

Helicopter crash kills 7 along Char Dham route

FIR filed against chopper company for not following DGCA rules on flying in bad weather; State suspends services to review experience of operators and pilots after fifth crash in two months

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

A helicopter ferrying pilgrims from the Kedarnath temple crashed near Guptkashi on Sunday morning, killing all seven people on board, a two-year-old child among them.

The accident likely occurred due to low visibility caused by bad weather, officials said. The deceased passengers are Vikram Rawat, a representative of the Badri-Kedar Temple Committee, who was returning to his home in Ukimath after official work at Kedarnath; Vinod Devi, 66, and her granddaughter Tushti Singh, 19, from Uttar Pradesh; and Rajkumar Jaiswal, 41, his wife, Shraddha, and their two-year-old daughter, Kashi, from Maharashtra. The couple's son had stayed with his grandfather in Yavatmal. The pilot of the helicopter was Lt. Col. Rajveer Singh Chauhan (ret'd), 39, who had served the Army for over 15 years.

The State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) said the accident involved a Bell 407 helicopter (call sign VT-BKA) of Aryan Aviation operating in the Kedarnath



Burned out: Rescue personnel at the site of the crash near Kedarnath in Uttarakhand on Sunday. PTI

temple sector. It took off from Guptkashi at 5 a.m. and landed at Kedarnath at 5.10 a.m. "At 5.18 am, it flew back from Kedarnath to Guptkashi but crashed near Gaurikund. The SDRF worked for five hours to retrieve the charred bodies from the debris of the chopper," said Arpan Raghuvansi, SDRF chief in Uttarakhand.

The Rudrapur police have filed an FIR against Aryan Aviation. The company is accused of not following the protocols laid down by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation on checking the weather conditions before a flight.

The company has announced a compensation of ₹5 lakh to the kin of each of the deceased.

Safety review

The Uttarakhand government suspended all helicopter services till Monday to review the high-altitude experience of all helicopter operators and pilots as Sunday's crash marked the fifth helicopter accident – and the second with fatalities – on the Char Dham Yatra route in the State since the pilgrimage began on April 30.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 12

One killed as landslide hits Kedarnath path

NEW DELHI

A person was killed and two sustained injuries after a landslide, triggered by incessant rain, hit the Junglechatti walking route of Kedarnath in Uttarakhand on Sunday. Authorities suspended the Kedarnath yatra from Sonprayag until further notice. Citing safety concerns amid adverse weather, the police appealed to devotees coming to the Kedarnath temple to remain safe wherever they were, and said security was being provided. » PAGE 12

Helicopter crash kills 7 along Char Dham route

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami ordered an inquiry into the crash, vowing to take strict action against those found guilty.

“Only those pilots with long-term experience of flying in high-altitude Himalayan regions will be allowed to operate,” Mr. Dhami said. The DGCA will also post officers to oversee the airworthiness, safety, and operations of all helicopter activity in the Kedarnath valley, and to review the State aviation authority’s functioning.

Sunday’s crash is the fifth helicopter accident in Uttarakhand over a six-week span. The officials said that *prima facie*, the accident looks like a case of Controlled Flight into Terrain (CFIT), with the helicopter reportedly airborne despite poor visibility and extensive clouds at the valley entry area.

The exact cause of the crash will be determined through a detailed investigation by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB).

“Helicopter services to Char Dham will remain completely suspended until Monday. The experience of all helicopter operators and pilots in high-altitude Himalayan regions will be reviewed. Heli services will be resumed only after a comprehensive meeting with all operators,” Mr. Dhami said. He also ordered a Command and Coordination Centre to be set up for better management and coordination of helicopter services.

International agencies reach Gujarat to assist in crash probe

Downloading and analysing black box could take four or five days; representatives from U.S. and U.K. agencies arrive in Ahmedabad; UN norms state that a country probing an accident should produce a preliminary report within 30 days

Jagriti Chandra
AHMEDABAD

Representatives of several international investigating agencies have reached Ahmedabad to assist India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) with the investigation into last week's Air India Boeing 787 crash that killed 241 aboard.

They include representatives from the top investigating agency of the U.S. for transport accidents, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB); the civil aviation watchdog of the U.S., the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA); and the U.K.'s Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), multiple sources said. A team of the aircraft manufacturer Boeing is also expected to participate in the investigation.

