

Delhi casts vote across generations

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Determined to exercise their franchise, three generations of several families on Wednesday lined up at various polling booths for Delhi assembly polls. AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal cast his vote in the New Delhi constituency, along with his father Gobind Ram Kejriwal, mother Gita Devi and son Pulkit Kejriwal, representing three generations of voters. Similar scenes were witnessed at several polling stations, where families arrived together to exercise their franchise. In Vikaspuri, 20-year-old Ritwik Mittal voted alongside his 40-year-old father and 78-year-old grandfather. "Three generations, one commitment. Our family votes together to secure our future. Democracy thrives when we participate," he said. In the Rohini constituency, 23-year-old Hriday Arora, who voted with his parents and grandparents, said, "This is not the first time I have voted with them, but it always feels special. I encourage others to bring their families and

Centre prohibits officials using ChatGPT, DeepSeek

From page 1

Put simply, foundation models in generative AI are large, pre-trained models that form the base for a variety of AI applications. "Making modern technology accessible to everyone, that is the economic thinking of our PM... Ours is the most affordable compute facility, at this point of time," Vaishnav said. The government, under the IndiaAI Mission, had approved Rs 10,372 crore outlay to strengthen India's AI ecosystem - a key pillar for that was enabling 10,000 GPUs for AI Compute Infrastructure. The 18,693 GPUs would offer large compute power considering that Deepseek was trained on 2,000 GPUs and ChatGPT version 4 on 25,000 GPUs. On the applications under India AI mission, India's focus has been about utilising the power of Artificial Intelligence for solving population-scale problems, in areas such as healthcare, education, agri, logistics, weather forecasting and others.

US will 'take over' Gaza Strip: Trump

From page 1

Asked about the possibility of sending US troops to Gaza, Trump said the US would "do what is necessary" as he laid out plans for the US to take the area over, and suggested he would visit the territory. Gaza has been decimated during a war with its neighbour Israel, which began with the October 7, 2023, attack by the terror group Hamas. Calling the Gaza Strip a "symbol of death and destruction" and a "hell hole right now", Trump said it is "so bad for the people anywhere near it, and especially those who live there... It's been very unlucky. It's been an unlucky place for a long time," Trump added that "we'll be a



participate in the electoral process." The polling arrangements were appreciated by the voters, with the Election Commission introducing an AI-based queue-management system app, "Delhi Election - 2025 QMS", to streamline the voting process. Themed polling booths, drinking water facilities, toilets, wheelchairs and ramps for differently-abled voters were also in place. In West Delhi, 25-year-old Abhijit Sharma, who voted with his father Kapil Sharma (44) and grandfather Surrender Kumar (80), said, "All three

generations voted. We feel great and appreciate the arrangements at the polling booth. A similar experience was shared in Laxmi Nagar by Neetu Kapasi (49), who voted with her daughter and mother. "It was a great experience to vote together. The arrangements were smooth and we faced no issues," she said. Sunil Kumar Jha, a resident of Gole Market who cast his vote at a polling booth in the Atal Adarsh Bal Vidyalaya, Mandir Marg in the morning, said, "It was our marriage anniversary.

My wife Khushbu Jha I went to cast our votes. We are proud to have carried out our democratic duty." He said he voted on the issue of development and a better and clean Delhi. In the 2020 Delhi Assembly polls, the AAP secured a decisive victory. The results of the 2025 polls, scheduled to be announced on Saturday, will determine whether the Kejriwal-led party scores a hat-trick of victories in the capital, the BJP stages a comeback after a gap of more than 25 years or the Congress regains lost ground.

Shah reviews J and K security after recent terror attacks

From page 1

He emphasised the Modi government's policy of zero tolerance against terrorism to achieve the goal of a terrorism-free Jammu and Kashmir and directed all security agencies to remain vigilant and continue to work in synergy to eliminate terrorism in the Union Territory. The home minister said the narco network is providing support to infiltrators and terrorists to carry out their activities. "There is a need to take prompt action against

terror funding from the proceeds of the narcotics trade with alacrity and rigour," he said. Shah directed the agencies to make new appointments in the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) in view of the timely implementation of the new criminal laws. He also appreciated the efforts of the security agencies for significant improvement in all parameters of the security scenario in Jammu and Kashmir. The home minister reviewed the security situation of Jammu and Kashmir with top

officials of the Army, police, paramilitary forces and others in two back-to-back meeting held on Tuesday and Wednesday. This was for the first time that the home minister had such threadbare discussions on security situation on Jammu and Kashmir in two consecutive days. The meetings were held in the wake of a terror attack in south Kashmir's Kulgam district, in which ex-serviceman Manzoor Ahmad Wagay was killed and his wife and niece were injured.

Families of Punjab deportees stare at bleak future

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Family members of the illegal immigrants from Punjab who are among the 104 Indians deported from the US on Wednesday said they took huge loans to facilitate their travel to America hoping for a bright future but now feel it is impossible to break free from the crushing debt. The families alleged that the travel agents adopted unfair means to facilitate the youths' travel to the US without their knowledge. They now seek strict action against those agents. A US military aircraft carrying 104 illegal immigrants from various states landed at Amritsar airport on Wednesday, the first such batch of Indians deported by the Donald Trump government as part of a crackdown it resolved to carry out when it was sworn in last month. Of the deportees, 33 each are from Haryana and Gujarat, 30 from Punjab, three each from Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, and two from Chandigarh, sources said. Among the illegal immigrants hailing from Punjab, six are from Kapurthala, five from Amritsar, four each from Patiala and Jalandhar, two each from Hoshiarpur, Ludhiana, SBS Nagar and one each from Gurdaspur, Tarn Taran, Sangrur, SAS Nagar and Fatehgarh Sahib.

Akhadas begin retreat from Kumbh

From page 1

"We are wanderers, moving with the rhythm of time," says Swami Shivanand Saraswati. "Kumbh is our anchor, a reminder that no matter where we go, the Ganga, the akhadas, and the faith will bring us back together." As the last lamps flicker in the akhada camps and the sadhus prepare for their onward journeys, one thing is certain- the spirit of Kumbh never ends. It flows like the sacred rivers, guiding the faithful until they meet again, two years later, at the Haridwar Ardh Kumbh.



