters, who were targeted by the colonial rulers. This spirit of service found reflection in the Constitution, with those very same legal luminaries serving as members of the Constituent Assembly."

Stressing the need to work on access to justice for all, irrespective of their socio-economic status, CJI Ramana said this is imperative to ensure that we remain a society governed by rule of law.

"If we want to remain a society governed by the rule of law, it is imperative for us to bridge the gap of accessibility to justice between the highly privileged and the most vulnerable. For all times to come, we must remember that, the realities of socio-economic diversity which prevail in our nation, cannot ever be a reason for denial of rights," he said.

Asking not to let the past determine the future, he said that project "Access to Justice" is an unending mission for the country so that it can dream of a future based on legal mobility, a future where equality is a reality. "If, as an institution, the judiciary wants to garner the faith of the citizens, we have to make everyone feel assured that we exist for them. For the longest time, the vulnerable population has lived outside the system of justice," the CJI said.

Pointing out that "prevailing obstacles like lengthy, painstaking and expensive formal justice processes add to the woes of realising the goals of Access to Justice", CJI Ramana said: "As an institution, the toughest challenge before us is to break these barriers first."

Making it clear that accessing justice in India is not merely an aspirational goal, he said, "We need to work hand in hand with various wings of the government to make it a practical reality."

## At Mahan Dal meet, Akhilesh reaches out to non-Yadav OBCs

**ASAD REHMAN**  
LUCKNOW, AUGUST 8

AS PART of his strategy to bring together smaller parties, especially non-Yadav OBCs, ahead of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections next year, Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday addressed party workers of Mahan Dal, an OBC-based party headed by Keshav Dev Maurya, in Lucknow.

Presiding the Mahan Dal meeting as its chief guest, Akhilesh lashed out at BJP, accusing it of wedging a divide in the backward class community by pitting Yadavs against other OBCs.

"The BJP says Yadavs are taking all the resources. Sometimes they say that we have snatched away what was yours. This narrative becomes more visible when elections approach... The BJP is just doing politics. You and I are Backwards. We follow the footsteps of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar... Samajwadi Party is a party of the backwards and demands the rights for all its people," Akhilesh Yadav said, adding that if Mahan Dal and SP workers would work together in the election, the alliance could win



Akhilesh Yadav said if Mahan Dal and SP workers work together in the election, the alliance could win 400 seats in UP. *Express*

400 seats in UP.

The UP Assembly has 403 seats.

Once again reiterating the demand for a caste-based census, Yadav accused both the BJP and the Congress of refusing to do so. "First the Congress refused to do a caste census, then the BJP. The BJP will never do a caste-based census because they know who are demographically more. I assure all our people that when we will form the government, we will do a caste census," he said.

The Mahan Dal enjoys support from Backward communi-

ties like Mauryas, Khushwahas, Sakhyas and Sainis.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Mahan Dal chief Keshav Dev Maurya said his party's only aim is to remove the BJP from power. "All communities are suffering — the Backwards, the Dalits, and the Muslims," he said.

Asked if they have reached a seat-sharing arrangement with the SP, Maurya said, "Yes, we have. But it is too early to disclose it..." "Our slogan is *Mahan Dal ne tahna hain, Samajwadi Party sarkar banana hain* (Mahan Dal has decided to make Samajwadi Party government)."

## NIA searches dozens of Jamaat-e-Islami premises in J&K over terror funding

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, JAMMU, SRINAGAR, AUGUST 8

THE NATIONAL Investigation Agency Sunday searched 56 locations allegedly linked to the banned Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) in Jammu and Kashmir as a part of its probe into a terror funding case.

The searches, conducted along with the Jammu and Kashmir Police, began early in the day and were going on till the evening. They were carried out in Kashmir's Srinagar, Budgam, Ganderbal, Baramulla, Kupwara,

Bandipora, Anantnag, Shopian, Pulwama and Kulgam districts and Jammu's Ramban, Doda, Kishtwar and Rajouri districts.

JeI was banned by the government on February 28, 2019 — shortly after the Pulwama attack. Sources said NIA registered the terror funding case on February 5 under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.

An NIA statement said: "The members of the organisation have been collecting funds domestically and abroad through donations particularly in the form of Zakat, Mowda and Bait-ul-Mal purportedly to further charity and

other welfare activities but these funds are instead being used for violent and secessionist activities."

It said these funds were channelled to banned groups such as Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba and others.

"JeI has also been motivating impressionable youth of Kashmir and recruiting new members (Rukuns) in J&K to participate in disruptive secessionist activities," it said.

NIA said the raid locations include the premises of office bearers of JeI, its members, as well as offices of trusts purportedly run by the organisation.

## PM to chair UNSC debate on maritime security, cooperation

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi will chair a high-level open debate on the topic "Enhancing Maritime Security — A Case for International Cooperation" on Monday via video conferencing.

The Ministry of External Affairs on Sunday said the meeting is expected to be attended by several heads of state and governments of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) member states, along with high-level briefers from the UN system and key regional organisations.

"Modi would be the first Indian Prime Minister to preside over a UN Security Council Open Debate," the MEA said in a statement.

The open debate will focus on ways to effectively counter maritime crime and insecurity, and strengthen coordination in the maritime domain. Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to attend the session, sources said.

The UN Security Council has discussed and passed resolutions on different aspects of maritime security and maritime crime, the MEA said. However, this will be the first time that maritime security will be discussed in a holistic manner as an exclusive agenda item in such a high level open debate.

"Given that no country alone can address the diverse aspects of maritime security, it is important to consider this subject in a



PM Narendra Modi

holistic manner in the United Nations Security Council. A comprehensive approach to maritime security should protect and support legitimate maritime activities, while countering traditional and non-traditional threats in the maritime domain," it said.

In 2015, Modi had put forward the vision of SAGAR — an acronym for "Security and Growth for all in the Region" — which focuses on cooperative measures for sustainable use of the oceans, and provides a framework for a safe, secure, and stable maritime domain in the region.

This initiative was further elaborated in 2019 at the East Asia Summit through the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI), with a focus on seven pillars of maritime security, including Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport, the MEA said.

### TRACKING THE SECOND SURGE

**525**  
DAYS SINCE  
PANDEMIC  
BEGAN

**NEW CASES: 34,629**

**ACTIVE CASES: 4,02,683**

**TOTAL VACCINATION: 50,68,10,492**

**DAILY DEATHS**  
**447**

**TOTAL DEATHS**  
**4,28,309**

**WEEKLY CFR**  
**1.32%**

**OVERALL CFR**  
**1.36%**



**TESTS TODAY: 18,06,290 | TOTAL TESTS: 48,18,45,475**

**WEEKLY POSITIVITY: 2.24% | OVERALL POSITIVITY: 6.63%**

### STATES REPORTING MOST CASES

STATE	NEW CASES	ACTIVE CASES	WEEKLY POSITIVITY	TOTAL VACCINATION
■ Kerala	18,607	1,77,012	12.52%	2,17,82,466
■ Maharashtra	5,508	71,510	3.12%	4,66,87,572
■ Andhra Pradesh	2,050	19,949	2.54%	2,36,21,506
■ Tamil Nadu	1,956	20,407	1.26%	2,51,39,694
■ Karnataka	1,598	23,956	1.11%	3,27,70,543

### STATES REPORTING MOST DEATHS

STATE	TODAY'S DEATHS	TOTAL DEATHS	WEEKLY CFR	OVERALL CFR
■ Maharashtra	153	1,36,336	2.53%	2.19%
■ Kerala	93	17,826	0.82%	0.54%
■ Odisha	69	6,488	3.04%	0.67%
■ Tamil Nadu	28	34,317	1.64%	1.35%
■ Karnataka	20	36,793	1.94%	1.27%

Note: Data as on Aug 8; vaccination numbers as of Aug 7. Deaths include those caused by comorbidities.

## Maharashtra identifies 45 cases of Delta Plus variant, six in Mumbai

**ANURADHA MASCARENHAS**  
PUNE, AUGUST 8

GENOMIC SURVEILLANCE by the state health department has identified 45 cases of Covid-19 caused by Delta Plus variant, across Maharashtra, with 13 in Jalgaon and 11 in Ratnagiri districts.

Three cases have been detected in Pune, five in Thane and six in Mumbai. Remaining cases have been detected with one each in Sangli, Kolhapur, Sindhudurg, Palghar, Aurangabad, Kolhapur and Beed districts.

Out of the 45 cases, 27 people infected with Delta Plus variant are male while the remaining are female.

A total of 20 people infected by this variant are in the age group 19 to 45, 14 between the age group of 46 and 60, six children are aged below 18 and five are aged above 60.

State health minister Rajesh Tope said cases of Delta Plus vari-

ant had increased, but there was no need to worry. Tope said immediate measures, such as travel history of the person, vaccination status and focus on contact tracing and testing, were being taken.

"So far, we have information on 34 out of 45 cases infected with Delta Plus variant and, barring one death, most are stable and have a mild form of the disease," state surveillance officer Dr Pradeep Awate told *The Indian Express*.

"At present, it does not seem a worrisome situation as there has not been an increase in the transmission rate," Dr Awate said.

He said surveillance, however, was critical, and that the Covid positivity rate was still high in some pockets of Pune district.

"Even as we relax restrictions and open up, we should be concerned about rural areas in Pune district as there is high positivity in some pockets and, hence, there has to be aggressive testing," Dr Awate said.

Till August 4, there were 83 cases of the variant in the country.

## FROM PAGE ONE Kerala tourism feels the pinch after months of restrictions

According to state Tourism officials, the total earnings from the sector in 2019 was Rs 45,010 crore. In 2020, it was only around Rs 11,000 crore — mainly during the months of January to March, before the pandemic struck, and mid-November onward, when the first wave eased (see box).

Officials said domestic arrivals fell by 72.86 per cent in 2020 from 2019, and international by 71.36 per cent.

In the first three months of this year, before the third wave surged, the state logged a decline of 40.53 per cent in domestic and 95.65 per cent in international arrivals from the same period last year.

Kochi-based tourism consultant Sanjeev Kumar Nair says a large number of properties are up

for sale. "Most of the properties have loan liability. Even though they are not operational, a skeletal staff has to be maintained for regular upkeep," says Nair.

According to All Kerala Houseboat Owners Association representative, Tomy Pulickattil, there was "a short period of relief" in December-January after the first wave waned.

"Many of us spent Rs 5 lakh to Rs 8 lakh to re-launch since the houseboats needed repairs after lying idle. Then came the second wave, and with the third now looming large, we are wary of making any fresh investment. The high fuel prices have also made re-sumption of operations unviable. We cannot increase the boat rent, either, at this stage," says

### DIP IN TOURISTS

YEAR	FOREIGN TOURISTS	DOMESTIC TOURISTS
2019	11.88 lakh	1.83 crore
2020	3.40 lakh	49.88 lakh
2021*	14,489	2.2 lakh

*\*January-March*

Pulickattil. The backwaters in Alappuzha alone has about 1,000 houseboats, each employing three-five persons. "Now, the employees as well as investors have turned to other avenues, such as door delivery of fish and vegetables," says Pulickattil.

In Wayanad, resort operator P T Jamshith says a large number of

properties are in crisis "without a paisa to resume business".

"Several resorts and homestays have been closed. Many are up for sale at half the rate of pre-Covid days. Those who have taken properties on lease have abandoned them. The only relief is that bikers are now checking in at off-road resorts," says Jamshith.

The sector has to "immedi-





## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## THE RISING FLAME

Tokyo 2021 busts many myths about Indian sports, points to the country's emergence as a sporting nation

AUGUST 7, 2021, Tokyo would be as much of a watershed moment for Indian Olympics sports lore as June 25, 1983, Lord's was for cricket. In its magnitude and potential influence, Neeraj Chopra's Olympic gold-medal-winning feat has only one parallel in the country's sporting heritage, the World Cup victory 38 years ago, a moment that changed India's sporting sensibilities. In a similar way, Chopra's accomplishment could alter perceptions of how Indians perceive athletes. This is a myth-busting gold medal, a testimony that Indian, or even Asian, athletes can not only match their European adversaries but also beat them, provided they get access to world-class facilities, top-draw coaching and unfettered support of the sporting fraternity. The unscientific assumption about Indians having inferior athletic DNA, something that undermines their medal-winning chances on the global stage, was hurled out the window and it landed 87.58 metres far. Chopra's gold would not only draw a clear route-map to global success but also banish the inferiority complex that Indian athletes carry to elite events. Athletics now has the momentum to jump in the sand pit of global competition and wrestle with the best.

Though India improved the London count by just one medal, the significance of that one medal cannot be overstated enough. Each of the medals they won was a statement of India's incremental rise as a sporting nation. It is foolhardy to expect India to match the US or China overnight, but the trajectory of the graph is constantly moving upwards. That those medals came in various streams is a further reason for optimism. In badminton and wrestling, it's time India is considered among the powerhouses; in weightlifting, there is a generational talent in Mirabai Chanu; in boxing, there is finally someone to look beyond Mary Kom. The revival of men's hockey would not have been better timed, the often-ignored women's hockey too blazed in promise. Shooting was an aberration — expect many of those who left in tears to bounce back stronger and hungrier. Overall, the Tokyo Games could leave a long-lasting influence on Indian sports.

The Olympics itself would be remembered as a metaphor of hope in the Covid-altered world. There were fears that the event would emerge as a super-spreader of the virus, it would see a stoppage and the competition wouldn't be top-notch. It has answered negatively to each of those doubts. With no runaway leader on the medals tally — just one gold separated the US and China — this was the most closely fought Games in recent times. Tokyo showed that with coaches seamlessly crossing borders and sporting knowhow spreading, the Olympic world was flattening. Top German coaches sitting in Chopra's corner as he left his Dresden-born arch-rival, Johannes Vetter, far behind was a frame that best captured the levelling of the playing field.

## STANDING WITH KABUL

UNSC meet exposes duplicity of Taliban and Pakistan, who talk peace and pursue war at the same time

A SPECIAL MEETING of the United Nations Security Council on Afghanistan convened under India's presidency last Friday, did not produce a new international consensus on arresting the tragedy triggered by Taliban's military offensive with the full support of the Pakistan army. On Afghanistan, there is no unanimity among the five permanent members, which is critical for any consequential decisions by the world body. An ambitious China seeking to extend its regional footprint, and an opportunistic Russia that tags behind Beijing seem to support Pakistan's game plan to reinstall the Taliban in Kabul. Given its special ties to the Pakistan army, London tends to be wobbly on the Taliban. The US, which spent much blood and treasure in rebuilding Afghanistan after ousting the Taliban from power in 2001, has ceded much ground by deciding to withdraw all its troops in Afghanistan by the end of this month. In Europe (represented by France which has a permanent seat in the UNSC) too there is a decline in political support for a continued Western military intervention in Afghanistan.