Among those killed in the crash were 53 Britons, seven Portuguese nationals and one Canadian citizen. The remaining 181 were Indians, including 12 crew members.

The Principal Secretary to Prime Minister, P.K. Mishra, visited the crash site and the BJ Medical College where the bodies had been brought to. He discussed the ongoing relief, rescue, and investigation efforts during a high-level review



Close scrutiny: Investigators after visiting the Air India plane crash site in Ahmedabad on Sunday. AP

meeting with senior officials from the Central and State governments, the AAIB, and the Airports Authority of India.

The AAIB retrieved the digital flight data recorder (DFDR) a day after the June 12 crash from the accident site, the B.J. Medical College hostel campus. The next steps involve "milking" the data from the cockpit voice recorder (CVR) and DFDR, which together make up the black box. Milking implies downloading of raw data, which could take up to 25 hours for the DFDR and two hours for the CVR. After this, the data will be analysed to interpret flight parameters such as speed

and angle of attack. The two exercises could take up to four to five days, said a former senior investigator of the AAIB.

During the air crash involving an Air India Express aircraft at the Calicut International Airport in August 2020, the black box was sent to the U.S. because the AAIB did not have its own facility.

In April 2025, Civil Aviation Minister K. Rammoohan Naidu inaugurated a DFDR & CVR Laboratory at the AAIB headquarters in New Delhi. A questionnaire sent to the Civil Aviation Ministry on Sunday seeking details of where this data would be downloaded, among others, re-

mained unanswered. The former official quoted above said the AAIB did not have a Boeing 787 "type trained" investigator until at least 18 months ago.

He felt that such an expertise could only come from Air India, which is the only airline to fly this type of aircraft in the country, but deputing its personnel may imply a conflict of interest. He said that the AAIB may have to look overseas for such expertise.

The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau is an office attached to the Civil Aviation Ministry. It investigates accidents and serious incidents involving aircraft

weighing over 2,250 kg.

According to standards laid down by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the UN aviation safety watchdog, the state probing an accident or incident is expected to produce a preliminary report within 30 days.

"A publicly available final report is encouraged to be produced by the state in charge of the investigation within 12 months of the accident, says Annex 13 of the ICAO's Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention), which provides standards for accident investigations. As per Annex 13, the state of occurrence is responsible for the investigation and controls the release of all information regarding the probe.

The NTSB had earlier said in a press statement on X that as per international protocols under the ICAO, all information on the investigation will be provided by the Government of India.

The government has also constituted a separate committee under the Chairmanship of the Home Secretary, which will recommend standard operating procedures to prevent air accidents, as well as guidelines for emergency response involving multiple stakeholders.

Amit Shah reviews preparation for upcoming Census

Vijaita Singh

NEW DELHI

A day before the notification to conduct the Census will be published in the official Gazette, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday reviewed the preparation for the exercise.

The Union Home Ministry said the notification to conduct the Census would be published in the official Gazette on Monday.

Around 34 lakh enumerators and supervisors, and 1.3 lakh Census functionaries would be deployed for the exercise, to be conducted in two phases. The Census will conclude by March 1, 2027.

The Ministry of Home Affairs said the Census would be conducted through digital means using mobile applications where provision of self-enumeration would also be made available to the people.

Data security

“Very stringent data security measures would be kept in place to ensure data security at the time of collection, transmission and storage,” it said.

The Census would be conducted in two phases – House Listing Operation (HLO) when the housing conditions, assets and amenities of each household will be collected, and Population Enumeration (PE), which would capture

The notification to conduct the Census will be published in the official Gazette on Monday

the demographic, socio-economic, cultural and other details of every person in each household. In Census, caste enumeration would also be done, the Ministry said.

The review meeting was attended by Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan, Registrar General of India and Census Commissioner Mritunjay Kumar Narayan and other senior officials.

On June 4, the Ministry of Home Affairs announced the commencement of the Census, adding that it would have a reference date of 12 a.m. on March 1, 2027.

‘Redraw constituencies’

As per the constitutional mandate, the first Census after 2026 can be used as the basis to redraw Lok Sabha constituencies. The next general election is expected to be held in 2029.

The last census was held in 2011 and the subsequent exercise, scheduled to take place in 2021, was delayed indefinitely, initially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On April 30, the Union Cabinet had decided to include caste enumeration as part of the next census exercise.