Police personnel take deported immigrants for initial questioning

PTI

Harwinder Singh (41), who hails from Tahli village in Hoshiarpur district, was among the deportees from Punjab. He had left home for the United States around eight months ago. His wife Kuljinder Kaur claimed that a travel agent charged Rs 42 lakh, promising to send Harwinder to the US in a legal way. However, the agent facilitated his journey through treacherous "donkey routes", illegal and risky pathways used by migrants to enter the United States, she claimed. Harwinder last contacted the family on January 15, informing them that he had crossed the US border. "Since then, there has been no

communication. We came to know about his deportation today," she said. "We sold whatever little we had and borrowed money on high interest to pay the agent, hoping for a better future. But he deceived us," said Kaur. "Now, not only has my husband been deported we are also left with a huge debt," she said, appealing to the government for help and strict action against the travel agent. Harwinder has a wife, a son, a daughter, and his elderly parents. In Hoshiarpur's Darapur village, the family of Sukhpal (35) stare at a bleak future saddled with a mountain of debt. A chef by profession, he had gone to Italy on a one-year

Deportation flight from US lands in Amritsar

From page 1

India has emerged as the farthest of the destinations to send military aircraft to deport people by the Trump administration. The US action comes amid India and the US finalising various elements of a likely visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to to Washington from February 12 to 13. The US embassy spokesperson declined to provide details of the deportation flight and said that the United States is 'vigorously' enforcing its border, tightening immigration laws, and removing illegal migrants. "These actions send a clear message: Illegal migration is not worth the risk," the official said. Days after Trump came to power for a second term, India indicated its willingness to work with Washington to address issues relating to illegal immigration. "India is opposed to illegal immigration because of its links to several forms of organised crime," external affairs ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said last month, adding New Delhi will take back all Indians who have either overstayed in the

US or are there without documentation. "We will take them back provided documents are shared with us so that we can verify their nationality, that they are indeed Indians," he had said. At the same time, Jaiswal said it would be "premature" to talk about the number of illegal Indian immigrants staying in the US. Following his phone conversation with Prime Minister Modi on January 27, Trump said India "will do what is right" on the deportation of illegal migrants from the US. According to estimates, around 18,000 illegal immigrants from India have been identified by American authorities for deportation. Meanwhile, PTI reported from Jalandhar the North American Punjabi Association (NAPA) on Wednesday urged the Punjab government to establish a rehabilitation fund to support young boys and girls being deported from the United States. In a statement, NAPA Executive Director Satnam Singh Chahal said lack of support and resources for these returnees could lead to severe social and economic challenges for the state. He warned the Punjab

government that negligence in addressing this growing crisis would only create more problems for the state, exacerbating unemployment, mental health issues and potential involvement in illegal activities. "Many of these young individuals leave their homes with dreams of a better future but find themselves deported due to immigration challenges. They return with shattered hopes, financial distress, and psychological trauma. It is the government's responsibility to ensure their proper rehabilitation and reintegration into society," Chahal said. He urged the state government to allocate funds for skill development programmes, employment opportunities and mental health counselling to help these individuals rebuild their lives. He also urged policymakers to engage with organisations like NAPA to create comprehensive strategies to address the issue effectively. "This is not just an individual problem but a societal one," Chahal said. "If we fail to act now, the consequences will be dire, not just for the youth but for Punjab's social fabric and economy as a whole," he said.

POLL PREDICTS EXIT AAP, FAVOURS IN BJP

From page 1

Among the exit polls that predicted a BJP victory, the People's Pulse showed the NDA was likely to get 51 to 60 seats, while the AAP may get 10-19 seats. The Congress, it claimed, will not be able to open its account. According to People's Insight exit poll, the NDA is likely to get 40 to 44 seats, the AAP 25 to 29 seats, and the Congress 0-1 seat. The P-Marq exit poll predicted 39-49 seats for the BJP and its allies, 21-31 seats for AAP and 0-1 for the Congress. The JVC exit poll said the BJP and allies would get 39-45, the AAP 22-31 seats and the Congress 0-2. Similarly, the Poll Diary predicted 42-50 seats of the BJP and allies, while giving the AAP 18-25 seats, 0-2 for the Congress and 0-1 for others. Chankya Strategies exit poll said the BJP and allies are likely to get 39-44 seats, the AAP is likely to get 25-28, while Congress may get 2-3. Two surveys predicted AAP's victory - Wee Preside, which gave 46-52 sets for AAP, 18-23 for BJP and 0-1 for Congress, and Mind Brink Media predicted 44-49 seats for AAP, 21-25 for BJP and 0-1 for the Congress. KK Surveys and Strategies also predicted 39

seats to AAP, 22 to BJP . It predicted a very close fight on nine seats. Matriz exit poll predicted a close contest, giving the BJP led NDA 35-40 seats, while the AAP was said to get 32 to 37 seats. The survey gave Congress 0-1 seats. The DV Research exit polls predicted 26-34 seats for the AAP, and 36-44 for the BJP and allies, giving zero seats to the Congress. While exit polls do not always get it right, in the last two elections, they had correctly predicted a victory for AAP, though falling short of the massive mandate the party had received. Exit polls have shown varying degrees of accuracy in Delhi's elections since the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) emerged in 2013. In 2013, while they correctly predicted a hung Assembly, they underestimated AAP's strength. In 2015 and 2020, exit polls anticipated AAP victories but failed to gauge the extent of their success, consistently underestimating their seat counts. For instance, in 2015, polls averaged 42 seats for AAP, while the actual count was 67. However, by 2020, predictions improved, with polls closely aligning with AAP's eventual 62-seat win, indicating a gradual enhancement in polling accuracy over the years.

An analysis of the exit poll predictions shows that the Congress has likely dented the AAP's support base among Muslims and Dalits, thereby helping the BJP. If the results hold true, it also indicates BJP's inroads among jhuggi clusters and unauthorised colonies - the two pillars that helped AAP win in 2015 and 2020. As the exit polls predicted a favourable outcome for the saffron party, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said "AAP-da (disaster) is leaving" - a term coined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to describe the AAP. However, the AAP put up a brave face, with leader Reena Gupta stressing that the party would "register a historic victory", and Arvind Kejriwal would become the Chief Minister for a fourth time. Most pollsters have kept the Congress in the fringes -- the maximum seats predicted for the party is just three. In the 70 member Delhi assembly, 36 is the majority mark. The AAP currently has 62 MLAs, the BJP has eight, and the Congress none. The Delhi assembly polls were held on Wednesday, and results would be declared on February 8. There are 1.55 crore voters in Delhi, out of which nearly 58 percent exercised their franchise till 5 pm on Wednesday.

Tight race for Delhi between BJP, AAP

From page 1

The Greater Kailash seat of Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj recorded 52 per cent voting, Rajinder Nager recorded 57.88 per cent, Patel Nagar 54.63 per cent, R.K. Puram 51.81 per cent and Delhi Cantonment seat recorded 57 per cent voting till 5 p.m. Chief Minister Atishi's constituency recorded a turnout of 51.81 per cent till 5 p.m. Former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia's Jungpura seat recorded 55.23 per cent voting till 5 p.m. Other turnout trends till 5 p.m. were Sangam Vihar 57.41 per cent, Badarpur 54.51 per cent, Tughlakabad 53 per cent, Okhla 52.77 per cent, Kasturba Nagar 51.70 per cent, Malviya Nagar 52.07 per

cent, Chhatrapur 60.53 per cent, Ambedkar Nagar 56.98 per cent, Deoli 56.8 per cent and Mehrauli 50.59 per cent. Till 5 p.m., the turnout in Central Delhi's Matia Mahal was 61.40 per cent, Ballimaran 59.56 per cent, Burari 56.16 per cent, Sadar Bazar 57.06, Timarpur 53.29 per cent, Karol Bagh 47.40 per cent, Chandni Chowk 52.76 per cent. In West Delhi, the turnout till 5 p.m. in Janakpuri was 59.28 per cent, Rajouri Garden 58.96 per cent, Madipur 58.13 per cent, Hari Nagar 57.92 per cent, Moti Nagar 55.21 per cent, Nangloi Jat 56.20 per cent and Tilak Nagar 56.65 per cent. The turnout in the 2020 Delhi Assembly election stood at 62.59 per cent, 4.65 per cent lower than 67.47 per cent in