Although the UNSC discussion may not have moved the political needle on Afghanistan, it has laid bare the depth of the crisis there and the duplicity of the Taliban and Pakistan that talk peace and pursue war at the same time. Addressing the UNSC, the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Deborah Lyons, pointed to the "dangerous turning point," in the nation. "Ahead lies," she added, "either a genuine peace negotiation or a tragically intertwined set of crises: An increasingly brutal conflict combined with an acute humanitarian situation and multiplying human rights abuses." That the Taliban could not have mounted the massive military operations on its own was the burden of the presentation by the Afghan envoy to the United Nations, Ghulam M Isacai. He told the Council that more than 10,000 foreign fighters are in the country, including from a number of UN designated terror organisations, participating in the Taliban's military offensive. He also pointed to long-standing Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan and Rawalpindi's massive logistical support for the Taliban's current military offensive in Afghanistan.

Although the world was optimistic about the peace talks in Doha ending the prolonged conflict in Afghanistan, the Taliban and Pakistan have merely used them to delay negotiations on devising a new political order in Afghanistan while stepping up their violent campaign to overthrow the legitimate government in Kabul. India must continue to stand with the people of Afghanistan, whose dreams for a peaceful future are being shattered. Delhi must continue to mobilise international opinion in all global forums as well as work with its close partners to mount pressure on Pakistan and the Taliban to stop fighting and start talking peace with Kabul.

## FREEZE FRAME

## E P UNNY



SANJOY HAZARIKA

THE INITIAL STEPS have been taken in calming the roiling waters on the Assam-Mizoram border confrontation. First, the FIRs and cases which were filed against each other's leaders — involving both Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and K Vanlalvena, Mizo National Front (MNF) MP — have been withdrawn. Cases against officials from both states have been dropped. While these should not have been initiated in the first place, stepping back in this manner is a good way to reduce the political and emotive temperatures, which were soaring on both sides.

A sharp war of words and aggressive social media posts on either side did not help. Indeed, an outsider may be excused, if after listening to, watching or reading the passionate, angry and even, in some cases, inflammatory remarks by either side, for being perplexed by these declarations — were they, s/he may well have wondered, by citizens of neighbouring states or opposing nations. Some have added fuel to the fire by casting aspersions on the citizenry of their brethren on the disputed border or referring inappropriately to a part of their own state. These need be seen in the background of the extensive suffering faced by the region as a result of misunderstanding and ill will.

Second, the Assam chief minister's decision to send two ministerial emissaries from Assam to Aizawl is a good gesture to open dialogue and appears to have paid off initially. Both states have agreed to the deployment of neutral Central forces at the disputed stretches of the interstate border. Atul Bora, one of the ministers sent to Aizawl is from the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) in the BJP-led coalition, and also party president. The significance of an AGP leader in the peace mission should not be underestimated. The AGP led a regional coalition in the 1980s and 1990s in the Northeast that emerged as an anti-Congress front. The MNF had been part of this process and has had good relations with the AGP from that time.

Part of the confidence-building measures

Goodwill amongst Assam, Mizoram, all Northeast states, holds key to Act East Policy

# Mending fences

Communities at the border, stakeholders such as business leaders and transporters as well as civil society need to be involved in conversations and dialogue for sustainable settlements. Political leaders must set the pace and provide the platform. However, since both sides use different yardsticks of history and geography to negotiate, it is difficult to visualise a situation where either side will emerge as a clear winner. There will have to be give and take, count net gains against losses.

has been the welcome withdrawal of the Assam government's travel advisory which asked people not to travel to Mizoram and urged people from the state working or staying there to "exercise utmost caution".

There is a third element that has become a seemingly endemic part of political confrontation between states. These are the blockades that have closed roads and highways in Assam leading to Mizoram — and in the past few days to Tripura. This has happened repeatedly in confrontations between different states in the region such as Nagaland and Manipur and last year between Assam and Mizoram.

These crackling tensions go far beyond interstate border disputes and have regional, national and international repercussions. For one, they have adverse economic impacts which are felt most sharply at the local level, leading to a rise in prices and shortage of commodities. This is a time when Covid-19 cases continue to rise in all the states of the region, including Mizoram and Assam, and essential supplies cannot be blocked by public agitations.

The economic fallout of such actions are felt down the entire supply chain, from producer to transporter and receiving customers/markets. National highways are the direct responsibility of the Centre and it must ensure that these economic veins remain clear for passenger and freight traffic.

In addition, images, especially of violence and confrontation, go "viral" without delay. They move from mobile to mobile, over social platforms, one group to the other, leaping across boundaries of state and nation. Among those who look at them are potential investors and policymakers, not just in Delhi but other state and national capitals. The adverse impacts of these can be considerable.

For decades, we must remember, the public image of the Northeast was shaped by conflict and confrontation, bandhs and violence. It had been shedding that image slowly and steadily, facing many hurdles, ag-

itations and risks. Sustainable peace continues to be elusive although flawed insurgencies have failed and fallen. There are new challenges such as border divides and sharpening sectarian tensions. Economic growth is visible as are continuing concerns. Lakhs of young people from the region, despite discrimination and pressures, have moved and made their lives in other parts of the country, engaging with the idea of India, before, during and after the waves of the pandemic.

That is why communities at the border, stakeholders such as business leaders and transporters as well as civil society need to be involved in conversations and dialogue for sustainable settlements. Political leaders must set the pace and provide the platform. However, since both sides use different yardsticks of history and geography to negotiate, it is difficult to visualise a situation where either side will emerge as a clear winner. There will have to be give and take, count net gains against losses. That is the practical side which politicians are best equipped to deliver. Herein lies the importance of the concept of a Development Corridor on the border that would have to be agreed to by both sides and guaranteed by the Centre. This could build on the natural advantages of the bordering states — vegetable, meat and fruit processing, handicrafts and designer handlooms to name just five — and create jobs, livelihoods and better incomes for people on the border and beyond, building an equitable supply chain.

A fundamental point needs to be underscored: The visionary Act East Policy and its predecessor Look East Policy rest on the pillars of peace and trust, not just better roads and physical infrastructure. They depend on good relationships between neighbours which enable economic cooperation, transport and trade not just cultural and social collaboration.

*The writer is director, Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, Jamia Millia Islamia*



M P NATHANAEEL

THE DEATH OF a fruit stall owner, 47-year-old A Murugesan, allegedly as a result of a brutal thrashing by a special sub-inspector of Tamil Nadu police in Vazhapadi in Salem district on June 22, has revived memories of Bennis and his father Jayaraj who died in custody last year in June in Thoothukudi. While two other policemen stood watching the gory scene, Murugesan's friends pleaded for him to be spared but to no avail.

An army man Resham Singh was brutally tortured while his mother and two sisters in Pilibhit, UP, were humiliated on May 3, drawing the Allahabad High Court's ire. Two sub-inspectors and six constables were booked, and the station house officer sent to lines. Singh's medical report confirmed injuries due to brutal torture.

On May 21, an 18-year-old vegetable vendor Faisal Hussain was allegedly beaten to death in Bangarmau police station in UP's Unnao district for violation of Covid-19 directives. Though the market in the town was open, Hussain was beaten up and taken to a police station from where he was shifted to a hospital. He was declared dead on arrival. The post-mortem report attributed his death to head injuries. Two police constables and a home guard have been charged with murder.

Custodial deaths in police stations, even in jails, seem to be commonplace these days. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, while speaking at the inauguration of the Centre of Excellence for Research and Analysis of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances of the

## ENDING POLICE BRUTALITY

Prompt action against errant personnel is a must to stop custodial torture

National Forensic Sciences University in Ahmedabad on July 12, said that the police in our country are accused of either "No Action" or "Extreme Action". He has hit the nail right on the head. Victims of crime shudder at the thought of having to visit a police station. More so if one happens to be from a marginalised section of society.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, 100 cases of custodial deaths were reported in 2017, 42 of which were in police custody. Thirty-three policemen were arrested while 27 were charge-sheeted. Forty-eight police personnel were charge-sheeted and three convicted in cases of human rights violation. Overall, 2,005 cases were registered against police personnel, 1,000 of whom were charge-sheeted. With 456 cases, Maharashtra topped the list, while Gujarat and Rajasthan followed with 191 and 169 cases, respectively; 128 personnel were convicted.

According to the NCRB's 2019 figures, 85 cases of custodial deaths were reported in the year with Tamil Nadu registering the highest number of cases followed by Gujarat, Punjab and Rajasthan and Odisha. No policeman was convicted, though 14 personnel of Gujarat were arrested, and charge-sheeted. For six custodial deaths in Rajasthan, three magistrate inquiries and two judicial inquiries were initiated against erring policemen.

In a written reply in the Lok Sabha, the former Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy stated that 1,697 custodial

deaths were registered between April 2019 and March 2020, of which 1,584 deaths were in judicial custody while the rest (113) were in police custody. Uttar Pradesh topped the list with 400 custodial deaths followed by Madhya Pradesh (143). This meant that about five custodial deaths took place every day in our country. But on August 3, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai stated in the Lok Sabha that 348 custodial deaths and 1,189 cases of torture by police were reported across the country in the last three years.

While several policemen do get convicted, there are good reasons to believe that many go scot free — by manipulating records, intimidating complainants or political patronage. It's up to senior officers to ensure that prompt actions are initiated against policemen who resort to brutal torture. When erring personnel are promptly punished, the message goes out loud and clear to other rogue policemen that the law will catch up with them. In the case of custodial deaths, those guilty should be tried for murder.

Police personnel who remain spectators when people in custody are being tortured are also complicit in the crime. Sub divisional police officers and superintendents of police should be held accountable for the impropriety committed by those under their supervision.

*The writer is a retired Inspector General of Police, CRPF*

## AUGUST 9, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

### CABINET RESHUFFLE

PRIME MINISTER INDIRA Gandhi carried out a minor reshuffle of her cabinet on August 8. Narayan Dutt Tiwari has been shifted from the Planning Ministry to the Industries Ministries. S B Chavan has been moved from the Education Ministry to planning. The Minister of State for Industry, Charanjit Channana, who has been looking after the industry ever since Indira Gandhi returned to power will continue in his position with Tiwari heading the ministry. Tiwari will continue to hold the temporary charge of the labour portfolio. The PM is yet to announce the name of the new education minister. She has asked Shiela Kaul, minister of state for education and culture, to take temporary charge of the ministry.

Mrs Gandhi is said to be looking for talent outside the parliamentary party but the search is yet to bear fruit.

### AMU EXPULSIONS

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR of the Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh, Saiyid Hamid, has rusticated Irfanullah Khan, president of the dissolved union of the university and convener of the Students Action Committee for a period of five years. Fifteen other students were also rusticated for a period ranging from two to five years for what the university called, "acts of indiscipline". Nine student leaders were expelled last month for a period of one to three years.

### DACOITS STRIKE IN UP

NINE POLICE PERSONNEL and three villagers lost their lives in an encounter with dacoits in Uttar Pradesh's Etah district. The dacoits, who are reported to have numbered approximately 45, were from the gangs of Chabiram Yadav, Poti Yadav and Anar Singh Yadav.

### LOANS WRITTEN OFF

THE UNION GOVERNMENT has taken a decision not to recover about Rs 1,412 crore given to states as assistance between 1977-78 and 1978-79 for coping with natural calamities. It has proposed to treat this amount as an additional assistance for these years.





9 THE IDEAS PAGE

Engineering a crisis

Constant tampering of curricula without giving students knowledge of the basics, a deficit in industry-instruction link continue to be the bane of country's technical education



SS MANTHA AND ASHOK THAKUR

ENGINEERING IS AN applied science and therefore its pursuit preconditions a sound knowledge of its civil, premechanical and electrical branches, these being its building blocks. Offshoots like metallurgy and chemical engineering have sprung up from mechanical engineering and a host of other branches like electronics, communications, computer science and IT grew from the electrical branch of engineering. A common thread that bound these specialisations was a sound engineering base rooted in materials, applied physics and thermodynamics.

Private entrepreneurs took the lead to meet the growing demand of the country in technical education in the mid-Eighties, but with little idea of the subject. As a result, the faculty of these institutions drove the agenda of their management — and sometimes their own. When the management's agenda entered academic bodies of various universities, the first casualty was the curriculum. Important courses such as those mentioned above were the first to be jettisoned since they were both tough to teach for the teachers and tough to pass for the students. Subjects like materials, applied physics and thermodynamics became dispensable. Several universities merrily revised their curriculum at the expense of these courses.

This softening of subjects coupled with unfettered expansion in the early and mid-2000s, though it ensured that everyone who aspired to technical education could find a seat commensurate with his/her abilities, resulted in real dilution of the overall standards in the country. At its peak in 2014-15, AICTE-approved institutes had almost 35 lakh seats, mainly due to the increased employment opportunities in the country. However, a series of reports by this paper in December 2017 revealed no takers for at least 51 per cent of the 15.5 lakh seats in 3,291 undergraduate engineering colleges in 2016-17. These reports laid bare the regulatory gaps, poor infrastructure, lack of qualified faculty and the non-existent industry linkage that contributed to the abysmal employability of graduates from most of these institutes.

Some consolidation is bound to happen in every expanding system, but that also calls for intelligent interventions to connect with the available employment opportunities if the fruits of expansion are to be enjoyed. Since 2015-16, at least 50 colleges have closed each year and this year, AICTE approved the closure of 63 institutes. However, 54 new colleges were approved for the academic year, 2021-22 in backward districts. Similar statistics rule every year. Did anyone also study the available employment opportunities in those districts before approving them? When political and economic reasons override the establishment of new entities, why discuss declining standards? Several such decisions only contributed to the cumulative deterioration of standards overall.

Not a single industry body, be it CII, FICCI or ASSOCHAM has managed to effectively



CR Sasikumara

inform the education planners on the growth in different employment sectors. Nor has the government taken any tangible steps to set up an independent body to advise AICTE on this vital aspect. In the absence of any credible information on demand side numbers, investments made by institutions will only be based on perception. Yesterday, it was IT and its applications that propelled a growth in IT and Computer Science courses. Today, it is automation. Be it RPA, AI, ML, blockchain, hard robotics or IOT, the thrust is on complete automation. What happens when these areas get saturated? Several jobs have already disappeared with the base of the pyramid having shrunk considerably.