Mind the gap

India needs to ensure women's participation in policymaking

India has dropped two points from its position last year in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index report, holding at 131 out of 148 countries. The parity score is just 64.1%, making it among one of the lowest-ranked countries in South Asia, according to the report released last week. The Index measures gender parity in a country across four aspects – economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival, and political empowerment. While the performance of India in three of the four dimensions is either stable or has marginally improved, the significant lack of achievement in the fourth weighs down the overall result. The report says, in the economic participation and opportunity category, India has improved by +0.9 percentage points. The parity in estimated earned income rises from 28.6% to 29.9%, positively impacting the subindex score, the report said. Scores in labour force participation rate remained the same (45.9%) as last year – India's highest achieved to date. In the educational attainment and health and survival categories, the scores have been driven up by positive shifts. It is in the political empowerment category that India records a drop in parity, since the last evaluation. Female representation in Parliament fell from 14.7% to 13.8% in 2025, lowering the indicator score for the second year in a row below 2023 levels. Also evaluated was the share of women in ministerial roles, which fell from 6.5% to 5.6 %, continuing the sinking trend since 2023.

The path ahead is obvious – consolidate and improve on the gains and make efforts to set right the lacunae with policies and political will. India has had a long, shameful tussle on this issue as it toyed with the idea of increasing representation for women in polity. The controversial Women's Reservation Bill was passed in 2023, 27 years after it was first introduced in 1996. The Bill has been visited upon by many charades, was blocked at every turn, and the path to actualisation of the goal was lined with monumental impediments. The present Act reserves one third of the seats for women in Parliament and the State legislatures, but will only be implemented from 2029, after the completion of the Census, and the delimitation exercise. But India climbing up the ranks of a global index should be only secondary to achieving a rounded, applause-worthy, gender parity structure within the country. There is, also, nothing keeping political parties from increasing women's participation in the electoral process, even before the law necessitates it.

PM reaches Cyprus, Turkey's rival & EU chair next year, to deepen ties

DIVYAA

NEW DELHI, JUNE 15

BECOMING THE first Indian Prime Minister to visit Cyprus in 23 years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached the Mediterranean island country Sunday where he was greeted at the airport by President Nikos Christodoulides.

Touched by this “special gesture” of welcoming him at the airport, Modi said, “This visit will add significant momentum to India-Cyprus relations, especially

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



PM Narendra Modi is received by Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides in Larnaca, Cyprus. PTI

● PM reaches Cyprus, Turkey's rival

in areas like trade, investment and more." The two sides are expected to sign multi-level cooperation agreements when the two leaders meet Monday for talks.

Cyprus is the Prime Minister's first stop on a three-nation tour that will also take him to Canada for the G7 meeting and Croatia in the Balkans. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the last Prime Minister to visit Cyprus in 2002.

Modi's choice of Cyprus for his first foreign visit after Operation Sindoor is a signal to neighbouring Turkey which openly supported Pakistan during the recent hostilities.

Cyprus, which has been engaged in territorial disputes with Turkey which invaded the island in 1974 and occupied its north, has consistently supported India's position on Kashmir, cross-border terrorism and UN Security Council reforms.

Besides countering the Islamabad-Ankara alignment, the visit to the Mediterranean nation also comes at a time when Delhi is looking to build bridges with Europe – External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar just concluded a six-day visit to France and Belgium.

Cyprus is set to hold the rotating presidency of the EU Council in 2026, and this visit by the Prime Minister will work to deepen India-EU collaboration.

"Cyprus is a close friend and an important partner in the Mediterranean region and the EU. The visit provides an opportunity to build upon the historical bonds and expand our ties in the areas of trade, investment, security, technology and promote people-to-people exchanges," Modi said in a departure statement Sunday morning.

He will be received at the Presidential Palace Monday and, according to Euronews, might even be given a tour of the cease-fire line in Nicosia by the President himself. The visit to the Green Line, the UN-controlled buffer zone, if it happens, will be a strong message to Turkey on the North Cyprus issue. It will be a response to Turkey's support to Pakistan on the Kashmir issue – Pakistan also backs Turkey on North Cyprus.

The official talks Monday between the two leaders will also touch upon the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Cyprus's maritime connectivity and strategic location makes it a potential hub in the IMEC project, which was mooted by India during its G20 Presidency in 2023.