2015. In 2013, the turnout was 66.02 per cent, 8.42 per cent higher than 2008's 57.6 per cent. Only 56 per cent participated in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The 2025 Delhi election is seen as a straight fight between ex-Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's AAP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP. In the triangular contest between the AAP, the BJP, and the Congress, the ruling party aims for a third consecutive term, while the saffron party hopes to make a return to power after 25 years, and the grand old party strives to make a comeback. From welfare schemes, development model of governance, Yamuna's water quality to "Sheesh Mahal" controversy, the Delhi Assembly polls witnessed

fierce campaigning with AAP, BJP and Congress leaders locking horns. Important candidates in the Assembly elections include AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal, who is fighting from New Delhi constituency against former BJP MP Parvesh Verma and Congress's Sandeep Dikshit, who is the son of former chief minister Sheila Dikshit. Delhi Chief Minister Atishi is fighting BJP's Delhi unit chief Ramesh Bidhuri and Congress's Alka Lamba. Another tight contest is unfolding in Jangpura, where AAP's Manish Sisodia has been fielded there against BJP's Tarvinder Singh Marwah, and Congress's Farhad Suri. The term of the Assembly in Delhi is due to expire on February 23, 2025. Counting

of votes will take place on the February 8, 2025. The electoral battlefield of the national is set to witness interesting contests, with turcoats adding spice to the triangular fights. There are high-profile constituencies where the contest is tough like Kejriwal's New Delhi, Atishi's Kalkaji and Sisodia's Jangpura. A resurgent Congress has put Kasturba Nagar, Chandni Chowk, Uttam Nagar and Badli on the political map. The AAP focused on its governance model, with Kejriwal and Chief Minister Atishi leading rallies across the city. Congress, which got zero in the 2015 and 2020 elections, and the 2014, 2019, and 2024 Lok Sabha polls, is not likely to be a major player.

Pakistani Hindu refugees cast their first vote in Delhi



Pakistani Hindu refugees show their fingers marked with indelible ink after casting vote for the first time during the Delhi Assembly elections, at their resettlement colony at Majnu Ka Tilla area

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Many Pakistani Hindu refugees, who were granted Indian citizenship, cast their vote for the first time in Delhi assembly polls on Wednesday. At a polling booth in Delhi's Majnu Ka Tilla, Reshma pressed the button on an electronic voting machine on Wednesday with a sense of pride as a smile spread across her face. For the first time in her life, the 50-year-old woman cast her

vote - not just to choose a candidate, but for her family's future. Reshma is one of 186 Pakistani Hindu refugees who, after years of uncertainty, exercised their voting right for the first time in the Delhi Assembly polls, marking a powerful moment in their journey from statelessness to citizenship. They all got Indian citizenship under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. Dharamveer Solanki, president of the Pakistani Hindu refugee community, expressed hope

that their struggles would lessen. "Now, we won't have to constantly change our location. We will finally get permanent homes and a stable means of livelihood," he said. Solanki said people from our community were so excited that they queued up outside the polling booth in Majnu Ka Tilla -- a resettlement colony for the refugees. "I have lived here for 17 years but today, for the first time, I truly feel like I am part of

Hindustan," Chandrama said as she became emotional. "After a long struggle, now I have hope that my children will get a better life," she added. For decades, thousands of Pakistani Hindus have sought refuge in India, fleeing religious persecution. Many settled in Delhi's Majnu Ka Tilla, living in makeshift shelters, and taking up daily wage work. Twenty-seven-year-old Yashoda was the first to receive Indian citizenship in her group and even had the chance to meet

Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Today, standing in a queue at the polling booth, she could hardly contain her excitement. "We have spent years working as daily wage labourers, struggling to survive. Now that we have Indian citizenship, we hope for proper jobs, homes, and a dignified life," she said. On March 11 last year, the Central government announced the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, paving the way for undocu-

mented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan who arrived in India before December 31, 2014, to obtain Indian citizenship. For Maina, 23, who travelled from Faridabad to cast her vote in Majnu Ka Tilla, the experience was entirely new. "When I entered the polling booth, I had no idea how to vote or which party represented whom. But once I pressed the button, I felt the shift - I finally had a voice," she said.

Despite their newfound rights, many still face basic struggles. Maina also said that electricity is getting cheaper for others, but we still pay more. "We don't have access to clean water. Our homes are broken, and we live in harsh conditions. We hope the new government will finally address our problems," she added. Among the voters was Ranju, in her 70s, who has spent more than half her life in India, but never had the right to vote until now.

"I have seen hardship my entire life - struggles for water, employment, identity. Many people here still don't have Aadhaar cards. Prices are rising, and we are just trying to survive," she said. But despite it all, today, Ranju stood proud. "I have faith. If I can vote today, maybe tomorrow I will get all the other rights I have waited for." For these newly naturalised citizens, casting a vote was not just a civic duty - it was a declaration that they finally belong.

Themed polling booths decorate Delhi elections

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Polling booths across the city daubed themselves with colours and hung posters of celebrities bearing special messages to give voters an impression of a true festive spirit. One such poster bore the image of Lata Mangeshkar, while several others depicted paralympians. Pink, blue, and yellow balloons were glued to bring some colours to the walls of the polling booths, usually set up in government schools, inconspicuous with their grey, dun paint. A pink-themed polling booth in Badli Assembly constituency stood as a tribute to the women. The booth was found with a poster bearing the slogan 'Leading Women, Leading Nation,' with images of Rani Lakshmbai, Lata Mangeshkar, astronaut Kalpana Chawla, and badminton star Saina Nehwal. Another polling booth in north Delhi's Jahangirpuri was seen decorated with blue and white balloons and posters celebrating the journeys of paralympians. Several booths were decorated with rangolis, garlands, hand-made umbrellas, and voting rights posters. At Golf Links, a special booth was designed for the visually-impaired voters. The booth featured tactile representations of symbols of democracy, including the Constitution of India, the Indian map, the Parliament, the Election Commission's colour code, and the National Emblem, all displayed in braille.