Lack of adequate number of teachers, lack of quality in those available, inability of the management to make adequate investments in a dynamic environment, lack of employment opportunities, shelf life of skills coming down with every technology-related intervention and a constant experimentation with curriculum have all been the bane of quality in technical education. Rather than being reactive, institutions must proactively define the practicing elements of education. The corrective measures for these shortfalls are technology intensive, are experiential, and need investments in teaching. Colleges are unwilling or not in a position to make those investments resulting in serious decline in quality.

Not all experiments are worth doing though. A constant fiddling with the curriculum, reducing total credits, giving multiple choices in the name of flexibility, dispensing with mathematics and physics at the qualification level, teaching in local languages may all be good arguments, but one must assess their utility and their effect on technical education in the long run. An IT-heavy curriculum in every specialisation is not called for.

Not a single industry body, be it CII, FICCI or ASSOCHAM has managed to effectively inform the education planners on the growth in different employment sectors. Nor has the government taken any tangible steps to set up an independent body to advise AICTE on this vital aspect. In the absence of any credible information on demand side numbers, investments made by institutions will only be based on perception. Yesterday, it was IT and its applications that propelled a growth in IT and Computer Science courses. Today, it is automation.

Reducing total credits has not only reduced the rigour of engineering education, but also meant loss in jobs for several faculty streams. National pride may be non-negotiable, but then will teaching in Marathi or Tamil increase employment opportunities besides causing several pedagogy and copyright-related issues? Is there a national report available on this? Over a period of time, such experiments tend to reduce interest levels in technical education itself.

The ultimate measure of performance is embedded in quality assurance. Various rating and ranking agencies insist that programme and course outcomes are paramount for quality. The larger question, however, is if these can be measured in the spirit in which they are written and if the gap in performance can be used to improve the system akin to a closed loop control system? What if the guaranteed outcomes are not realised? Can the stakeholders sue the administrators on reneging on promises? The need of the hour is to create a truly autonomous quality assurance body at an arms-length from the government, manned by eminent persons both from industry as well as academia.

The education paradigm is staring at a large shift, due to the pressures of a large growing and young population, the exponentially increasing cost of education and the need to reach the unreached with quality, which is being fast forwarded by Covid-19. That being said, Steve Jobs' words of 2005 ring true — "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So, you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future." Will we be able to connect ours?

Mantha is Former Chairman AICTE and Thakur Former Secretary GoI, MHRD

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"There have been times when it seemed Olympic sport would go the way of other sports, and be more about cynicism than grace, contracts than courage. Even in the absence of crowds, however, there have been plenty of moments in these Games that have shown the original flame still flickers." — OBSERVER

The job gap

Decline in unemployment rate is based on a statistical approach that masks the deterioration in quality of employment on the ground



RADHICKA KAPOOR

A QUICK LOOK at the recently released Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) reveals a decline in the unemployment rate from 5.8 per cent in 2018-19 to 4.8 per cent in 2019-20. This fall in the unemployment rate from the 45 year high of 6.1 per cent as reported in the first PLFS (2017-18) is indeed a respite. However, these statistics need to be interpreted with caution. They are based on the "usual status" approach wherein the activity status of a person is captured for a reference period of 365 days preceding the date of survey. Those who are reported as unemployed by this approach are those who are chronically unemployed. In developing countries, where casual and intermittent work and part-time and temporary jobs are widespread, employment estimates based on this approach tend to include the under-employed workforce. Consequently, unemployment rates derived from the usual status approach give a misleading picture of the extent of labour underutilisation and the employment challenge faced by the economy. In PLFS (2019-20), we observe that the unemployment rate based on the weekly status (which corresponds to the activity status of a person for a reference week) is not only higher than the usual status measure, but has also remained unchanged at 8.8 per cent compared to 2018-19. The divergence in these statistics only reinforces the need for anchoring the policy discourse in India on weekly status measures and not the usual status measures.

Significantly, even beyond the issue of using the weekly status measures, the lower unemployment rate (based on usual status approach) appears to be a consequence of economic distress and lack of gainful employment opportunities which have pushed jobseekers into low productivity and low paying work, thereby intensifying the challenge of under-employment.

To begin with, an examination of the composition of the workforce by employment type shows that the share of self-employment in total employment has increased to 53.5 per cent, up from 52.1 per cent as reported in the previous two PLFS rounds (2017-18 and 2018-19). Self-employed workers comprise three broad categories — own-account workers (those who run their enterprise without hiring any labour); employers (those who run their enterprise by hiring labour) and unpaid family workers/helpers in household enterprises. The third group comprises those who are engaged in their household enterprises, working full or part time, but do not receive any regular salary or wages in return for the work performed. It is this latter category, considered as poor quality employment, that has witnessed an increase in its share in total employment from 13.3 per cent (2018-19) to 15.9 per cent (2019-20) and contributed to the falling unemployment rate. The increase in this category of workers is reflective of rising underemployment. As the number of members working

in household enterprises rises, each worker simply works for less time than before and a large section of the workforce is underemployed. The share of the other two categories of self-employed workers, that is, own account workers and employers has declined. The share of regular salaried workers, which had been steadily rising in India until the PLFS 2018-19 and is considered as a more stable and secure form of employment, is now showing a decline. Significantly, even amongst regular salaried workers, those who are not eligible for any social security benefits has increased from 51.9 per cent to 54.2 per cent suggesting that formalisation would have been adversely impacted.

Interestingly a sectoral breakdown of the workforce shows that the share of the workforce engaged in agriculture has risen to 45.6 per cent (2019-20) from 42.5 per cent (2018-19). This increase is significant as it is the first time that the share of agriculture in total employment (in percentage terms) has increased since the NSS surveys started. This is indicative of a stalled structural transformation process, one which had picked up pace after 2004-05 with both the share and absolute numbers of workers engaged in agriculture declining with a concomitant rise in the non-agricultural sector. However, as non-agricultural sectors have failed to create jobs at a rapid pace in recent times, many jobseekers have been pushed back into the agricultural sector resulting in its emergence as an "employer of last resort".

Two trends that point to a deterioration in quality of employment merit attention vis-à-vis the sectoral composition. First, in the non-agriculture sector, the share of those engaged in informal enterprises increased from 68.4 per cent in 2018-19 to 69.5 per cent in 2019-20. Second, within the agricultural sector, much of the increase is coming through the category of unpaid family helpers. Their share in agricultural employment has increased (from 25.7 per cent to 29.7 per cent), while that of own account workers and employers has declined (48.4 per cent to 44.5 per cent) between the two rounds. Significantly, the share of rural women engaged in agriculture has increased substantially from 71.1 per cent (2018-19) to 75.7 per cent (2019-20) and these women are increasingly being employed in the category of unpaid family workers.

It is worth noting that India has been witnessing a rapid decline in female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) since 2004-05. This trend has been partly attributed to the withdrawal of women from the workforce as a consequence of an "income effect" — an increase in their family's income. The PLFS 2019-20, however, shows a sharp increase in the female LFPR by 5.5 percentage points. Much of this is driven by the increased LFPR of rural women. This rise coupled with their increasing engagement as unpaid family workers (and not better forms of employment such as regular salaried work) appears to mark a reversal of the trend of reduction in distress participation of women in the workforce.

These metrics suggest that the decline in unemployment rate based on the usual status approach masks a deterioration in the quality of employment and rising underemployment, challenges which are only likely to have intensified post Covid.

The writer is a senior visiting fellow at ICRIER



ASOKE MUKERJI

Securing the Indian Ocean

UNSC debate seeks to address maritime security peacefully, holistically

INDIA'S DECISION TO convene an open debate of the UN Security Council (UNSC) on enhancing maritime security, to be chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 9, reflects India's international evolution as a maritime nation. The objective of the debate is to highlight effective international maritime cooperation to respond holistically to natural and manmade threats to maritime security.

The fallout of the 2004 tsunami, which took a heavy toll on human and natural resources, led to the creation of an Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System by the UN in 2005. Early warnings through an international network seek to prevent a recurrence of such devastation. Faced with the increased threat from piracy originating off the coast of Somalia since 2007 to shipping in the western Indian Ocean, the Indian Navy participated robustly as part of a UNSC mandated 60-country Contact Group on Piracy off the coast of Somalia.

With a coastline of over 7,500 km, India has a natural interest in enhancing maritime security. The Indian Ocean region transports 75 per cent of the world's maritime trade and 50 per cent of daily global oil consumption. India's Security and Growth for All (SAGAR) policy, unveiled by PM Modi during a visit to Mauritius in March 2015, proposes an integrated regional framework to meet such an

objective in the Indian Ocean.

The five pillars of SAGAR are: One, India's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean region (IOR). Two, active engagement with friendly countries in the IOR. India would continue to enhance the maritime security capacities and economic resilience of these countries. Three, developing a network to take effective collective action for advancing peace and security in the region. Four, a more integrated and cooperative focus on the future of the IOR, which would enhance the prospects for the sustainable development of all countries in the region. Five, the primary responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in the IOR would be on those "who live in this region". India would continue its engagement with other nations having strong interests and stakes in this region through dialogue, visits, exercises, capacity building and economic partnership.

Sustaining international cooperation to enhance maritime security requires two supportive frameworks in the policy and operational areas. An effective legal policy framework must underpin a rule-of-law based approach to securing the maritime domain. The open debate will focus on the application of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), bringing to the fore new challenges to peace and security including from non-state actors such as terrorists, pirates and criminal gangs engaged in drug trafficking.

The discussion can become the catalyst for reviewing the operational effectiveness of the UNCLOS, especially regarding the enforcement of its provisions on freedom of navigation, the sustainable exploitation of maritime resources, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. India's credentials in presiding over this discussion are enhanced by the fact that in July 2014, it accepted an UNCLOS tribunal award on the maritime boundary arbitration between India and Bangladesh, contributing a new impulse to effective international economic cooperation among the littoral states of the Bay of Bengal (BIMSTEC).

Securing the sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) that traverse the oceans is of central importance to enhancing maritime security. The debate must focus on ensuring equal and unrestricted access to SLOCs by states while resolving differences through peaceful means. In the Indian Ocean, three major SLOCs that play a crucial role in the energy security and economic prosperity of states include the SLOC connecting the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean through the Bab al-Mandab (that transports the bulk of Asia's international trade with its major trading partners in Europe and America), the SLOC connecting the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean through the Strait of Hormuz (transporting the bulk of energy exports to major import destinations like India, ASEAN, and East Asia), and

the SLOC connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans through the Straits of Malacca (integral to the smooth flow of trade with ASEAN, East Asia, Russia's Far East and the US).

Sharing data on threats to commercial shipping is an important component of enhancing maritime security. India's initiative to establish an International Fusion Centre (IFC) for the Indian Ocean region in Gurugram in 2018, jointly administered by the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard, serves the objective of generating Maritime Domain Awareness on safety and security issues. It is projected that 40 international liaison officers from partner countries will eventually be located at the IFC.

The debate would illustrate the increasing role of the private sector in the maritime domain, whether it is in shipping, sustainable development through the Blue Economy, or using the maritime domain to provide the critical submarine fibre-optic cables supporting the Digital Economy. The ability of the UNSC to respond to the debate by endorsing a multiple stakeholder approach to enhancing maritime security would be a significant outcome, setting a paradigm for upholding "multi-dimensional" security in the 21st century.

The writer is a former ambassador and Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations in New York

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IMAGE DENTED

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Better late', (IE, August 7). There's a saying that it is only the bad laws that receive unanimous support. This is true for the retrospective tax law. In its near-decade of existence, the law didn't just attract a bad rep for doing business in India but also for the hypocrisy of the political structure which, despite criticising the law back in 2014, made no efforts to rectify it. As per the ministry statement, the deal was not in consultation with Cairn, which leaves it as a wild card.

Udit Sarkar, Kolkata

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Better late' (IE, August 7) The government's move to refund dues to Cairn is a correct one, even though it waited for an arbitration push to do so. Junking an unfair amendment of 2012 after nearly a decade exposes Centre's indecisiveness. This episode should be a case in point on how to avoid being caught napping by being proactive in resolving all pending, contentious matters. Else, investor friendly-promises shall remain as dubious as the sudden rise in our rankings in the ease of doing business.

Raja Bhandopadhyay, Vadodara

SHAMEFUL ATTACK

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Casteist abuse shameful, says women hockey team skipper' (IE, August 7). It is disheartening that in our country, people

IDEAS ONLINE

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cannot come to terms following the drubbing of our team. Our women's hockey team has accomplished a exceptional feat and it is our moral duty to embolden and motivate them.

Aanya Singhal, Noida

GREAT GAMES

THIS REFERS TO the report, '87.58m, a billion hearts, first athletics medal: Neeraj Chopra makes history' (IE, August 8). India's campaign at the Tokyo Olympics ended on a high on Saturday with Neeraj Chopra winning India's first-ever Gold medal in Athletics. The previous best medal haul came at the 2012 London Olympics.

SS Paul, Nadia



10

IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

MIRABAI CHANU, OLYMPICS SILVER MEDALLIST; COACH VIJAY SHARMA

“*Khushi ke maare neend nahin aati. We waited so many years for this... I feel one day I’ll also have a record lift*”

Chanu talks about putting the heartbreak of Rio behind, missing her mother, and retaining composure in the face of pressure; coach Vijay Kumar explains the determination and discipline which lie at the heart of his 26-year-old ward’s success. The session was moderated by Senior Assistant Editor Shivani Naik

**SHIVANI NAIK: Which was more stressful — the snatch of 87 kg or the clean & jerk of 115 kg?**  
**Mirabai:** The last snatch was the most tense because technique-wise, I fell a little short. I gave my best and tried, but I fell a bit short.

**SHIVANI NAIK: Coach Sharma, what was going through your mind at the time?**  
**Vijay Sharma:** Definitely during each lift, the blood pressure shoots up, but after the first lift you can relax a little. This time, I was feeling a lot more pressure thinking about Rio. Even though we had some great performances after that, psychologically, there is always the feeling that this is the Olympics, hope nothing goes wrong. That was the idea behind the 84, 87 kg starts, to take it safe and secure a medal. When the snatch finished, we relaxed a little thinking, ‘Yes, we are in the competition now. *Kar lenge* (We’ll do it)’.