As India seeks to diversify its energy sources, Cyprus being a key player in eastern Mediterranean natural gas exploration becomes crucial. In fact, strong India-Cyprus ties may help India get broad-based EU support for its various global initiatives, besides the IMEC.

EXPLAINED

E

Why
Cyprus
matters

THE CHOICE of Cyprus as the PM's first overseas destination after Operation Sindoor has not gone unnoticed. The island country has a decades-old dispute with Turkey which backed Pakistan during the recent hostilities. Cyprus has also backed India on Kashmir and its stand against cross-border terrorism. It will be taking charge of the EU Council presidency at a time when India is looking to deepen ties with Europe.

Locked in territorial disputes with Turkey and facing security challenges, Cyprus is looking to expand defence cooperation and will welcome any assistance from India. Delhi is also aiming to consolidate international support following Operation Sindoor, and the fact that Modi's stopover at Cyprus precedes his departure for Canada and attendance at the G7 Summit is also telling.

"This three-nation tour is also an opportunity to thank partner countries for their steadfast support to India in our fight against cross-border terrorism, and to galvanise global understanding on tackling terrorism in all its forms and manifestations," Modi said ahead of his departure Sunday morning.

From Cyprus, he departs Monday for Kananaskis to attend the G7 Summit at the invitation of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney.

"The Summit will provide space for exchange of views on pressing global issues and the priorities of the Global South. I also look forward to engaging with leaders from partner countries," Modi said.

While the agenda for the G7 huddle is focussed on building supply chains for critical minerals, energy security and counter-ing transnational crime, discussions could be on the raging Israel-Iran conflict and containing escalation. Modi is likely to have discussions with various stakeholders on the issue and express India's oft-repeated stance on dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward.

The last leg of the Prime Minister's three-nation trip will take him to Croatia, where he will meet President Zoran Milanovic and Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic. "Both our countries enjoy centuries-old close cultural links. As the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Croatia, it will open new avenues for bilateral cooperation in areas of mutual interest," Modi said.

Indian students, pilgrims stuck in Iran raise alarm

Iranian airspace is shut due to the conflict with Israel, and sources say evacuation by ships from southern Iran is being considered; there are 10,000 Indians in Iran, including 6,000 students

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

As Israel continued air strikes in Iran, thousands of Indians stuck in various Iranian cities have requested that the two sides declare a pause in fighting so that the Indian government can evacuate them through the airports in Iran.

The Embassy of India in Tehran on Sunday released emergency contact numbers and started a Telegram group to help Indians in Iran connect with the Indian authorities so that their safety could be ensured.

Official sources said there are about 10,000 Indians in Iran, including 6,000 students in various seminaries in the holy city of Qom and other Shia centres of learning. Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Sunday took up the issue with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and urged him to ensure the safety of Indian students in Iran. Later he said, "The Honorable Minister assured me that MEA is in close contact with their counterparts in Iran and will take all necessary steps to safeguard all Indian students in Iran."



Conflict zone: Smoke and fire rise over an oil refinery in Tehran, Iran capital, on Sunday after it was hit in an overnight Israeli strike. AFP

The Hindu has learnt from sources in Qom that several groups of Shia pilgrims from India, especially from Lucknow, who had travelled to Najaf and Karbala in Iraq and reached Qom have been stuck for the past few days since Israel started its bombing.

Metro as shelter

"Government of India should ask Israel and Iran to suspend the fight for some days so that we can be evacuated from Qom," said an Indian pilgrim on condition of anonymity, noting that the Indian Embassy is in contact with

most clusters of Indians across Iran but the shutdown of the airports and lack of flights to India pose the biggest obstacles.

Israel has targeted the Mehrabad international airport near Tehran, while the Ben Gurion airport in Israel's Tel Aviv has been shut down in anticipation of Iranian attacks. Indian sources said that Iranian authorities have opened the Tehran Metro Rail network to be used as safety shelters in case of further intensification of fighting.

An official source indicated that evacuation by air is not possible as the

airspace has been shut down and therefore the option of evacuation by ships from southern Iran is being considered.

Helpline numbers

The Embassy of India in Iran on Sunday issued fresh emergency WhatsApp numbers - +98 90101 44557, +98 90159 93320, and +91 80868 71709 - for Indians stuck in Iran in the prevailing circumstances. Separate numbers were also issued for those in the southern Iranian port of Bandar Abbas (+98 91776 99036) and Zahedan (+98 93963 56649).