Allegations of fake voting and bribery mar Delhi polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP and BJP indulged in an intense blame game with both sides alleging multiple incidents of alleged irregularities, bogus voting, money distribution and mismanagement were reported from several places in Delhi on Wednesday as 70 Assembly constituencies in the national capital went to polls. The incidents led to chaotic scenes near polling centres at Seelampur, Jangpura, Kasturba Nagar and New Delhi. Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Delhi said around noon that the polling process was going on "smoothly". A few EVMs were replaced during mock polls and actual voting also, the CEO said. "We have a sufficient number of reserve EVMs. A strong technical team along with sector officers are sorting out EVM-related issues then and there," she said. In the first incident in Seelampur, northeast Delhi, two groups of people had a face-off after the BJP supporters alleged bogus voting at a polling centre in Aryan Public School. A three-minute video clip of the purported incident surfaced on social media in which two groups of people can be seen having an argument over the issue. As per the video, policemen deployed outside the centre intervened and brought the situation under control. According to police, high drama unfolded in Seelampur when a BJP leader accused some people wearing burqas of attempting to vote fraudulently. However, police denied any fake voting in the area. In Seelampur, following allegations of fake voting by the BJP, more leaders of the party began sloganeering outside a polling booth. Delhi Police, however, dismissed the charges pointing to security deployed in the area. Additional police and paramilitary forces were also deployed. In a statement, the police said that a Police Control Room (PCR) call was received by a woman who alleged that her vote had already been cast by someone else. "The call was made by Mohini, 26, of Usman Pur. Inquiry revealed that confusion arose due to a similar name by another woman, who was a previous tenant at Mohini's residence," the police said in the statement. After verifica-

tion, the presiding officer allowed both women to vote, it said. "The situation is under control now and the arrangements are fine," the police said. Seelampur resident Safdar Ali said that BJP candidate Anil Gaur came and said people were voting fraudulently. "We asked him how was it possible when there are several layers of checking. The officials are checking the voter ID cards of everyone and allowing only valid voters inside the booth. "Later he left and the situation is now normal here due to the administration and security personnel," Ali said. In the second incident, the police received information that two men allegedly attempted fake voting in Kasturba Nagar. The incidents allegedly happened at Sarvodaya Vidyalaya in the Andrews Ganj area. They were caught by the Delhi Police and are currently being interrogated, police sources said. Two men identified as Sumit, 22, and Anuj, 24, were detained for allegedly attempting bogus voting in south Delhi's Kasturba Nagar. "Two people were going to Savodaya Vidyalaya in Andrews Ganj area of Kasturba Nagar assembly constituency of Delhi to cast fake votes with slips when they were caught. Both are being interrogated," said a Delhi Police officer. The Delhi BJP, in a post on X, alleged that AAP workers torched the shanty of a party worker at Kalandar Colony in Shahdara constituency. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva claimed that the AAP has stooped to "fake voting" as it was rattled by its "imminent defeat". He urged people to be wary of the Arvind Kejriwal-led party's "manipulations". AAP candidate from Greater Kailash, Saurabh Bharadwaj also claimed people were being stopped from voting in Chirag Dilli and senior party leader Manish Sisodia alleged money was being distributed from a house in Jangpura. Bharadwaj claimed that police had barricaded the Chirag Dilli area, preventing people from voting. He shared a video on X showing a woman sitting alone in an autorickshaw near a barricade, alleging that it was deliberately placed to obstruct access to the polling station. Bharadwaj on



Voters wait in a queue at a polling booth to cast votes during the Delhi Assembly elections

Ranjan Dimri

Wednesday accused the Delhi Police of putting barricades at 200 metres at polling stations at Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) strongholds. "Delhi Police at AAP strongholds has barricaded the polling station at 200 metres. It's there at Chirag Delhi polling station. No bike scooter car allowed," Bharadwaj wrote in a post on X. "How will people vote? Will old and handicap walk 200 meters to vote?" the AAP minister sought to know. He also urged the Election Commission of India and Delhi Police to "show under what law or rule is this happening?" The Delhi Police, however, said that the elderly and those who cannot walk can bring their cars. "There is an exception for the elderly and those who cannot walk. For them, bringing their car inside is allowed," Ankit Chauhan, DCP, South Delhi said. This rule is being implemented everywhere. We will investigate the places where he (Saurabh Bharadwaj) is raising concerns about..." In another incident, former deputy chief

minister Manish Sisodia alleged that BJP polling agents were distributing money to voters near a polling booth in Sarai Kale Khan, which falls under Jangpura constituency. A video clip of the purported incident surfaced on social media where Sisodia could be seen arguing with the BJP supporters and policemen. In another video, Sisodia alleged money was being distributed from a house in the area. He asked police officers on duty to conduct a raid at the house. Police received another PCR call from a woman who alleged that someone had cast vote in her name by the time she went to her pooling booth. Police, however, found out that another woman with a similar name, who lived in the complainant's house as a tenant, had cast the vote. After verification the presiding officer allowed both of them to vote, police said. "Allegations of voter bribery at Sarai Kale Khan were promptly investigated. Police, along with the Exe. Magistrate/FST, ensured thorough verification. No evidence was

found to substantiate the claims. Effective Police presence is maintained for peace and order," police tweeted. While District Election Office New Delhi tweeted that some incidents regarding relievers not being allowed inside polling booths were reported by political parties. However, on-ground verification revealed that polling agents inside were unwilling to come out, which prevented relievers from being accommodated. Sector officers and presiding officers have been sensitized to ensure the smooth relieving of polling agents. "We would like to clarify that barricading has been done for proper entry of queue and effective crowd management for smooth functioning of the voting process. As per the ECI guidelines, private vehicles are not allowed within 200 metres of polling stations to ensure a fair & orderly process. Elderly, persons with disability & those unable to walk can be dropped at the main entrance, with wheelchair assistance available," the DEO, New Delhi said in another tweet. The BJP's New Delhi seat candidate Parvesh Verma took to X to accuse Sisodia of resorting to "hooliganism" as he shared a video purportedly showing the AAP leader angrily demanding action against BJP workers. Scared of defeat, AAP leaders are now showing 'pettiness', he charged. In New Delhi constituency, Rajya Sabha MP and senior AAP leader Sanjay Singh alleged that "BJP goons" were distributing money near the Rashtrapati Bhavan. "BJP goons were distributing money at booth no. 27 N block near the Rashtrapati Bhavan, a highly sensitive area. When I reached there, they ran away," Sanjay Singh posted on X with a video. "Elections are being held in Delhi and this is a joke," he added. The Delhi Police, however, said that allegations of distribution of money from the building could not be substantiated. Meanwhile, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva accused the Aam Aadmi Party of facilitating fake voting in the national capital. "There is a wave of change in Delhi. People are voting against the corrupt government. Now, this 'AAP-da' - the 'farzi' govt has come to the extent where it is facilitating fake voting," Sachdeva said.