**NIHAL KOSHIE: Mira, after the Rio Olympics, did you discuss your future with your mother? How big an influence is she?**  
**Mirabai:** She has been my pillar. She likes sports, and the family has dreamt of me becoming a sportswoman one day. In earlier days, there were problems with getting a good diet. My mother tried, she went all out. She told me, ‘Don’t look back, whatever comes, we are there to support you’. She once said I can’t feed you properly but I will try my best to take you to the top. If I had a bad day, or didn’t have a good day, she would come to know from my voice. She knows when I’m sad or not feeling well. I would lie many times but she would come to know. She used to motivate me regularly, that ‘If today is your bad day, keep working hard, tomorrow will be your good day’.

**NIHAL KOSHIE: How crucial was her support after Rio?**  
**Mirabai:** Just after my competition got over in Rio, I called my mother and couldn’t control my weeping. I told her I could not win a medal despite training so much. I knew somewhere she was also disheartened. She told me, ‘When you come back, we will talk about it’. I asked her what more I needed to do. I even thought maybe I should give up weightlifting. Later, I asked her if I should do so. She said winning and losing are part of sports, that whatever happened has happened, it’s past now, that I should try to plan my future, think of how much more hard work I can do. Later, I realised that I can do a lot, I can plan something. ‘Whatever happened has happened’... it was great motivation from my mother.

**SHIVANI NAIK: What did your coach tell you post Rio?**  
**Mirabai:** After Rio, I was clueless. I had done all the hard work but failed. I didn’t know what to change. I used to ask him what more I needed to do. Where was I going wrong? Coach made me understand, he changed my style of training, he changed my technique. After I changed my technique, my coach said, I can go ahead in my game and in the next Olympics I will surely win a medal. He motivated me a lot.

**DEVENDRA PANDEY: Coach Sharma, one year after the Rio Games, Mirabai became the world champion. What changed in that one year?**  
**Vijay Sharma:** The Rio 2016 setback was a very bad time for us. But two months later, we were back in proper training. Mira took a couple of months to mentally and physically regain her form. Her mother’s role in that period was instrumental. I too was there for her at that time. We discussed training — what to do, what not to do, how to go about it, what all was there to achieve. But all of it was possible because of how determined Mira is — if she wants to achieve something, she will absolutely achieve it.

**DEVENDRA PANDEY: What was the thinking behind the entry list total weight of 210 kg (at the Olympics)?**  
**Vijay Sharma:** There are some psychological aspects to the game that a coach must consider. Mira had a problem physically before the event and the declaration of weight was tactical.

**SRIRAM VEERA: Mira developed menstrual cramps the day before the event. How did you guys handle it?**  
**Vijay Sharma:** It’s a coach’s duty to keep tab of everything, from small to big. That is why bonding is so important. We



WHY  
**MIRABAI CHANU, VIJAY SHARMA**  
Never before Tokyo has India enjoyed such a confident start to the Olympics, with Mirabai Chanu winning silver in 49-kg weightlifting, with a total lift of 202 kg, on Day 1. Thus, helped by her coach of seven years, Vijay Sharma, the Manipuri superstar erased the memories of Rio, where she had struggled to make a single lift

need to know what’s happening in her body and we can speak about these things only when the relationship is completely open and we trust each other.  
With Mira, let’s put it this way: if not A to Z, I know A to W at least of her! We share a lot. This time in the US, we met a gynaecologist as we have had problems with this in the past. We asked that gynaecologist what to do if it crops up. We also did Zoom chat with a doctor Mira had been in touch with from before. So we had our bases covered as this can happen to a woman any time.  
We also carried precautionary medicines to Tokyo.  
The thing is, you can’t be sure 100% with these things. And that’s what happened. We missed the 117-kg lift — she had done 119 kg just a few days ago. So if that (menstrual cramps) hadn’t set in, she might perhaps have done even better. But this is part of the game, you have to be ready for anything. But yes, it does affect performance.

**SHIVANI NAIK: How much would you say Mirabai has evolved since she started to train with you, and how much of a learning experience has this been for you as well?**  
**Vijay Sharma:** Mirabai came into the national camp after she had won a medal in the junior championships. At that time, I was in charge of the men’s team but training used to happen together. She has been with me since the 2014 Commonwealth Games. When she was a silver then, she had lifted clean & jerk weight of 98 kg. Slowly from there, we

worked hard, and today she can lift 119 kg in the same category. It has been a long and tough journey but Mirabai has put in honest work and discipline, the result of which is her being here, at this position.

**DEVENDRA PANDEY: Coach Sharma, it’s all about the medal now, but how tough were the last few years with this single-minded pursuit?**  
**Vijay Sharma:** The bond between a coach and the athlete is significant. Luckily, my bond with Mira gradually became as strong as a father-daughter’s. That is why we bounced back after every injury, every problem, and gave this result.  
This was a pursuit of five years. 2019 and 2020 were absolutely crucial for us. At the Kolkata nationals (in February 2020, where Mirabai won gold), we performed brilliantly and there was regular improvement. And suddenly, we got to know that the Olympics had been postponed. We were distraught. But again, it’s the resolve. In our hearts we knew that we have to do this, it will be delayed now, but we will perform. We didn’t go back home during the lockdown. The thought process then was whatever happens, happens for the best. We didn’t spare any opportunity. In rooms, corridors, whenever we got any opportunity, we trained.

**SANDEEP DWIVEDI: Mira, the pandemic time must have been a setback for you guys. How much did it impact your training and how much of a difference does no crowds make?**  
**Mirabai:** Everyone likes crowds, they bring a different energy.  
**SANDEEP DWIVEDI: What is the thinking like after each lift? When does the thought of a medal kick in?**

**Mirabai:** I was not thinking about a medal, every player has a different way of thinking. We have six lifts, first three and later three. My first goal was to clear the first three lifts. If I think about the medal after one lift, things will be over for me. I was thinking about giving my best performance.

**SANDEEP DWIVEDI: Do you ever get angry in real life, because there is hardly any tension on your face?**  
**Mirabai:** Sometimes I do get angry (laughs). It happens sometimes.

**SANDEEP DWIVEDI: Do you meditate or read to bring that calmness?**  
**Mirabai:** I have been like this since childhood. The mind needs to be relaxed as a relaxed mind always helps.

**SRIRAM VEERA: What was going through your mind between lifts?**  
**Mirabai:** You do feel the pressure as everyone is watching you, there is pressure to do well. I recall the time I spent during training. I keep calm, I tell myself that the way I pull through during my training, I will do the same here. The situation then feels normal.

**SHIVANI NAIK: Coach Sharma, how is Mirabai different from the other lifters you have trained?**  
**Vijay Sharma:** *Talented bachche bahut hain* (There are many talented children). But the two things that separate Mira from these other weightlifters are her discipline and her self-determination. *Aaj bhi cycle pe training karne aati hai hostel se*

(Even today she comes for training on a cycle from the hostel). In the last five years, she hasn’t been home for even 10 days, she has missed her own sister’s wedding and she has done nothing but eat, sleep and train. These things are very tough for other talented weightlifters.

**NIHAL KOSHIE: Mira has had many issues in the past. There was the mystery back issue and problems with her shoulder. In a power sport like weightlifting, how challenging is it to make a comeback after injury?**

We didn’t go home during the lockdown... In rooms, corridors, any opportunity, we trained... In 5 years, Mira home for not even 10 days, missed her sister’s wedding

**Mirabai:** I used to think about home every day. There was not a day when I didn’t miss my mother and my family. I have not been home for the past few years now. At the same time I would tell myself that I was in the US so that I could win a medal for my country. I had to keep my emotions aside and focus on my training.

**SHIVANI NAIK: How does a coach balance between training and injury management in weightlifting?**  
**Vijay Sharma:** When you are regularly watching a student, even a small difference during their lifts should tell you that there is fatigue, the body isn’t working properly today. Then, depending on the communication with the athlete, you will immediately know if there is a problem and you have to change the training.

**SRIRAM VEERA: The stereotype is that weightlifting is an aggressive sport and lifters work themselves into almost a frenzy before lifts. Mira is calm, composed...**  
**Vijay Sharma:** It’s up to the DNA of every wrestler. You can be quiet and calm and perform really well. Some need to get really hyper, they shout loudly, to perform. It differs from person to person. It depends on your nature and we tailor the training according to it.

**SHIVANI NAIK: Mira, how do you typically react when you hear, say, that Chinese lifter Zhizhi Hou (the eventual champion), has lifted a record 96 kg? Does it add to the pressure?**  
**Mirabai:** There was no pressure. She had a good snatch and I will just try to match it someday. I feel one day I will also lift 96 kg so I need to continue my hard work and keep training.  
**SRIRAM VEERA: Coach Sharma, in these tense and emotional times of preparation, have there been any lighter incidents that stick in the mind?**  
**Vijay Sharma:** Our federation’s secretary general Sahadev Yadav ji, who was in daily touch with us and took care of all the details, had met a sports psychologist who said, ‘Keep Mira laughing, don’t allow her to get stressed, just light-hearted stuff daily’. Twice daily, for 5-10 minutes, we would keep her laughing. Just to not let her get too serious.

**SHIVANI NAIK: Mira, how good was returning home after long?**  
**Mirabai:** I’m very happy, the way I was welcomed. Everyone here is happy, be it my family, my friends. I got plenty of gifts. I am just happy.

**NIHAL KOSHIE: Mira, after winning at Tokyo, whom did you call first?**  
**Mirabai:** I did speak to my mother, she told me there were celebrations back home. Lot of well-wishers had come by. We couldn’t speak much, but I saw it on TV later. I wanted to talk more to her, but couldn’t.

**SHIVANI NAIK: How did you celebrate the medal back at the Athletes Village?**  
**Mirabai:** Due to the pandemic, I couldn’t celebrate after I won because there were too many restrictions. I didn’t enjoy it much either. I spoke to Sir and he said it was a dream which everyone had seen together for the last five years. We worked so hard to get this. Finally, the day had come. We sat in the evening and recalled those past five years.

**SRIRAM VEERA: We have read that two years ago, when you couldn’t sleep well, you used to reverse count from 100 to 1. Is the problem solved?**  
**Mirabai:** It has been solved. There is no issue now.  
**SRIRAM VEERA: So after winning a medal now, do you get good sleep?**  
**Mirabai:** (Laughs) *Khushi ke maare neend nahin aati* (Now I can’t sleep out of sheer happiness). We waited so many years for only this day.

**SHIVANI NAIK: Do you miss training now? And what will be the challenges ahead of the Paris Olympics?**  
**Mirabai:** Yeah, I miss it a lot. I want to go back to training!  
Three years is less time. I have to start again. Time is running fast. There will be qualification rounds and later the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games. I have very little time actually.



Illustration: Suvajit Dey



# ECONOMY

**FIRMS LIKELY TO STRUCTURE ASSETS ACCORDINGLY WHILE DOING DEALS HEREON**

## Retro tax repeal: Sovereign right to tax intact post-2012, but mist clears for cos

**AANCHAL MAGAZINE**  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

THE GOVERNMENT'S recent move to bury the controversial policy of retrospective taxation will provide relief to companies that undertook indirect transfer of assets before May 28, 2012, but the country still continues to retain its sovereign right to taxation under Section 9(1)(i) of the Income-tax Act. With the removal of the retrospective feature, however, a clear and predictable taxation law and intent has been presented to the companies, which are expected to structure their assets accordingly while doing deals hereon.

Experts said this removal of the

retrospective aspect now also provides clarity for deals between companies of countries where these are not covered under any tax treaty benefits.

"... Any indirect transfer of assets where underlying assets are in India, the tax is payable in India and accordingly they will arrange their assets. That is tax planning as far as the future is concerned. And for the future, the amendment in the law is now settled, and you arrange the assets in a manner that tax liability is reduced to the minimum," said V Lakshmi Kumar, managing partner, Lakshmi-kumaran & Sridharan Attorneys.

The immediate beneficiaries would only be those who did their transactions before 2012 and from

**EXPLAINED**  
**Why was this tax brought in**

THE GOVERNMENT had, in 2012, retrospectively amended the Income-tax Act. This was in response to a Supreme Court verdict, which had held that Vodafone cannot be taxed for a 2007 transaction that involved its purchase of a 67 per cent stake in Hutchison Whampoa.

them the government will not collect the tax. And if collected, they

will refund it, he added.

The government has proposed amendments to the Income-tax Act and Finance Act, 2012 to effectively state that no tax demand shall be raised for any indirect transfer of Indian assets if the transaction was undertaken before May 28, 2012.

Section 9(1)(i) of the Income-tax Act states that any income accruing or arising outside India due to a business connection in India is deemed to accrue or arise in India and shall be taxable in case of all assesses irrespective of their residential status. Companies are now expected to withdraw their litigation claims for deals prior to 2012, experts said.

"They are not saying that the

law was wrong. They are just saying the retrospectivity in the law is wrong which they are taking back. There is not much future planning shift which can happen, it is only the past which has been corrected. For the future, there is no new law in place... the companies don't have a reason to continue with the arbitration (for cases before 2012) because they have been given a winning deal. Whatever they were saying, the government has now agreed to it. They stand to gain by withdrawing the litigation and then there will be a refund of any taxes that have been already paid or refunded in respect of any demands that have been adjusted," Neha Malhotra, tax partner, Nangia & Co said.

## Power consumption up 9.3% in August first week

The country's power consumption grew 9.3 per cent in the first week of August to 28.08 billion units after easing of lockdown curbs, as per Power Ministry data

**During August 1-7** in 2020, the power consumption was 25.69 BU. It was 25.18 BU during August 1 to 7 in 2019

restrictions for boosting economic activities

**Recovery in power demand** and consumption in the first week of August 2021 is consistent and would further improve as many states have eased lockdown

**Power demand** as well as consumption would see improvement due to higher commercial and industrial demand in coming days but the only fear is another wave of pandemic

## PEAK POWER DEMAND

met or the highest supply in a day stood at 188.59GW in the first week of August, which is 14 per cent higher than 165.42 GW in the same period last year



**April 2021 saw year-on-year growth of nearly 38.5 per cent. The second wave started in the middle of April and affected the recovery in commercial and industrial power demand as states started imposing restrictions**

Source: Power Ministry/PTI

## Task cut out for DoT to convince FinMin on telecom relief package

**AASHISH ARYAN & SUNNY VERMA**  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

THE DEPARTMENT of Telecommunications (DoT) may find it difficult to convince the Finance Ministry to give the go ahead for telecom sector-specific relief as the latter has expressed apprehensions about the bailout options laid out by the department, sources told *The Indian Express*.