If Iran attacks, 'full strength' of U.S. military will 'come down': Trump

Iranian Foreign Minister states Tehran is open to a nuclear deal that prevents it from acquiring atomic weapons but will not abandon its nuclear rights; Trump says a deal between Iran and Israel could be easily achieved to end the 'bloody conflict'

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON/TEHRAN

U.S. President Donald Trump warned Iran on Sunday that it would experience "the full strength" of the U.S. military if it attacks the United States, reiterating that Washington "had nothing to do" with Israel's strikes on Tehran's nuclear and intelligence facilities.

Israel's operation, which began early Friday, has targeted Iranian nuclear and military sites, killing dozens of people including top Army commanders and atomic scientists, according to Tehran.



Clear stance: Donald Trump reiterated on Sunday that the United States 'had nothing to do with the attack on Iran'. REUTERS

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to hit "every target of the ayatollah regime", and Iran has retaliated with a deadly barrage of

missiles.

While Mr. Trump had said he was aware of the Israeli operation before it started, he reiterated Sunday morning on his Truth

Social platform that the United States "had nothing to do with the attack on Iran, tonight".

"If we are attacked in any way, shape or form by Iran, the full strength and might of the U.S. Armed Forces will come down on you at levels never seen before," he said in a post.

He added that "we can easily get a deal done between Iran and Israel, and end this bloody conflict!!!"

On Friday, the U.S. President urged Tehran to make a deal or face "even more brutal" attacks by Israel.

During his first term, a landmark nuclear accord with Iran – negotiated un-

der former President Barack Obama – was torpedoed in 2018 when Mr. Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States and reimposed sanctions.

Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that Tehran is open to a nuclear deal that would ensure it cannot acquire atomic weapons, but will not agree to abandon its "rights".

"We are prepared for any agreement aimed at ensuring Iran does not pursue nuclear weapons," Mr. Araghchi told foreign diplomats, adding that Tehran would not accept any deal that "deprives Iran of its nuclear rights".

G-7 leaders meet in Canada amid rising U.S. policy and trade tensions

Reuters

BANFF

Group of Seven leaders gather in the Canadian Rockies starting on Sunday amid growing splits with the United States over foreign policy and trade, with host Canada striving to avoid clashes with President Donald Trump.

While Prime Minister Mark Carney says his priorities are strengthening peace and security, building critical mineral supply chains and creating jobs, issues such as U.S. tariffs and the conflicts in West Asia and Ukraine are also expected to feature heavily.

U.S. ally Israel launched



Friendly talks: Keir Starmer attends a bilateral meeting with Mark Carney before the start of G-7 summit in Ottawa on Sunday. REUTERS

a barrage of strikes across Iran on Thursday, a blow to Mr. Trump's diplomatic efforts to prevent such an attack.

The summit will take place in the mountain resort of Kananaskis, some

90 km west of Calgary.

The last time Canada played host, in 2018, Mr. Trump left the summit before denouncing then-Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as "very dishonest and weak" and

instructing the U.S. delegation to withdraw its approval of the final communique.

Conditional stability

"This will be a successful meeting if Donald Trump doesn't have an eruption that disrupts the entire gathering. Anything above and beyond that is gravy," said University of Ottawa international affairs professor Roland Paris, who was foreign policy adviser to Mr. Trudeau.

Mr. Trump has often mused about annexing Canada and arrives at a time when Mr. Carney is threatening reprisals if Washington does not lift tariffs on steel and aluminium.

CAIRO

Houthis target Israel with ballistic missiles in coordination with Iran



AFP

Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis on Sunday announced coordinated missile attacks on Israel with Iran, targeting Jaffa in central Israel. This marks the first public admission of joint operations with Tehran. The strikes follow ongoing missile exchanges between Israel and Iran amid escalating regional conflict. REUTERS

PHNOM PENH

Cambodia turns to World Court over Thailand border disputes



REUTERS

Cambodia said on Sunday it had formally asked the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to resolve its border disputes with Thailand after a deadly skirmish on May 28. Cambodia seeks ICJ rulings on four contested areas, while Thailand prefers bilateral talks and rejects the court's jurisdiction. REUTERS