Delhiites seek better roads, safety, jobs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhiites on Wednesday exercised their right to vote while expressing concerns about key issues such as civic amenities, employment opportunities, and inflation -- matters which directly impact their daily lives. Basin (67), a resident of Kalkaji, said he was voting in the hope of improving the entire constituency. "I am here to vote against corruption and poor sanitation. The issues don't need to be highlighted-just look at the roads. When you step out of the house, you can clearly see all the sanitation problems. The entire constituency needs cleanliness. The roads are there, but they're broken and congested. Similarly, the drainage and sewage systems are open," he stated. Polling, which began at 7 am, is underway at 13,766 stations

across Delhi's 70 constituencies to decide the fate of 699 candidates. It will continue until 6 pm. Damodar Kumar (50), a motorcycle garage owner and resident of Okhla, said the maintenance of public washrooms is poor and open drains also trouble the residents. "The management is poor. There are public restrooms on the roads, but their maintenance is terrible. They're open, so they stink all the time. And these open drains create the same problem during rain-they're not even covered, and many are newly built. If someone isn't careful, they could fall right into them," Kumar stated. In northeast Delhi, where communal riots occurred five years ago, residents are focusing on development as the central theme of their votes. A voter said that they have "bad memories of the riots" but people are "voting in large numbers for the

future." Mohammad Wahid (38), a resident of Jaffrabad, said that the unavailability of a sewer line in Seelampur is a major concern for the residents. "Whatever happened in February 2020 was done to disturb the harmony of the area and polarise the population. We have a Hindu family living on our street. They celebrate their festivals, and we also participate in them. They could have left after the riots, but they chose to stay because they feel safe here. This is not the issue now. The sewer is a big problem in the area. Sometimes, we get dirty water," Wahid, a restaurant owner, said. Similarly, Rehman Ali (42) also expressed concern about crime in Seelampur and Jaffrabad. "We do not have a sewer in our area, which is a major issue for every street in the locality. Apart from this, the crime rate is also increasing, which is

worrying people about their children's future," Ali said. Raisuddin (54), a resident of Babapur, said all the issues would be resolved with a stable government. Dr. Faizan Sheikh (26), a resident of Mustafabad, said the entire northeast area shares the same problems. "People still have bad memories of the riots, and it will never fade away. However, residents are voting in large numbers for the future. The main issues in Mustafabad are the same as those faced by the entire northeast region -- sewer problems, cleanliness, better roads, drainage, and pollution," Sheikh, an eye specialist, said. More than 50 people were killed, and many others injured in the February 2020 riots, which occurred just after the assembly elections. Uma Singh, a 45-year-old resident of Rohini and a native of Bihar, expressed her concerns about rising prices. "We belong

to a middle-class family, and in today's times, the increasing costs are making life difficult for us. Many big promises are made, but nothing ever gets fulfilled. The water supply in our area sometimes has a bad smell. I feel that change is needed now so that we can get some relief," she said. Kavita Verma, a 37-year-old resident of Jahangirpuri who works as a house help, also shared her concerns about poor living conditions. "The water we get here smells bad, and the roads are in terrible condition. When it rains, the entire road gets flooded, making our lives difficult for the whole season. I still haven't received my ration card. I have been trying to get one for the past two years, but I haven't received it yet," Verma said. She also claimed that they haven't received 'pucca housing' as promised earlier and are still living in a rented home.

BJP leaders lead voting drive

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Several Union Ministers, Delhi BJP President, MPs, and office bearers voted early in the morning and motivated both party workers and citizens to participate in the election process. Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva stated that although the morning voter turnout appeared slow due to cold winds, it picked up momentum as the sun rose around 11 AM. Sachdeva alleged that until the night before the election, AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal and his party workers attempted to create tension in Delhi to suppress voter turnout. However, the alertness of the Delhi Police and Election Commission officials ensured a satisfactory voting process. He criticised the AAP leaders for running a negative campaign throughout the election and for trying to disrupt the



Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva at a polling booth

PTI

voting process in different areas on polling day. AAP leaders allegedly tried to incite voters in areas like Okhla, Seelampur, and Brahmpuri but were unsuccessful, BJP chief said. Minister of State Harsh Malhotra voted at Shyam Lal College polling booth while BJP National General Secretary Arun Singh voted at Chilla

Village, Mayur Vihar. General Secretary & Karol Bagh candidate Dushyant Gautam voted at Pratibha Vidyalaya, Mayur Vihar while the BJP Candidate from New Delhi, Pravesh Sahib Singh voted at Nirman Bhavan. Kalkaji BJP Candidate Ramesh Bidhuri, who is challenging the Chief Minister Atishi, voted at Bhangar Mohalla, Tughlaqabad.

Delhi Elections: High-profile leaders cast their votes



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged voters of Delhi that they must cast their valuable votes in the assembly elections on Wednesday and said to keep this in mind "Pahle matdaan, phir jalpaan" (First vote, have meal later). In a social media post, he especially greeted the first time young voters. Modi urged voters to participate in the festival of democracy with enthusiasm. He had spearheaded the BJP's intense campaign to against the Aam Aadmi Party, which is in power in Delhi since 2015. President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Union ministers S Jaishankar and Hardeep Singh Puri, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, were among the early voters as polling

began for the Delhi Assembly elections. President Murmu reached a polling booth inside the President's Estate and cast her vote around nine am. "President Droupadi Murmu voted in the Delhi Legislative Assembly elections 2025. The President cast her vote at the polling station in Dr. Rajendra Prasad Kendriya Vidyalaya inside Rashtrapati Bhavan complex," her office said in a social media post. Vice-President described voting as the oxygen for democracy and said exercising of franchise was the biggest right given to the people. Dhankhar and his spouse Sudesh cast their votes here for elections to the Delhi Legislative Assembly. Later, he told reporters that voting was the oxygen of democracy. "The basis of democracy is voting, and voting is the mother of all rights. There is no right above this,"



he said. Democracy holds meaning only when every person casts their vote judiciously and freely, he added. "India is an example for the world. (It is) the oldest democracy, the largest democracy, the strongest democracy, the most vibrant democracy, where change in power or stability in governance is evident only through voting," Dhankhar said. The vice-president reminded that when the country became independent, every adult person, male or female, was given the right vote, whereas this was not the case in many big democratic systems of the world that got independence before India. He also lauded the arrangements made by the Election Commission for smooth conduct of the democratic exercise. "The technology that we have adopted, the speed with which the result of your vot-

ing is declared publicly, the world is appreciating it," he said. Other prominent leaders who came out to cast their vote were Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, AAP leader and former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva, Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora, and Delhi Chief Electoral Officer R Alice Vaz. AAP's Greater Kailash candidate Saurabh Bharadwaj, BJP's Karawal Nagar candidate Kapil Mishra, Congress' New Delhi candidate Sandeep Dikshit, and Kalkaji candidate Alka Lamba also exercised their franchise soon after voting began at 7 am. Saxena said after casting his vote, "It is a festival of democracy. I appeal to all Delhiites to participate in this festival. Today is a day of duty, not a holiday." Jaishankar said, "I



have always been an early voter, a Delhi voter. The people are in a mood of change." Delhi Chief Minister and AAP's candidate from Kalkaji, Atishi, offered prayers at the Kalkaji temple ahead of casting her vote. "This election is a battle between good and evil. This is a battle between work and hooliganism," she said. "I have cast my vote for better Delhi and for better life of people. I appeal to voters to vote for better education, better health, and other facilities," AAP candidate from Jangpura constituency Manish Sisodia said. There are around 1.56 crore eligible voters in the capital, which is witnessing a triangular contest between the ruling AAP, BJP, and Congress. While the AAP is eyeing a third consecutive term, the BJP and Congress are hoping for resurgence in Delhi. In a swipe at the AAP, Rahul

Gandhi urged people of Delhi to remember while voting who committed the biggest scam in Delhi by talking about practising clean politics. The former Congress president said people's vote for his party will protect their rights, strengthen the Constitution and put Delhi back on the path of progress. He cast his ballot in the morning in the New Delhi constituency at the Nirman Bhawan polling centre. The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha issued an appeal to voters on social media. "My dear brothers and sisters of Delhi. I appeal to all of you to go and vote today. Your every vote for the Congress will protect your rights, strengthen the Constitution and put Delhi back on the path of progress," he said in his post in Hindi. "While voting, remember who is responsible for polluted air, dirty water, and broken roads.