Among the relief package options chosen by the DoT are a possibility of extending the moratorium on spectrum payment obligations by another couple of years or allowing the telcos to encash, for some years, the bank guarantees the firms have submitted before asking them to re-submit these, the sources said. "The discussions are still on. A sector-specific relief will be difficult because the government has received requests from other sectors such as the food and beverages, hotels industry as well for relief," a senior government official said. The discussions for relief to the telecom sector have gained pace after Kumar Mangalam Birla, former non-executive chairman and direc-

### ON THE TABLE

■ Among the relief package options are a possibility of extending moratorium on spectrum payment obligations by couple of years or allowing telcos to encash, for some years, the bank guarantees the firms have submitted before asking them to re-submit these, sources said

tor of Vodafone Idea (Vi), wrote to the Central government in June offering to "hand over" his 27 per cent stake in the company to any public sector, government, or domestic financial entity or to any other firm that the government may think fit, to keep Vi going.

The June letter, however, was not the first time that Birla had raised the request for a package from the government. In December 2019, he had, following the Supreme Court judgment on adjusted gross revenue, said that Vodafone Idea would have to "shut shop" if there was no relief forthcoming from the government.

Following his comment, the majority stakeholder in Vi, Vodafone Group's chief executive officer Nick Read too had ruled out any further equity infusion in the debt-laden telecom joint venture it runs in India.

For some time now, Vi has been unsuccessfully scouting the globe, trying to either raise funds of up to Rs 25,000 crore or bring in a strategic partner. In his June 7 letter, Birla made a mention of the company's efforts to raise the funds and said that all the non-Chinese investors they had talked to so far had asked to be assured that the Indian government wanted to "have a three-player telecom market".

"To actively participate in this fundraising, potential foreign investors (mostly non-Chinese and we are yet to approach any Chinese investors) want to see clear government intent to have a three-player telecom market (consistent with its public stance) through positive actions on long-standing requests such as clarity on AGR (adjusted gross revenue) liability, adequate moratorium on spectrum payments, and most importantly, a floor pricing regime above cost of service," Birla wrote.

## SECTOR WATCH INSURANCE

### Covid health claims of ₹10,703 cr pending before insurers despite HC, Irdai directive

**GEORGE MATHEW**  
MUMBAI, AUGUST 8

WITH INSURANCE claims going through the roof amid the Covid pandemic, insurance companies are sitting on almost one-third of the claims submitted by patients since the pandemic hit the country in the beginning of 2020-21.

Over 3.06 lakh Covid claims for Rs 10,703 crore are pending before insurance companies as of August 6, indicating the pressure being faced by insurers despite Delhi High Court and Irdai, directing insurance firms to complete the settlement of Covid claims in an hour after discharge.

Health insurance companies have received a total of 23.06 lakh claims worth Rs 29,341 crore as on August 6, 2021, according to figures compiled by General Insurance Council. However, insurance firms have settled only Rs 17,813 crore involving 18.99 claims so far.

Of the total claims, 13.19 lakh claims worth Rs 14,783 crore came between April 1 and August 6, 2021 during 2021-22 while 9.86 lakh claims for Rs 14,560 crore were reported during the financial year ended March 2021.

According to insurers, the sharp rise in Covid claims has hit them substantially. "Yes, health claims have gone up a lot. While the number of claims went up, the average cost of a covid claim is twice the size of non-covid claims. Thus, the hit has been substantial," said Kamesh Goyal, chairman, Digit Insurance.

The big rise in claims even

**As per insurers, the sharp rise in Covid claims has hit them substantially**

forced some insurance companies to stop issuing health policies for some periods. Many companies were even forced to go slow on issuing term policies as death claims also shot up. "I'm sitting on a 400 per cent loss in Covid claims," said the regional manager of a public sector insurer.

The General Insurance Council, the representative body of 34 general insurers in the country, has laid down a basic framework for seeking the cooperation from hospitals to implement the directives. It has asked hospitals to submit all the patient discharge documents in one go without having to be reminded of the missing documents like cashless treatment approval reference, copy of the case sheet, prescriptions, diagnostic reports, bills, discharge summary, Covid positive and the subsequent Covid negative reports.

According to the Council, when the patient's progress is good and discharge is planned for the next day, hospitals should inform the insurance company or TPA of the impending discharge the soonest and submit the available documents and bills. "Balance documents and bills pertaining to the last 24 hours could be submitted at the discharge time so that the insurance company or TPA could also start working on the discharge simultaneously," it had said.

### BRIEFLY

#### Sebi probed 94 new cases

**New Delhi:** As many as 94 fresh cases pertaining to flouting of securities norms were taken up for investigation by Sebi in 2020-21, marking a fall of 42 per cent from the preceding financial year, as per the regulator's latest annual report. **PTI**

#### US board diversity

**New York:** The US Securities and Exchange Commission approved a proposal from Nasdaq that requires its listed companies to have diverse boards or explain why they do not. The proposal requires that companies have two diverse directors, including one who identifies as female and another as an underrepresented minority or LGBTQ+. **REUTERS**

### MARKET WATCH

#### FPIs INVEST ₹1,210 CR IN AUG SO FAR

**New Delhi:** Overseas investors were net buyers to the tune of Rs 1,210 crore in domestic markets in the first five trading sessions of August on the back of domestic factors. In equities, they invested Rs 975 crore during August 2-6, as per depositories data. **PTI**

## New chemistry cell battery tech set to diversify, disrupt sectors: From electricity storage to EVs

**ANIL SASI**

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

WITH AT least three energy storage-linked projects of scale being planned in India, new advanced chemistry cell battery technologies, which could potentially enable battery storage ecosystems to diversify away from the established lithium-ion formula and scale up the viability threshold, offer an array of potential options to policymakers. The suitability of some of these frontier battery technologies are likely to be evaluated based on the end-use application of the battery storage projects in the works — electricity storage for the grid or their use in electric vehicles (EVs).

While policymakers in the NITI Aayog and the Power Ministry maintain that the established lithium-ion ecosystem is likely to continue to be the mainstay for the projects that are on the verge of being rolled out, there is now a fresh impetus to examine these new technological breakthroughs from an improved viability and end-use perspective while drafting new project proposals.

The new technologies include a novel rechargeable iron-air battery developed by a US-based startup for electricity grid storage that promises to deliver power at less than a tenth of the cost of lithium-ion batteries, alongside solid-state batteries that use alternatives to the aqueous electrolyte solutions — an innovation that could lower the risk of fires, sharply increase energy density and potentially take only 10 minutes to charge a battery — that are being explored by mobility.

The government has already commenced work on a blueprint for a project of around 4,000-megawatt hour of grid-scale battery storage system at the regional load dispatch centres (RLDCs) that control the country's power grid, primarily to balance the vagaries of renewable generation. Apart from this, Reliance Industries Ltd has recently announced plans to set up an Energy Storage Giga factory while state-owned NTPC Ltd has floated a global tender for grid-scale battery storage project.

The Union Power Ministry's large grid-scale battery storage project is being envisaged as an intervention mechanism aimed at counterbalancing any sharp fluctuation in grid frequency because of renewables, with part of the envisaged capacity set to be reserved

### FRESH IMPETUS

■ There is now a fresh impetus to examine these new technological breakthroughs from an improved viability and end-use perspective while drafting new project proposals

as an ancillary for the grid controllers, and part to be made available to the project developer to be leveraged on a commercial basis by storing energy during off peak hours and drawing from it during peak hours. Mega battery storages are expected to add to the stability of India's electricity grids. Posoco, India's electricity grid operator, manages the grid through the National Load Despatch Centre and a combination of five RLDCs and 33 state load despatch centres. The storage is planned at the RLDC-level to manage growing share of renewables in the country's electricity generation mix.

There are also other wings of the government that are active in this area. The Department of Science and Technology has launched a "Materials for Energy Storage" and "Materials for Energy Conservation and Storage Platform" programme, and set up centres on batteries and supercapacitors with Indian Institute of Technology Bombay and Indian Institute of Science, respectively, for developing energy materials for efficient electrochemical energy storage devices. This is in addition to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy supporting a broad-based Research and Development Programme on energy storage.

One of the the new breakthrough technologies globally, announced in July, is by US company Form Energy Inc: a rechargeable iron-air battery capable of delivering electricity for 100 hours at a claimed system cost competitive with conventional power plants and at less than 1/10th the cost of lithium-ion. "We conducted a review of available technologies and have reinvented the iron-air battery to optimise it for multi-day energy storage for the electric grid," according to Mateo Jaramillo, Form Energy's CEO and co-founder. "With this tech, we are tackling the biggest barrier to deep decarbonisation: making renewable energy available when and where it's needed, even during

multiple days of extreme weather or grid outages." The battery leverages the concept of 'reversible rusting' — the battery uses oxygen from the air and converts iron metal to rust while discharging, and while charging, the application of an electrical current transforms rust back to iron and the battery releases oxygen back into the air. But the problem pertains to the battery's size and weight, which makes its application impractical in EVs. In case of grid storage, though, it works well as it's about the size of a small refrigerator.

The other really promising technology involves solid-state batteries that use alternatives to aqueous electrolyte solutions — an innovation that could lower the risk of fires, sharply increase energy density and potentially take only 10 minutes to charge an EV, cutting the recharging time by two-thirds. Despite the improvements in lithium-ion batteries over the last decade, long charging times and weak energy density are still barriers.

Some of the alternatives being fostered globally to achieve more optimal options include:

■ Toyota's solid state battery: The Japanese automaker is attempting to wrest back the lead from the Chinese, who are current Li-ion battery pack leaders. It plans to be the first company to sell an EV equipped with a solid-state battery and will unveil a prototype this year. Nissan, too, is in the fray.

■ Apple battery tech: Apple has said it's moving forward with self-driving car technology and will target 2024 to produce a passenger vehicle.

■ QuantumScape's solid-state battery: Earlier efforts to create a solid-state separator (electrolyte) capable of working with lithium metal had to compromise on its other aspects like cycle life, operating temperature, cathode loading, among others. QuantumScape seems to have circumvented this, and its use of a solid state separator technology eliminates the side reaction between the liquid electrolyte and the carbon in conventional lithium-ion cells' anode.

■ Tesla's new tabless battery: A tab is part of the battery that forms a connection between the cell and what it is powering. Tesla will produce its new batteries in-house, which CEO Elon Musk predicts will help dramatically reduce costs and help sell EVs for the same price as petrol-powered ones.

Full report on [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com)

### INTERVIEW WITH FOUNDER AND CEO OF EMCURE PHARMACEUTICALS

## ‘On track to deliver 60 mn doses of our mRNA vaccine by yr-end’



Satish Mehta

be surprises and we don't know what the Delta variant would do.

**Genovva has been given the target to supply vaccines by the year-end. What stage are you on your mRNA vaccine?**

The government has given us a target of 60 million doses by the end of the year. We are on track and committed to delivering it. Right now we are in Phase 1. We are very satisfied with the primary outcome of safety. As we speak, secondary outcome of efficacy or immunogenicity is also being reviewed and studied by drug safety and monitoring board — an independent body. Post that, we will submit our data with the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation and apply for phases 2 and 3. That's when the regulatory bodies would comment and guide us in terms of next steps.

We are on track but there are different types of challenges. First and foremost is that the product has to be shown safe through the clinical trial process. Simultaneously, the supply chain aspects are daunting because gaining access to some of the key raw materials (particularly for the mRNA vaccines) is a big challenge.

So we are taking efforts to plan for manufacturing and securing raw material supply. We are repurposing some of our own capacities within the company for fulfilling the requirement of the vaccine.

**By when do you think you would you be able to do second and third phase trials?**

We don't have a timeline for that and it is very difficult for me to say that as of now. We can focus on the processes and do them diligently, then we have to work closely with government agencies. I am very optimistic. The government is handholding and supporting us quite a lot.

**How do you see your vaccine and demand for it?**

We are very bullish on our mRNA vaccine because within 45-50 days the vaccine can also be developed for the new variant including Delta variant. Unlike other vaccines (that we have), which has Adenovirus or attenuated live virus, this has a dynamic platform where you can come out with a new vaccine. It is important because I think this cat-and-mouse game would go on for 2-3 years.

While mRNA is undoubtedly the best vaccine that we have, Pfizer and Moderna are supplying to the regulated markets. The rest of the world (EMs) would be happy to take mRNA and we see them as a market. While Moderna and Pfizer are required to be kept at very low temperatures, the vaccine that we have developed is stable between 2 and 8 degrees, and that makes the job lot easier.

Full interview on [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com)

## Rankings must be transparent; digital dominance a concern: CCI Chairman

**KARUNJITSINGH**  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 8

ONLINE PLATFORMS must make ranking systems transparent and treat all sellers in a non-discriminatory manner, CCI Chairman Ashok Kumar Gupta told *The Indian Express* in an interview.

Gupta said instances of digital players abusing their market power had become a concern for the competition regulator. The CCI has ordered investigations into the conduct of major online platforms including Flipkart, Amazon and MakeMyTrip. The CCI is also conducting investigations into Google's conduct in the smart TV, mobile operating system and online payment platform spaces.

"Of late, instances of digital players abusing their dominance or market power by adopting anti-competitive means, have been brought to the attention of the



CCI Chairman Ashok Kumar Gupta. *via @CCI\_India Twitter*

Commission. That is a concern," said Gupta, adding while the Commission did not think it was always necessary for there to be multiple players in a market segment, dominant players should not abuse their market power.

The Commission is currently investigating allegations against Google: that the tech giant requires original equipment manufacturers in the smartphone and smart TV space to sign agreements

which prevent such manufacturers from making forked versions of Android operating system and require they include the entire suite of Google apps on their devices if they want to pre-install the Google Play Store on their devices. Gupta also highlighted key issues of opaque ranking systems, exclusive selling arrangements and deep discounting.

"In search rankings, you have to be transparent and your algorithm has to be unbiased. You cannot just rank businesses in your own opaque ways, which nobody knows," said Gupta, noting that it was important that platforms charge commissions to sellers in a non-discriminatory manner.

"When people don't have effective alternatives, you become like an essential facility, you acquire the characteristics of a public good," he said. CCI officials have previously said a large number of sellers are becoming increasingly

dependent on online platforms.

"Prima facie we have also seen that the ecosystem of exclusive agreements, deep discounting, and preferred sellers put together by online platforms commanding market power are also raising competition concerns," he said.

Gupta added differential treatment in terms of commissions charged to sellers were also a cause of concern. The National Restaurants Association of India has approached the CCI, alleging Swiggy and Zomato have misused their market power by unilaterally raising commissions charged to restaurants and masking consumer data from restaurants.

"Our endeavour is that people should be able to shift lock, stock and barrel from one platform to another seamlessly. One hindrance in that is the absence of data portability. If you want to shift from one platform to another, you may lose your data," Gupta said.



# 12 THE WORLD/SPORT

## TOPOF THE WORLD



Ochre markings painted on stalagmites. *Reuters*

### SPAIN

#### Cave paintings show Neanderthals were artists

NEANDERTHALS MAY have been closer to our species of prehistoric modern human than previously believed after cave paintings found in Spain proved they had a fondness for creating art, one of the authors of a new scientific report said. Red ochre pigment found on stalagmites in the Caves of Ardales, near Malaga in southern Spain, were created by Neanderthals about 65,000 years ago, making them possibly the first artists on earth, according to the study published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* journal. **REUTERS**

### PAKISTAN

#### 2 cops killed in blast near luxury hotel in Quetta

AT LEAST two policemen were killed and eight others injured on Sunday when a powerful blast targeted their vehicle near a luxury hotel in Quetta, the capital of Pakistan's Balochistan province, officials said. "The initial probe showed that the bomb was fitted with a motorbike," a Balochistan government spokesperson said, adding that the blast targeted the police mobile van at Tanzeem Square near Serena Hotel in Quetta. **PTI**

## Taliban seize key Afghan city of Kunduz

Sar-e-Pul, another provincial capital, also captured; insurgent group pushes into Tالقان city

**CHRISTINA GOLDBAUM, NAJIM RAHIM, SHARIF HASSAN & THOMAS GIBBONS-NEFF**  
KABUL, AUGUST 8

THE TALIBAN seized the city of Kunduz in northern Afghanistan on Sunday, officials said. It is the first major city to be overtaken by the insurgents since they began their sweeping military offensive in May, and it happened just weeks before US forces were set to complete a total withdrawal from Afghanistan.

It was also the third provincial capital to be overtaken by Taliban in three days, and a major blow to the Afghan government.

Kunduz, the capital of a province of the same name, is a significant military and political prize. With a population of 374,000, it is a vital commercial city near the border with Tajikistan.

"All security forces fled to the airport, and the situation is critical," said Sayed Jawad Hussaini, the deputy police chief of a district in Kunduz city.

Clashes between government forces and Taliban fighters were continuing in a small town south of the city, where the local army headquarters and the airport are situated, security officials said.

Security forces, who had retreated to the town earlier in the morning, began an operation to flush Taliban fighters out of the city on Sunday evening, accord-



In Kunduz on Sunday after fighting between Taliban and Afghan security forces. *AP*

ing to security officials.

In the two preceding days, the Taliban had taken two other provincial capitals: Sheberghan, the capital of Jowzjan Province in the north, and Zaranj, the capital of Nimruz Province on the Afghanistan-Iran border. As Kunduz was collapsing on Sunday morning, the Taliban also seized Sar-e-Pul, the capital of another northern province of the same name, officials said.

"Taliban are walking in the streets of the city. Local residents are terrified," said Sayed Asadullah Danish, a member of the Sar-e-Pul provincial council. Provincial officials had taken shelter in an army base on the outskirts of the city, where clashes were continuing,

he added.

After sweeping through the country's rural areas, the insurgents' military campaign has shifted to brutal urban combat in recent weeks.

Taliban fighters pushed into another northern provincial capital on Sunday, local and military officials said. The fighters had been contained at the gates of Tالقان, the capital of Takhar Province, since June. But as the Kunduz city centre fell, the insurgents moved toward Tالقان, threatening to topple a fifth provincial capital in three days.

"The situation is chaotic, and the front lines are not clear now," said Mohammed Omar, a district governor in Takhar who is leading militia fighters in Tالقان. **NYT**

## EXPLAINED Kunduz a major win for Taliban

TALIBAN IN recent days have stepped up their efforts to seize provincial capitals, and on Sunday, they pushed into three, including the strategically important Kunduz city. It represents a significant victory for the group as it is the first major city they have captured since foreign troops announced their departure. The city is also important because it serves as a gateway to the mineral-rich northern provinces and Central Asia.

## Rocked by sexual assault allegation, Alibaba launches investigation

### REUTERS

SHANGHAI, AUGUST 8

CHINESE E-COMMERCE giant Alibaba said on Sunday it has suspended several staff following an employee's allegations on the company's intranet that she was sexually assaulted by her boss and a client.

The woman's account, published via an eleven-page PDF that went on to circulate widely online, prompted a social media storm on China's Twitter-like microblogging website Weibo. Police in the city of Jinan said on Sunday morning that they were investigating the incident.

"Alibaba Group has a zero-tolerance policy against sexual mis-

conduct, and ensuring a safe workplace for all our employees is Alibaba's top priority," a spokesperson said in a statement.

"We have suspended relevant parties suspected of violating our policies and values, and have established a special internal task force to investigate the issue and support the ongoing police investigation."

Late on Saturday, a female Alibaba staffer's account of an incident she said took place while on a business trip went viral on Chinese social media.

The woman alleged that her boss coerced her into going on a business trip with him to meet one of her team's clients in the city of Jinan, about 900 km from Alibaba's headquarters in Hangzhou.

According to the woman, on the evening of July 27, the client kissed her. After consuming alcohol, she woke up in a hotel room the following day with her clothes removed and no memory of what happened the evening before. CCTV footage she obtained from the hotel showed that her boss entered the room four times over the course of the evening, she added.



The day-five washout at Trent Bridge means both India and England log four World Test Championship points each from the first Test. *AP*

## Day 5 washed out, but Kohli finds 'template'

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NOTTINGHAM, AUGUST 8

THIS TEAM will be "our template" going ahead, Indian captain Virat Kohli said after the rain-marred opener against England ended in a draw on Sunday, meaning they will stick to the 4-1 pace-spin combination in the remainder of five-Test series. So it will be a toss-up between Ravindra Jadeja and Ravichandran Ashwin in the upcoming four matches, with the former preferred for the first Test in which India were deprived of a victory owing to persistent rain that washed out the fifth day.

"We were expecting rain on days three and four but it chose to come on day five. It would have been enjoyable to play and watch, but it's a shame," Kohli said after the match. "This is exactly what we wanted to do; start strong. On day five we knew we had our chances. We certainly felt like we were on top of the game."

India needed to score 157 runs on the final day but the rain did not allow a single ball to be bowled.

"Getting that lead was crucial, but it's a shame we couldn't finish day five. Getting to fifty overnight

was important. We just didn't want to play for survival. Our intent kept us ahead. It's hard work of three odd weeks for our bowlers with the bat."

"Most likely this will be our template in this series, but adaptability has been our strength. The conditions and the pace on the wicket needs to be seen, but this team will be our template. England and India have always been a blockbuster, and looking forward to the next Test."

As part of the new World Test Championship cycle, both India and England logged home four points each. Only 250 plus overs out of a maximum 450 were possible due to the weather. India, chasing a target of 209, were well-placed at 52 for one in 14 overs at the end of fourth day. Though India had their nose ahead, English skipper Joe Root said rain marred "what would have been a very interesting final day".

"Great Test match to play in and watch as well. Sets up the series really well and hopefully we can take it into the next games. We certainly believed we could win. We knew we would have opportunities if we took our catches and kept our fields. It's a shame it ended this way," Root said.

## Messi breaks down, says wasn't ready to leave

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
MADRID, AUGUST 8

LIONEL MESSI began crying before he even started speaking. The "most difficult" moment of his career had arrived and he wasn't ready for it.

It was time to say goodbye to Barcelona after more than two decades with the Catalan club.

"I don't know if I'll be able to speak," he said while trying to compose himself during his farewell news conference at the Camp Nou Stadium on Sunday. "It still hasn't sunk in that I'm leaving this club, that my life will be changing completely. It will be a difficult change for me and especially for my family. But we have to accept it and move on."

Messi struggled to control his emotions and cried profusely as he stepped up to the podium at the Camp Nou. "This is very hard for me after so many years, after being here my entire life," he said. "I wasn't prepared."

Messi said that, unlike last year when he asked to leave, he had his mind set on staying with Barcelona and did everything possible to make it happen, including reducing his salary by 50%. He said he was surprised to hear he wouldn't be able to stay because of the club's debt and the Spanish league's financial fair-play regulations. "In these last few days I was thinking about what I would say today, but to be honest I couldn't come up with anything. I was blocked, like I still am right now," Messi said. "I was convinced that we would remain with the club, which is our home."

Messi's family and some of his teammates were at the Camp Nou for the emotional farewell. He was applauded several times by those in the audience.

The 34-year-old Messi avoided speaking specifically about his future, saying he received offers from several clubs after the announcement that he would leave the Catalan club. When asked about Paris Saint-Germain, considered the frontrunner to sign him, Messi admitted it was "a possibility."

"At this moment I don't have a



Lionel Messi avoided speaking about his future, saying he has offers from several clubs. *Reuters*

deal with any club," he said.

PSG has been in talks over the weekend with Messi's team trying to finalize a deal.

Sports daily L'Equipe reported on its website Sunday that Messi was to fly to Paris later Sunday to put the finishing touches on the deal with a view to having a medical exam on Monday morning.

An email from The Associated Press to PSG seeking to confirm the report was not immediately answered.

Messi said he hopes to return to Barcelona in some capacity one day and that he wished he could have said goodbye to fans in a match with a capacity crowd chanting his name. He said it was sad to leave after not being able to play in front of fans for nearly a year and a half.

He said his best moment was his first-team debut in 2004, because "that's when it all started." He said he has "no regrets," but believed he was part of a generation that should have won more Champions League titles.

**In these last few days I was thinking about what I would say today, but to be honest I couldn't come up with anything. I was blocked, like I still am right now. I was convinced that we would remain with the club, which is our home.**

### LIONEL MESSI

He said it will be "strange" to see Barcelona without Messi, "but with time people will get used to it." He said the club still has good players and can continue to succeed without him.

Barcelona announced Thursday it could not keep its greatest player because it wasn't able to fit a new contract within the Spanish league's financial fair-play regulations. The club's salary cap has been significantly slashed because of its huge debt. President Joan Laporta blamed the club's

struggles on the coronavirus pandemic and particularly on the previous administration led by Josep Bartomeu.

Messi asked to leave at the end of the 2019-20 season but had his request denied by Bartomeu, with whom he had clashed. "I wanted to leave then, but not now," he said. "I didn't expect it, so it's sad to have to say goodbye."

Messi spent nearly two decades with Barcelona after arriving from Argentina as a 13-year-old to play in its youth squads. He made his first-team debut as a 17-year-old, then played 17 seasons with the main squad. He helped the club win the Champions League four times, the Spanish league 10 times, the Copa del Rey seven times and the Spanish Super Cup eight times. Messi leaves as Barcelona's all-time leading scorer with 672 goals. He played in 778 matches with the club, also a record. He is also the overall top scorer in the Spanish league with 474 goals from 520 matches.



**PROTESTS AGAINST FRENCH VACCINE PASS:** At a protest against Covid-19 vaccine passports, in Paris on Saturday. Thousands of people marched in Paris and other French cities to protest against the special pass and what they see as restrictions of personal freedoms. *AP*

## Britain eases travel restrictions for India

**ADITI KHANNA**  
LONDON, AUGUST 8

THE UK on Sunday eased travel restrictions for India by moving the country from its "red" to "amber" list, which means fully vaccinated Indian passengers will no longer be subjected to a compulsory 10-day hotel quarantine on their arrival in Britain.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has confirmed that all arrivals from India who have been vaccinated in India, which is on the amber list as at 4 am local time on Sunday, are re-

quired to isolate at home or their designated location mentioned on the compulsory locator form.

While the requirement for a compulsory 10-day self-isolation in a government-approved facility at an additional cost of £1,750 per head will no longer apply, only those vaccinated in the UK or EU would qualify for an exemption of the home quarantine requirement. "We recognise there are a large variety of Covid-19 vaccines being administered worldwide and work is ongoing to determine which non-UK vaccines and certification solutions to recognise," a DHSC source said. **PTI**

## Iran sees highest daily virus case, death counts

**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
TEHRAN, AUGUST 8

IRAN, GRAPPLING with its most severe surge of the coronavirus to date, reported more new infections and deaths across the country on Sunday than any other single day since the pandemic began.

Health authorities logged over 39,600 new cases and 542 deaths from the virus. The fatality count shatters the previous record set

during Iran's deadliest coronavirus surge that gripped the country last November, signalling the current wave will likely only get worse. The new all-time highs push Iran's total number of infections over 4.1 million and death toll over 94,000 — the highest in the Middle East.

The crush of new cases have overwhelmed hospitals. The country has never seen so many Covid patients in critical condition, with 6,462 more severe cases reported Sunday.

## What Messi's exit means for Barcelona

**SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY**  
AUGUST 8

LIONEL MESSI broke down at his final press conference as a Barcelona player. Since making his senior debut at Camp Nou in 2003, Messi has played 778 games for the Catalan club, scoring 672 goals. He claimed he wanted to stay at the club and had even accepted a 50 percent salary cut to sign a new contract. But as it turned out, Barcelona couldn't even afford a cut-price Messi.

### Why is Messi's Barcelona exit a football tragedy?

Messi has spent over two decades at Barcelona, and is the most decorated player in the club. Even his children are Argentine-Catalan. There were several brinkmanship attempts when things didn't go well on the pitch, including a call to leave the club ahead of the 2020-21 season. He shared an acrimonious relationship with erstwhile club president Josep Bartomeu. But when Joan Laporta replaced Bartomeu, Messi committed his future to Barcelona. By July 1 he was a free agent, with a new contract being formalised. "... at the last minute, it couldn't happen. This year I wanted to stay and I couldn't. Last year I didn't want to stay, and I said it," Messi said.

### What did Barcelona say on Messi's exit?

On August 5, Barcelona confirmed that Messi "will not continue" with the club. A day later, Laporta said: "Leo wanted to stay and the Club wanted him to stay, but with the LaLiga rules it has not been possible." The club wanted to extend the 34-year-old's contract by two years, but LaLiga's Financial Fair Play (FFP) rules prevented it. As per the rules, Barcelona's wage-to-turnover percentage has to be 70 percent.