Who committed the biggest scam in Delhi by talking about practising clean politics?" the former Congress chief said. After casting her vote in the New Delhi constituency, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said in a post in Hindi, "Today is the day to use the power given to you by the Constitution and decide your future for the next five years. Your one vote will make you and your Delhi stronger. Use your right after thinking well and definitely cast your vote." The Congress, which ruled Delhi for 15 years until 2013, is striving to stage a comeback after failing to win a single seat in the last two elections. AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal, accompanied by his family members that included his elderly parents, cast his vote and appealed to the people of Delhi to exercise their franchise for "good schools,

hospitals and development of the city". Kejriwal, who is contesting from the New Delhi seat for the fourth time in a row, is pitted against BJP's Parvesh Verma and Congress's Sandeep Dikshit, in a keen contest. "My parents have health issues but they were very excited about voting since morning," the former chief minister told reporters. His wife Sunita Kejriwal and son Pulkit Kejriwal also accompanied him to their polling station. Kejriwal said hopefully people will vote for "those who work". Sunita Kejriwal said people are "very intelligent" and will make the right choice. "They won't tolerate hooliganism," she said. The Aam Aadmi Party accused the BJP during campaigning of resorting to "hooliganism" to win the elections.

Congress expresses regret over visuals of deportees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday expressed sadness over "pictures of Indians getting handcuffed and humiliated" while being deported from the US and recalled that America had to express regret over the treatment meted out to India diplomat Devyani Khobragade in 2013 after the then UPA government retaliated sharply. A military transport aircraft of the US brought a group of Indian migrants, in the first such deportation to India as part of the big crackdown on illegal immigrants by President Donald Trump in his second term at the White House. Without directly commenting on the deportation flight carrying the Indians, a spokesperson at the US embassy in New Delhi said on Tuesday that Washington is tightening immigration laws and removing illegal migrants. Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said, "Looking at the pictures of Indians getting handcuffed and humiliated while being

deported from the US saddens me as an Indian." "I remember in December of 2013, an Indian diplomat Devyani Khobragade was handcuffed and strip searched in America. Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh registered a strong protest with US Ambassador Nancy Powell," Khera said in a post on X. "The UPA government retaliated sharply. Leaders like Ms Meira Kumar, Sushil Kumar Shinde & Rahul Gandhi refused to meet the US Congressional delegation (George Holding, Pete Olson, David Schweikert, Rob Woodall and Madeleine Bordallo) that was visiting India at that time," he recalled. Khera said then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh termed the US action 'deplorable'. India withdrew several perks given to the US embassy, including imports of food and alcohol at concessional rates by embassy staff, he said. Khera said Income Tax department started investigating the American Embassy school. "John Kerry expressed regrets

at the treatment given to Devyani Khobragade. The US administration called up foreign secretary Sujatha Singh to convey the regrets of the USA," he said. A 1999-batch IFS officer, Khobragade was arrested in New York on visa fraud charges, triggering a row between the two countries with India retaliating by downgrading privileges of certain categories of US diplomats among other steps. Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Tuesday said the media kerfuffle over the deportation of 150 plus illegal Indian migrants from the United States obscures a few facts. "This is not the first such planload, nor is it directly related to the ascent of @realDonaldTrump. There were 1100 Indians deported in the previous fiscal year (ending September 2024), under Biden, not Trump. As of 2022, there were 725,000 undocumented Indian immigrants in the US - the third-largest group, outnumbered only by nationals of Mexico and El Salvador, he said.



Underground works in forests exempt from compensatory afforestation: Environment Ministry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Union environment ministry has clarified that all underground works in forest land linked to linear, irrigation, hydel, and other development projects should be considered equivalent to underground mining, which is an environmentally-friendly activity and exempt from compensatory afforestation. The clarification was issued in response to a request from the Rajasthan government, which enquired about the applicability of compensatory afforestation for tunnels constructed as part of water resource development projects. Tunnel construction is environmentally friendly because it does not disrupt surface flora, fauna or ecological regimes, said

the ministry. The ministry's guidelines from April 17, 2018, already consider tunnels constructed for hydel projects to be equivalent to underground mining. In a meeting on January 27, the Forest Advisory Committee said the ministry's October 1, 2024, guidelines exempted tunnel construction for linear projects (railways and roads) from compensatory afforestation and net present value charges, as there was no ground surface disturbance. Following discussions with regional and nodal officers, and the Forest Conservation Division, the committee determined that tunnel construction for irrigation and similar purposes, such as hydel projects, is environmentally friendly and causes no surface disturbance.

PM Modi condoles the passing of Aga Khan IV

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday condoled the death of Aga Khan IV, spiritual leader of Ismaili Muslims, describing him as a visionary who dedicated his life to service and spirituality. "Deeply saddened by the passing of His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV. He was a visionary, who dedicated his life to service and spirituality. His contributions in areas like health, education, rural development and women empowerment will continue to inspire several people," Modi said in a social media post. The prime minister said he will always cherish their interactions. "My heartfelt condolences to his family and the millions of followers and admirers across the world," he added. Aga Khan IV, who became the spiritual leader of the world's millions of Ismaili Muslims at the age of 20 as a Harvard undergraduate and poured a



material empire built on billions of dollars in tithes into building homes, hospitals and schools in developing countries, died Tuesday. He was 88. His Aga Khan Development Network and the Ismaili religious community announced that His Highness Prince Karim Al-Hussaini, the Aga Khan IV and 49th hereditary imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, died in Portugal surrounded by his family. Leader of Opposition in the Lok

Sabha Rahul Gandhi expressed sadness over the passing of The Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of Ismaili Muslims, and said he was a visionary leader devoted to humanity, education, and progress. "Saddened by the passing of His Highness The Aga Khan, Mawlana Shah Karim Al-Hussaini -- a visionary leader devoted to humanity, education, and progress," Rahul Gandhi said in a social media post.

DUREX 69 SALE IS LIVE!

Upto 69% off*

From 6-9 February 2025 on DurexIndia.com



Scan here

*T&Cs apply

A wake up call!

The mass deportation of illegal immigrants by the US exposes deep-rooted socio-economic challenges and an urgent need to rein in traffickers

The recent deportation of 205 illegal Indian immigrants from the United States marks a distressing event for India. The US government has long maintained a strict stance on immigration policies, particularly under the Trump administration that emphasise national security and economic stability. Illegal immigrants, including those who overstay visas or enter through unauthorised routes, are often at risk of deportation. Many of these individuals had entered the US using irregular means, commonly referred to as the 'donkey route,' spending lakhs of rupees to facilitate their passage. The crack-down on illegal immigrants is a part of broader immigration enforcement efforts in the US. The citizens from several countries including Mexico, Columbia are being mass deported. With the renewed emphasis on border security and legal pathways to residency, individuals without proper documentation are being repatriated to their home countries. For India, this mass deportation is a moment of embarrassment on multiple levels. First, it exposes the loopholes in India's migration system and the desperation of many to seek better livelihood abroad through illegal means.