### Why can't Barca afford Messi?

Barcelona couldn't have resigned the six-time Ballon d'Or winner even if he had played for free. As Laporta explained, with Messi on board, the club's wage-to-turnover percentage was 110 percent. And without him, it would have been 95 percent — well above the FFP cut-off mark. As per the latest financial report, the club's debt exceeded £1 billion, which includes money owed for Philippe Coutinho and Frenkie de Jong. The wage bill for their first-team squad is around £235 million-a-year.

"Before anything, I want to explain that we have received a terrible inheritance from the previous board," Laporta said. "There's no room to manoeuvre and the (FFP) rules mark the limits... we had to accept an agreement that mortgaged the Club's TV rights for half a century and FC Barcelona is above everything else."

### Is this the end of Messi at Barcelona?

A tearful goodbye suggests so. Messi has been the Spanish league's most lucrative player in terms of commercial deals and TV rights, and according to some pundits, this could well be a pressure tactic from Barca to force LaLiga to water down its FFP rules. Interestingly, Real Madrid also released a statement, attacking LaLiga, on the heels of Barcelona confirming Messi's exit.

### Is Messi going to PSG?

Messi remained coy on his next move. But he has reportedly spoken with PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino and the club is making arrangements for an Eiffel Tower unveiling of Messi. PSG are one of the very few clubs that can afford the Argentine. Also, owned by Qatari investors, Messi's arrival could unlock huge commercial possibilities ahead of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.



# Men behind the medals: Seven foreigners, 1 Indian

The podium has place for only the athletes who perform in front of the world. But there's always guiding hands and wise counsel that show the right path to a medal. The seven medals India won at Tokyo too owe a lot to the coaches who worked behind the scenes to ensure their wards succeeded on the biggest stage.

## UWE HOHN (HEAD COACH) & DR KLAUS BARTONIETZ (BIOMECHANICAL EXPERT)

COUNTRY: GERMANY  
ATHLETE: NEERAJ CHOPRA  
EVENT: JAVELIN THROW  
MEDAL: GOLD



THE JAVELIN thrower's body is like a bow and the javelin an arrow. This is Dr Bartonietz's philosophy and it worked like a charm for Chopra. Bartonietz has immense knowledge about the intricacies of the event and is credited with making Chopra stronger, yet more elastic, in his movements. He was part of the core team which developed javelin-specific work-out machines German throwers swear by. UWE HOHN, the only man to throw the spear over 100 metres, coached Chopra when he won the Commonwealth and Asian Games gold medals in 2018. He roped in Bartonietz for his expertise in early 2019. Both Germans had worked with the Chinese national team earlier.

## VIJAY SHARMA (CHIEF NATIONAL COACH)

COUNTRY: INDIA  
ATHLETE: MIRABAI CHANU  
DISCIPLINE: WEIGHTLIFTING 49KG  
MEDAL: SILVER



MIRABAI CHANU came under the guidance of Sharma, a former national champion, in 2014, the same year he took charge of the men's team for the Commonwealth Games. Sharma's own career as a weightlifter was curtailed because of a wrist injury. He has been a constant during the highs and lows faced by Chanu. After she failed to produce one legal lift in the clean and jerk at the 2016 Rio Olympic, it was Sharma, along with her mother, who coaxed her out of thoughts about retirement. Sharma joined the national camp in 2012 after UP, the state he coached, became national champions.



## GRAHAM REID

COUNTRY: AUSTRALIA  
TEAM: MEN'S HOCKEY  
MEDAL: BRONZE

## KAMAL MALIKOV

COUNTRY: RUSSIA  
ATHLETE: RAVI DAHIYA  
EVENT: 57KG FREESTYLE WRESTLING  
MEDAL: SILVER

BROUGHT IN to prepare Sushil Kumar for Tokyo Olympics' qualification, Malikov was meant to be a fitness trainer, a sparring partner and observer for India's two-time medallist. But once that was no longer feasible, Malikov was employed from April 2021 under the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) to help Dahiya. For the Indian wrestler, Malikov was able to procure prime sparring partners in Vladikavkaz (Russia). The 23-year old's defeat in the gold medal match at the Poland Open would prompt the 34-year-old coach and student to work harder at improving reaction times and the speed of counters. Dahiya is a product of wrestling coach Satpal Singh and the set-up at Delhi's Chhatrasal Stadium.

THE STINT with the Indian team was a shot at redemption for Reid, who was at the helm with Australia when they crashed out of the Rio Olympics in the quarterfinals with a 4-0 thrashing against the Netherlands. He has changed the team's psyche, making them less prone to

## SHAKO BENTINIDIS

COUNTRY: GEORGIA  
ATHLETE: BAJRANG PUNIA  
EVENT: 65KG FREESTYLE WRESTLING  
MEDAL: BRONZE



BAJRANG'S RISE to become one of the top wrestlers in the 65kg category occurred after Bentinidis took over the reins of the 26-year-old. An animated coach, Bentinidis has facilitated sparring partners for Bajrang from the United States and Russia. The wrestler from Haryana, thus, travelled across the world looking for wrestlers who can attack him with speed. The goal – to improve his leg defence, an aspect that continues to be a weakness, and his reaction times. While still not perfect, the influence of Bentinidis has led to improvements in Bajrang's arsenal and an Olympic bronze medal to boot.

making costly errors at inopportune moments. After the loss to Belgium in the semifinal, it was Reid's job to pick the team up for the bronze-medal playoff against Germany, and India gave one of their most rousing performances in a long time. Earlier in the tournament,

## RAFFAELE BERGAMASCO (HIGH PERFORMANCE DIRECTOR)

COUNTRY: ITALY  
ATHLETE: LOVLINA BORGOHAIN  
EVENT: WOMEN'S WELTERWEIGHT BOXING  
MEDAL: BRONZE



SON OF an Olympian, Bergamasco was a five-time national champion and took part in the Beijing, London and Rio Olympics as a coach. After guiding the Italian women's team from 2001 to 2007, he took over their senior and junior men's sides and contributed to six Olympic medals. He was let go after a barren run in Rio, and found his way to India in 2017, orchestrating the country's best ever medal haul at Youth Boxing Championships (five gold, two bronze) that November. A month later, he was promoted to high performance director for senior women.

after the 7-1 hammering against Australia, Reid ensured the team didn't panic and fought on level terms with all teams. He has toughened the team and history will record that he was in charge when India climbed the Olympic podium in hockey after a gap of 41 years.

## PARK TAE-SANG

COUNTRY: SOUTH KOREA  
ATHLETE: PV SINDHU  
EVENT: WOMEN'S SINGLES BADMINTON  
MEDAL: BRONZE



SINDHU'S GAME was based on strength and impressive hand speed, and she often overpowers opponents. But she needed more variety and dimensions to win consistently against the best players in the world. Enter Korean coach Park, who had chiselled into shape players like Sung Ji-Hyun, whose on-court movement had the smoothness of a swan in still water. Park not only gave Sindhu assurance in her stride, but importantly, worked long quality hours on her defence – always a target owing to her rangy frame. He would also inject confidence in Sindhu's game at the net. Where she would earlier swat at the shuttle and lift copiously to move the battle away from the forecourt, in Tokyo Sindhu expertly engaged with Akane Yamaguchi and didn't shy away from the dribbles. The smash-tap forced opponents to dig deep, and that mostly worked in the Indian's favour. Park was also animated – something Sindhu draws great energy from.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

# Sporting world flattens

Reading the medal tally: Tightest race ever between Top 2, record gold-winning nations, more countries on podium

## TOKYO MOOD

### GOVERNOR IN THE RANKS

**THERE'S A GOVERNOR** in the mix for the American women's volleyball team. Not your typical politician though, this one wasn't elected by a traditional vote. A popularity vote instead gave Jordan Larson the moniker 'The Governor.' And you can understand why. The six-foot-two American team captain comes from the small town of Hooper in Nebraska, with a population no more than 900. Naturally, everybody knows everybody. And everybody there makes a lot of noise throughout the state about who Larson is to the point that she's now become a very recognisable figure all over the state, and the most popular player in the country. That's what led the brother of a teammate to give her the nickname. And there was no way one passing through the town could go without knowing the name. In her first Olympic appearance at London 2012, every store in the town had posters up of her, and a large banner was put up at the entrance of the town reading "Home of Olympian Jordan Larson USA Volleyball women's national team." That sign was removed a year later when authorities realised it was put up without permission. Larson was in the team that won silver in London and bronze at 2016. Tokyo, she said, will be her last Olympic Games. And she's leaving it by conquering the highest stage.

### DEBUT AT 40

**THE LOWEST** point of her sporting career, Caroline Gattaz says, is when she didn't make the Brazilian national volleyball team for the 2008 Olympics. She watched the event from close quarters, working as a sports commentator for the Games that saw Brazil win its first women's volleyball gold medal. Four years later, when the Brazilians defended their title in London 2012, she again didn't make the cut and by 2013 stopped playing for the national team. In Tokyo, the Brazilians are up against the American team in the final, just as it was in Beijing and London. For the first time in eight years, Gattaz has been called in to play for the national team. At 40, she's making her Olympic debut and she's just a match away from winning gold. **ENS**

## TUSHAR BHADURI, SHAHID JUDGE & GAURAV BHATT AUGUST 8

IN A final day swoop at Tokyo 2020, the United States earned the bragging rights of Tokyo 2020 by moving ahead of China on the medal table. The three golds that they clinched on Sunday just put their noses in front at the finish line, 39-38. The one in women's basketball may have been on expected lines, but the women's volleyball team winning their first ever gold drew them level, and Jennifer Valente's cycling gold proved to be the clincher. The one-medal gap between the top two is the closest ever. Before Tokyo, it was at Athens 2004 that the USA with 36 gold and China with 32 gold were involved in a tight race. The other interesting aspect of the tally was the emergence of first-time medal winners. In what is the largest list of medal-winning countries at any Games, 93 different nations earned a podium finish. The number of gold-winning nations at an edition – 63 – also broke the record of 59 set at Rio 2016. Just like in Rio, where Jordan, Kosovo and Fiji medalled for the first time, the Tokyo Games ended with three new countries joining the medal table – San Marino, Turkmenistan and Burkina Faso. The newest on the list of gold-winning nations are Qatar, Bermuda and the Philippines. The final tally seemed unlikely with just a few days left when China had a significant lead in the gold medal count. Over the last several editions, the top position on the gold medal table has been the preserve of the USA or China. In fact, the last Games where a third nation topped the standings was Barcelona 1992, with the 'Unified Team' of the erstwhile Soviet Union states securing the most gold medals.

### Fluctuating fortunes

The US's gold medal count of 39 this time is down from the 46 golds they won at Rio 2016 and London 2012 each. China, which dominated on home turf in Beijing 2008 with 48 gold, won 26 gold in Rio 2016, just one behind Great Britain who finished second. In Tokyo though, the Chinese have equalled the gold medal haul they achieved in London 2012.

The American haul this term dropped in



The one gold medal gap between the top two countries is the closest ever. Before Tokyo Olympics, it was at Athens 2004 that the USA with 36 gold and China with 32 gold were involved in such a tight and frenetic race. *AP*

their traditional strongholds like swimming (16 in Rio, 11 in Tokyo), athletics (13 in 2016 and seven now) and gymnastics (four and two). The retirement of Michael Phelps and the withdrawal of Simone Biles affected the tally. But the Americans still managed to gain new strides in other events – wrestling, shooting, golf, fencing, and the new 3x3 basketball and surfing events.

China meanwhile improved their already impressive performance in weightlifting (seven gold medals this time compared to five in Rio) while matching the seven they won in diving from five years ago. Shooting was a successful event, as they clinched four gold, compared to the solitary gold Zhang Mengxue won in the 10m air pistol event in Rio. They also tripled their gold medal in

## MEDAL TALLY

COUNTRY	G	S	B	TOTAL
1. USA	39	41	33	112
2. China	38	32	18	88
3. Japan	27	14	17	58
4. Great Britain	22	21	22	65
5. ROC	20	28	23	71
6. Australia	17	07	22	46
7. Netherlands	10	12	14	36
8. France	10	12	11	33
9. Germany	10	11	16	37
10. Italy	10	10	20	40
48. India	01	02	04	07

\*G- Gold, S- Silver, B- Bronze

swimming to three, but couldn't defend their women's volleyball title.

### New horizons

The Americans won gold in Tokyo in several events not always considered their strengths. Lee Keifer won an individual foil gold in fencing, Nevin Harrison won in canoeing while Anastasija Zolotic triumphed in taekwondo's featherweight class. For China, gymnastics was a big success with four gold medals (including trampoline), while in Rio they failed to win a single gold medal. They also secured top spots on the podium in sports like canoeing, fencing, rowing, sailing and cycling.

### India's new high

With their best-ever tally (one gold, two silver, four bronze), India finished 48th on the table – their highest position since the 1980 Moscow Olympics which was boycotted by 66 countries because of the Soviet-Afghan War. India finished 23rd in Russia, having won just the men's hockey gold. In fact, the 48th position in Tokyo is India's best finish at any Olympics where they won more than two medals (they were ranked 26th with a gold and bronze at Helsinki 1952).

### Golden sunrise in Japan

Japan finished third – their best – in the overall medal table for the third time (after Rome 1960 and Tokyo 1964). The 58 medals

they won – 27 gold, 14 silver and 17 bronze – in 2021 make this their most successful edition. A stellar performance in judo helped the hosts in the overall ranking. In London, Japan won one gold medal in the sport and three in Rio. Over the 15 events in judo this past fortnight, they won nine gold, two silver and a bronze.

The Japanese also dominated the new skateboarding event, winning three of the four gold medals on offer. They also maximised the return of baseball and softball to the Games' line-up, taking both gold medals.

### Different name, similar haul

Since the end of the Cold War, this was the sixth Olympic Games where 'Russia' competed as a country. But they could not use their name, flag or anthem based on International Olympic Committee (IOC) sanctions due to the country's infamous doping scandal in 2014. Instead the contingent went by the name Russian Olympic Committee (ROC). This was also the second smallest contingent from the country, 333 compared to the 282 that travelled to Rio. In terms of total number of medals won in Tokyo, the 71 (20 gold, 28 silver and 23 bronze) put ROC third on the leaderboard. But they were fifth based on gold medals – the official standard – behind the USA, China, Japan and Great Britain.

This was a better performance from the ROC compared to the 19 golds each in London and Rio. The gold medal in the women's team gymnastics event – their first ever as Russia – made the difference.

### The Olympic 'Ashes'

A rivalry that transcends sports, Great Britain again pipped the Australians in the gold medal tally, 22 to 17 to finish fourth and sixth respectively in the overall tally, though the latter had a much better showing this time – they won just eight golds in Rio. The Australians, courtesy Ariarne Titmus' double gold over USA's Katie Ledecky, won nine golds in swimming compared to the three from Rio. Meanwhile the Brits continued dominating the cycling event like only the Brits can, winning six gold, four silver and two bronze medals just as they did five years ago.

## IRISH HERO

# Cleaner at psychiatric hospital, LGBTQ idol and now boxing champion

## SRIRAM VEERA AUGUST 8

A HORSE carriage from a neighbour, the bunting from a recent funeral of a loved figure is all over her street, helium balloons from a resident, gifts from the local 'lolly-pop lady', a song recorded by neighbour – the neighbourhood in Dublin's north inner-city is waiting proudly for the return of the gold-winning Irish boxer Kellie Harrington. When she won the semi-final bout of women's boxing lightweight event to enter the final, she plunged for the most philosophical line of our times from Lion King: "Like I said, Hakuna Matata, it means no worries." A role model for the inner-city kids, Harrington is openly lesbian, a part-time cleaner in a psychiatric hospital and someone who loves her job and the jabs. It's a long cry from her teens when she feared she might end up in prison. "That's (prison) was a great possibility. Thankfully I didn't. There's no doubt it was the boxing

(that turned my life around). I just needed something and boxing was cheap, cheerful and there's a boxing club on every second corner in the inner city," she said in 2019. "I could never have gone to sailing or GAA or horse riding. One, my family wouldn't have had the money and two, they're not in the area." "It's nearly like a tradition in the inner city. Everyone has a family member who's boxed. For me, that was my option. Growing up, you would always see people walking around with their (kit)bags or out jogging. Ever since then I haven't looked back." Boxing gave her gold and also a partner. She met Mandy Loughlin, who doesn't box anymore but is a coach. "She's not competitive anymore. But that's how we ended up meeting. It's a small world." Putting smiles on people gives her the greatest joy. Like her cleaning job at the hospital, which she has held for 10 years. She used to be in the catering department before shifted to cleaning. Some patients saw it as a demotion. "Ah Jesus, Kellie" and I'll say, "What's wrong with you?" "And she'll



Ireland's Kellie Anne Harrington after her bout with Brazil's Beatriz Ferreira in the lightweight 60-kg boxing gold medal match in Tokyo. *AP*

say, 'I'm so sorry you got demoted'. "I'm on the deck laughing. I'm like, 'Don't worry about it, someone has to do it, it's a tough job but someone has to do it,' she told reporters in '18. "It's a rewarding job for me. The job itself is not so great but it's the interaction. They're vulnerable people and I just like being able to go in and put a smile on their face basically." The Irish Times has this lovely snippet from a meeting with the parents Yvonne, the mother, and Christy Harrington, the father. Here is the mother about the strange events after her daughter's win. "Two lads arrived from a newspaper and they wanted to photograph us sprinkling around holy water from Lourdes," laughed Christy." They said no. "Then he wanted Christy to water the plants with it," said the mother Yvonne. "I think it's because I say I go out into the garden and pray when Kellie is on – as any mother would. But I'm not hugely religious: if you do a good turn for someone, that's my belief." The father compared the thrill of watch-

ing her daughter to the famous bouts of Mohammad Ali and Jo Frazier. "I was confident watching her. You know by Kellie when she is getting into the ring when she is focused, focused, you just know she is going to give everything. It was like when we were kids, you got up to watch Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier, except that was our Kellie." There is a famous Dublin landmark near home with an Indian connection. The Five Lamps, at the intersection of five streets that includes Harrington's Portland Row is in honour of a general who served in India. It's claimed that the lamps symbolise five battles fought by the British in India in the 19th century. The website Dublin Live also posits that it represents the "five lamps lit for luck during the Hindu festival". Whatever be its origins, it's about to turn golden in the night to celebrate the best boxer of their neighbourhood and the world. On the fight day, the neighbourhood congregated in masks in a common area with a big screen hoisted on a pole from a

tempo van. Dublin Live covered it live, breathlessly for over an hour. Buntings fluttered above their heads, drinks in their hands, and Irish cheers and screams of "C'mon Kellie!" rung the air. As the seconds ticked towards the end, everyone started to scream her name. And a slight hush fell as they waited for the verdict. Raucous cheers go up as the announcer's voice went... 'in the red.' and an impromptu dance starts. Tears. Laughter. And all start to run along the rain-soaked street to Harrington's home. The family emerges dazed, euphoric, emotional – and more screams and tears flow. Kellie's mother, clad in a t-shirt with her daughter's face plastered, is joyously tearful and is hoisted upon the shoulders. On a t-shirt of her grandma, the text runs, "Hakuna Matata!" and she too finds herself on shoulders. Music blares from a speaker and dance breaks out in the street. The mother then waves a homemade banner, "Kelli, Our Golden Girl ... The Olympic Champion". And someone screams, "oh what a day!"



TOKYO  
MOOD

CLOSING CEREMONY



Athletes from the United States walk into the Olympic Stadium for the closing ceremony.

## Japan's flag bearer, one to watch out for in Paris

THEY ACED the debuting sports in Tokyo, and Japan have seemingly thrown down for Paris 2024 as well. One of the flag bearers for the hosts at the closing ceremony was **Ramu 'Ram' Kawai**, the 2018 youth Olympics breaking champion. As per the qualification process, the Kanagawa-born B-girl first floored the judges with a one-minute, unedited video of her performance, then won the continental qualifier in Taipei City before wind milling and head spinning her way to gold in Buenos Aires.

Last December, breaking — the competitive form of breakdancing — was confirmed as part of the final line-up for the Paris Games. And Kawai, a member of one of the most famous breaking crews in the world 'Floorioz', is earmarked to become the first female Olympic breaking champion.

In Tokyo, Japan won 12 medals across the four debuting sports (skateboarding, surfing, climbing and karate); two more if you count the returning baseball and softball.

### Vignettes of Tokyo for those who missed out

Just after a stunning light show, a Sunday afternoon park in Tokyo was recreated to the accompaniment of orchestral music. Just to give a representation of what Japanese people are up to in a park on Sunday. An idea germinated to give the athletes unable to get out of the village due to covid restrictions. If they and the fans (not allowed this Olympics) had stepped out to the streets, this is what they would have witnessed.

### Sombre to peppy: Contrasting ceremonies

In contrast to the sombre, almost brooding, ruminative theme is the opening ceremony, the end was immensely peppy. Orchestral bands and DJ Matsunaga, a winner of works DJ championship, strutted his stuff on the turntable. Before the Greece flag went up in honor of where it all began.

### Eiffel Tower misses out because of bad weather

The plan was to use Eiffel tower in Paris as the largest flag pole in the closing ceremony shots but due to bad weather they had to drop the plan. They did a successful rehearsal of it in June.

SRIRAM VEERA, GAURAV BHATT

BY INVITATION

## ‘He may be an Olympic champion but I still dread sharing a room with Neeraj’

TEJASWIN SHANKAR

THIS MORNING when I was asleep, I got a video call from Wayne Lombard, a dear friend and scientific advisor of the Indian women's hockey team. I picked up Wayne Bhai's call and saw a smiling Neeraj with a medal around his neck.

I was still half-asleep and for a moment thought it was a dream. I quickly went to the bathroom and washed my face and applied some talcum powder. “*Bhai tu soh raha tha na?*” (You were sleeping?), Neeraj asked me. “Of course, you'll find most people asleep at six in the morning,” I replied.

But I was touched. I am not an emotional person but had tears in my eyes which I tried best to hide with a little help of the powder. Neeraj took me through his throws. I was only concerned if he was okay because after the fourth throw, he seemed to be in some discomfort. I was relieved when he told me

he was fine.

He is very different from us. Imagine he has won India's first-ever athletics medal but he's telling me that he's feeling bad for (Johannes) Vetter. He's one of those persons who can never say no to you if you're his friend. I remember him telling me once that a lot of people had borrowed money from him and that he's not even cared to make a note or a list. I honestly feel he's too nice for his own good.

### Inspirational

The moment Neeraj sealed the gold, I had a rush of adrenaline and, believe it or not, I went down on the floor and did 20 push-ups. I was so pumped up that Paris 2024 was already running in my mind.

In 2016 after his Junior World Championship gold medal, I was taking a walk with Neeraj at the JSW facilities in Bellary. I asked him what he's done with all the prize money or if he's secured a govern-



Tokyo Olympics gold medallist Neeraj Chopra and high jumper Tejaswin Shankar during the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast.

**He's one of those persons who can never say no to you if you're his friend. I remember him telling me once that a lot of people had borrowed money from him and that he's not even cared to make a note or a list.**

ment job. He didn't seem interested in the conversation at all and was extending his arm and doing this weird throw action. I asked him, “What are you doing? Why aren't you responding?” He replied, “You know, I can easily add another two metres if I get my block (the extension of his left leg at the point of release) right. I realised that day that money and recognition don't matter to him. He had his eyes set on just improving himself. From that day, he became a person I



Nuno Duarte, senior manager (audio) of the Olympic Broadcasting Services, at the International Broadcasting Centre in Tokyo.

who do not understand it through the sound of it. “It's the perception of emotions,” Duarte tells The Indian Express.

“For example, the famous movie of (Steven) Spielberg, *Shark*... if you see that movie without sound, you don't have emotion or suspense. (But) Once you put the sound, all emotions change. It's the same in sport.”

To generate the same emotions without the fans in the stadiums, who are an integral part of it, was a challenge. In Tokyo, the organisers tried to recreate a semblance of that atmosphere by playing fake crowd noises at some of the venues.

For Duarte, a purist, this wasn't an option for the Games' broadcast even though it practically became a norm for all matches that were held without fans.

The OBS, instead, decided to transmit what actually was happening in the stadium. “If we do synthetic or fake crowd, we are not showing what's going on in the heart of the athletes and competition,” he says.

It is here, his secret ‘weapons’ made a difference: 3,600 microphones of 32 different models. “It's important to use correct microphones,” he says, holding up his latest toy,

which shaped like a spike-protein, hung on the roof of the venues and is so small that, from a distance, it can be hard to spot it at a venue. That mic, a prototype that is being used for the first time at the Olympics, captures the ambient sounds at almost all venues, which helps in creating the ‘immersive sound’ experience that Duarte is excited about for these Games.

### Discreet placements

The other mics are placed discreetly, so they don't get in an athlete's face but still capture all the sounds. They are hung on the nets, submerged in sands and underwater, on the cars and underneath the carpets.

In archery, for instance, mics are placed not just near the shooting line, but they are also hidden under the carpet leading up to the target to capture the ‘whoosh’ of the arrow when it pierces through the air. In the pool, when the swimmers touch the wall, a production official leans over and dips a camera that has a mic attached to it so as to get the sound of what goes on underwater.

On the golf course, another production assistant walks the entire course with the golfers with a boom mic, not getting too close

to them but close enough to capture all the drama. The toughest, perhaps, is rowing where most of the action takes place in the bay, and it's not always possible to get the mic close to the rowers to capture the sound of the paddle hitting the water.

“Here, if the mics fail, then we use artificial sounds. But that's just a backup option in case something goes wrong,” Duarte says. “You need to see a sport like music. All sports have a sound, and we have to capture it. The best way to capture is mics. The international federations understood the importance of the sound of the sport. So, they also allow this to get near to the athletes, to get their sound. If you have the sound, you understand the sport better.”

He gives the example of skiing, where some former players told him they were able to gauge if the snow was hard or soft just by listening to the sound of the pole swooshing through it. “That way, they know if the athlete will be faster or slower than the previous one.”

The mics are most essential in capturing the sound on sight. From there, it travels to an OB van that's at the venue. There, the engineers make the mix, which is then sent to the International Broadcasting Centre (IBC).

The IBC is where all the action is in terms of the broadcast of the Games. It's located inside a funnel-shaped building by the Tokyo bay and in a tiny corner office, a supervisor, with control to audio from all venues, completes the final checks.

The sound is then synced with the video and then, it is transported through the fibre cables under the sea to all TV stations that have the rights to broadcast the Olympics before it is finally relayed to millions of homes. “That's a simple way of putting it,” Duarte says. “All this happens in milliseconds to get it on air.”

Sometimes, the broadcasters add fake crowd noise to their production. Like it has happened in Tokyo, in some cases. Duarte, a purist, scoffs at the mere thought of it. For him, an ideal sound of sport is basic. “The one where I close my eyes, I can feel emotions of the venue and feel of the athletes.”

Many watching the Tokyo Olympics from home might have had the best seat in the house.

## Kipchoge is marathon king again

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
SAPPORO, AUGUST 8

ELIUD KIPCHOGE just decided it was time to sprint away. Simple as that. He never really even looked back. Except near the finish, simply to see if anyone was there. Of course, no one was even close.

**Kipchoge** pulled away late and pretty much went for a stroll in the park — Odori Park — as the 36-year-old Kenyan defended his Olympic marathon title Sunday.

Immediately after his finish, he held up two fingers to acknowledge his back-to-back marathon titles.

Clearly, though, he's No. 1. “King,” one of his fellow racers said as he walked by.

Kipchoge finished in 2 hours, 8 minutes, 38 seconds on a breezy and humid day along the streets of Sapporo. It was 80 seconds ahead of runner-up Abdi Nageeye of the Netherlands. Bashir Abdi of Belgium earned bronze to close out the track and field portion of the Tokyo Games.

This was a running clinic put on by Kipchoge, who even fist-bumped a fellow racer. Kipchoge becomes the third athlete to win multiple gold medals in the men's marathon, joining Abebe Bikila (1960, 1964) and Waldemar Cierpinski (1976, 1980).

About his reaction before making his move: “That smile is the happiness,” Kipchoge said. “They say to enjoy this world is to be happy.” About that late surge: “I wanted to test my fitness. I wanted to test how I'm feeling. I was feeling right.”

About his legacy: “I want to be the inspiration for the next generation.”

The temperature was around 77 degrees Fahrenheit (25 degrees Celsius) at the start and climbing to 84 degrees (29 degrees). The men's race stayed at the same time after the women's race was moved up an hour the day before to avoid the heat. It was humid, though, at around 81% as the runners wound their way through Sapporo, about 500 miles north of Tokyo. The race was moved to escape the extreme heat.