Punjab and many other states have been witnessing a surge in illegal attempts to move to US or European, reflecting socio-economic distress, lack of opportunities and the lure of a perceived better life in the West. Additionally, the incident damages India's global reputation, presenting it as a country that struggles to provide livelihood to its citizens. Moreover, it also reflects poorly on the State Governments in general and Punjab in particular, where unscrupulous agents and human traffickers continue to exploit vulnerable

individuals seeking a better future abroad. To avoid such situations in the future, the Indian government should work towards creating more legal pathways for skilled and unskilled workers to migrate. Agreements with countries like the US, Canada, and Australia for structured work visas can prevent people from taking illegal routes. There is a dire need for awareness campaigns to educate individuals about the dangers of illegal immigration. The Punjab NRI Affairs Minister has rightly urged people to acquire necessary skills and education before attempting to migrate. But it is about time to rein in fraudsters who fool gullable people in the name of migrating them to the US and Europe. Strict action, including severe penalties and dismantling of these networks is necessary to curb this menace at its root. The core issue driving illegal immigration is the lack of sufficient job opportunities in India. A robust economic strategy aimed at generating employment, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, will reduce the need for individuals to seek risky migration options. Besides, The Indian government should engage in active diplomacy with countries like the US to negotiate leniency or alternative pathways for Indians residing abroad illegally, especially those who have contributed significantly to their economy.

PICTALK



Devotees immerse an idol of Goddess Saraswati in the Atrai river after 'Basant Panchami' in Dakshin Dinajpur

The labyrinth of social media nutrition trends

From fitness trainers to influencers, everyone seems to have the 'ultimate' nutrition hack, leaving audiences overwhelmed and anxious about every bite they take

A quick scroll through social media reveals a chaotic world of conflicting nutritional advice. One reel vilifies carbs, another champion gluten-free living, and yet another insists on the life-altering power of soaked almonds blessed by Himalayan monks. It's a universe where everyone - fitness trainers, and fashion influencers - seems to be a certified nutritionist, armed with exclusive knowledge about what's harmful and what is crucial to live to 150. This constant influx of contradictory information creates a sense of overwhelm, leaving viewers unsure of where to turn to for reliable guidance. Coffee, once lauded as a metabolism booster, is now condemned as a gut-destroying cortisol spike. Eggs are alternately hailed as a perfect protein source and demonized for their cholesterol content. Dairy is both essential for bone health and the root of all inflammation. Ghee is evil and the enricher! This dietary confusion is further amplified by the ongoing debate between naturopathy and allopathy.



One side advocates for self-healing though turmeric, various morning concoctions to be taken empty-stomach, sunlight and avoidance of processed foods and the other champions the pills and supplements. Reels trap viewers between these camps, leaving them questioning every health decision. One moment, popping a pill seems like a capitalist scam; the next, viewers are googling "is vitamin deficiency reversible?" because, well, another reel. The ultimate transformation reel that often promotes a plant-based diet as the sole escape from the "horrors" of the modern food industry, citing concern about chemicals and hormones in meat and

dairy. However, another reel quickly counters this narrative, claiming even vegetables are laden with harmful substances. The result? A state of constant food paranoia, even with food choices scrutinized and mealtimes transformed into occasions of anxiety. The joy of eating is replaced by the fear of consuming the "wrong" thing. This fear-mongering around food choices can lead to disordered eating patterns and an unhealthy obsession with "clean-eating". The reality is that the human body is complex, and nutrition is not one-size-fits-all. A diet that works for a social media influencer (backed by a team of professionals and

image-enhancing tools) may not be suitable for everyone. Individual needs, genetic predispositions, and lifestyle factors all play a role in determining optimal nutrition. Instead of blindly following a diet fad, it's vital to listen to your own body and consult qualified healthcare professionals or your family doctor before making drastic dietary changes. If a reel references a study without providing details, it needs to be taken with a grain of salt. Food should be nourishing and enjoyable, not a source of stress. While mindful eating is important, social media shouldn't dictate every dietary decision.

One needs to trust one's gut (literally and figuratively), enjoy food in moderation, and perhaps consider muting influencers whose dramatic pronouncements create unnecessary anxiety. After all, balanced nutrition is about making informed choices based on credible information, not succumbing to the latest viral trend. (The writer is a Dubai-based author, and organises literature festivals and workshops; views are personal)



DEEBA SALIM IRFAN

image-enhancing tools) may not be suitable for everyone. Individual needs, genetic predispositions, and lifestyle factors all play a role in determining optimal nutrition. Instead of blindly following a diet fad, it's vital to listen to your own body and consult qualified healthcare professionals or your family doctor before making drastic dietary changes. If a reel references a study without providing details, it needs to be taken with a grain of salt. Food should be nourishing and enjoyable, not a source of stress. While mindful eating is important, social media shouldn't dictate every dietary decision.

One needs to trust one's gut (literally and figuratively), enjoy food in moderation, and perhaps consider muting influencers whose dramatic pronouncements create unnecessary anxiety. After all, balanced nutrition is about making informed choices based on credible information, not succumbing to the latest viral trend. (The writer is a Dubai-based author, and organises literature festivals and workshops; views are personal)

Rekindling Gandhian values in education

The erosion of Gandhian values—commitment, sacrifice and service — has led to a disconnect between education and its moral and social responsibilities



J S RAJPUT

Educational endeavours in India immediately after independence were initiated in a hurry to achieve too much in too little a time, and that too, under a severe paucity of human and materialistic resources. This has proved too costly in the long run to the nation, as it now suffers non-functional schools, absentee teachers and proxy teachers!

My interpretation would be that our teacher preparation institutions have either ignored, forgotten, or failed to appreciate the importance of the values that brought the entire nation together! It was the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi that had generated commitment, dedication, sacrifice, caring for others and devoting entire life to the nation. These are generally referred to as the Gandhian Values in public conversations. Unfortunately, the Gandhain values were neglected practically in every sector, as the generations managing the nation changed. The expectations from teachers and education have always been very high, they are supposed to set standards, norms, practices, morals, ethics and values. Unfortunately, the phenomenon of disappearing values did not spare the education systems and teachers.

Eminent educationist D. D. Kothari puts it: "The basic task of education - education at all levels - is to promote powers of mind, acquisition of special skills, and advancement of knowledge, but above all, to generate in the young generation a sense of purposefulness and mission, dedication, confidence in themselves and faith in the country's future. To underscore the significance of moral education and promotion of an abiding sense of ethical values and social responsivity as integral element of education in any society, secular or otherwise." This sentence deserves to be read a couple of times, and more than that, should generate an intensive process of continuous 'Manan' and then interactive discussions: 'Chintan'. This needs a serious rethink, which could begin from schools and projected to institutions of higher learning



also. To bring this point into the current context of the 21st century, let me digress to return to a focal point. One outstanding person who envisioned post-independence education in India in its totality of the past and present, and simultaneously envisioned its future, Dr D.S. Kothari, was a great physicist, researcher and legendary educator. His deep insight into spirituality and the Indian tradition of generating, transferring and utilising knowledge, and the inherent objective of utilizing it for people's welfare made him extraordinarily suitable for the task that he performed as the Chairperson of the National Commission on Education (1964-66). It is impossible not to be impressed by his articulation, pragmatism and vision. For India, his prescription for the future was also expressed in some of such orations in very simple yet meaningful terms: "STPG"! Yes, India and Indian education need to concentrate on 'Science, Technology, Production; and Gandhi"! It was certainly more than five decades ago when this approach stirred my thought process and inspired my keen desire to comprehend it in modern times, in a situation overwhelmed by western education, thought and culture. The Kothari prescription



THE TEACHER WHO ACKNOWLEDGES HIS RESPONSIBILITY AS THE CREATOR OF A UNITED, INTEGRATED AND COHESIVE FUTURE OF INDIA, NEEDS TO BE AWARE OF THE TREASURE OF THE GREAT INDIAN SCRIPTURES ALL OF WHICH ARE NOT NECESSARILY RELIGIOUS BUT ACT AS THE GUIDE FOR A 'CONTENTED, CONTRIBUTING AND CREATIVE' LIFE

meant deep familiarity with Indian tradition, culture, the intrigues it suffered, and an incisive analysis of Western knowledge systems, without any prejudice or 'pre-conceived admiration only'! It may sound personal, but listening to Professor Kothari changed my reading interests and transformed my entire approach to educational change. Unfortunately, the Gandhi part of the quartet -STPG - proposed by Dr. Kothari never received the attention to the extent it deserved. This neglect of the Gandhain values is visible right from schools to universities, -exceptions apart! If one broadens the horizons, it would be obvious that its impact extends far and wide. In simpler terms, one may ask: did India ignore the basic purpose of education? Within the education system, if one dwells deep into the implications, the focus will always be on the teachers. The ultimate goal of all of us -and our religions - is the same. It deserves to be repeated that practically every Indian teacher in a government school teaches multi-religious classes, and hence, he ought to be best equipped -and convinced - of the beauty of the diversity of various types and dimensions that nature has bestowed on Indians, includ-

ing religious diversity. The teacher who acknowledges his responsibility as the creator of a united, integrated and cohesive future of India, needs to be aware of the treasure of the great Indian scriptures all of which are not necessarily religious but act as the guide for a 'contented, contributing and creative' life. A teacher must be free from prior prejudices and biases. Those who are keen on this front could take guidance from an address that Mahatma Gandhi had delivered to the students and teachers of the Banaras Hindu University: "Early in my childhood I have felt the need of a scripture that would serve me as unfailing guide through the trials and temptations of life. Today the Gita is not only my Bible or my Koran; it is more than that - it is my mother." A large number of Institutions are engaged in in-depth research and serious studies on IKS- Indian Knowledge System. One expects that irrespective of misinterpretations of secularism these studies would not ignore the importance of ancient Indian scriptures and their contemporary relevance.

(Professor Rajput works in education social cohesion and religious amity. He is an Atal Fellow with the PMML, New Delhi)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RAHUL'S UNCHARITABLE COMMENT

Madam — Recent remarks by Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi regarding President Droupadi Murmu's address to Parliament have sparked significant controversy. Rahul Gandhi described the President's speech as "boring," stating, "I must say, I struggled through the President's address to maintain my attention on what was being said." Sonia Gandhi added that the President "was getting very tired by the end. She could hardly speak, poor thing." These comments have been widely criticized as disrespectful and condescending, particularly towards President Murmu, the first tribal woman to hold India's highest constitutional office. The Rashtrapati Bhavan condemned the remarks, calling them "in poor taste" and "unfortunate." Prime Minister Narendra Modi also denounced the comments, suggesting they reflect an elitist and feudal mindset. This incident highlights a perceived disconnect between the Congress leadership and India's evolving sociopolitical landscape. The remarks not only suggest a lack of respect for the President's office but also an insensitivity towards the representation of marginalized communities. Such attitudes risk alienating key voter bases and undermining the party's efforts to present itself as inclusive and progressive.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

PRAGG WINS TATA STEEL CHESS

Madam — Madam- The doyen clash of the two chess champions D. Gukesh and R. Praggnandhaa in the final match of Tata Steel Chess championship turns interesting, when two teens clashed against each other for one title of winner. No doubt of the fact that, despite R. Praggnandhaa turns the winner, D. Gukesh played equally well and deserve appreciation for playing excellent game in the finals. The tie breaker ended up with 2-1 Tata Steel Master Chess Championship held in the Netherlands. It is always interesting to watch two young teens chess doyen, playing aggressively against each other for one prestigious chess

Battling cancer and an unjust society



A woman who used to work in a beauty product company was asked to quit her job by her employer when her chemotherapy started. This shows the absence of effective labour laws in our country. In addition, the social security net for such a worker is almost invisible. A worker can fight against cancer. But

what she or he can do when the whole environment is afflicted with malignancy? High profit margins resulting in high cost for most of the medicines including life saving ones is another symptom of malignancy in our society. In such an environment, it is impossible for a common person to overcome even a treatable disease and a manageable crisis. This case highlights the lack of effective labor laws and social security for workers in our country. While one can fight cancer, battling an unsupportive system is far harder. Without systemic reforms, the real malignancy lies not just in illness but in a society that fails to protect its most vulnerable.

Sujit Dey| Kolkata

titles. As Praggnandhaa and Gukesh is almost equivalent in their chess caliber, it is essential to appreciate both of them for knocking the kick in the final with the best of their efforts. Praggnandhaa deserves kudos and heartiest congratulations for his prowess play, calmness and chess intuition practice, which he showed till the last minute, until he lift the chess title to his name. India is building it's chess excellence on the shoulders of these young teenagers, who are the chess masters already, and amazing the whole world with their terrific gaming ability, inspiring millions of the budding chess players all around the whole world.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

SAVE TIGERS FROM POACHERS

Madam — Jim Corbett, Gangotri, and Rajaji National Park in Uttarakhand; Amangarh, Pilibhit, and Valmiki National Park in Uttar Pradesh; Balaghat and Pench Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh; along with the Western Ghats covering Goa, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Gujarat, and Kerala, are among the nine states where

approximately 1,800 tigers are currently at risk. On the international black market, tiger body parts, claws, and skins are being auctioned for millions, attracting poachers to these critical tiger habitats. The Indian Wildlife Institute has issued warnings for 24 tiger conservation projects, highlighting the urgency of protecting these endangered animals. Following resolutions passed at the 13-country tiger summit last year, India successfully doubled its tiger population by 2022, now hosting around 4,000 tigers—an extraordinary conservation achievement. Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh have played a key role in this success, contributing to India's preservation of 73.7% of the world's tiger population. With tigers in protected forests becoming prime targets for illegal hunting and trafficking, it is crucial to strengthen patrolling in high-risk forest zones and implement stringent anti-poaching measures.

Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

BREAKING FREE FROM THE BLAME GAME

It's easy to point fingers when things go wrong, but true growth begins with self-reflection



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We all are used to blaming others for our woes. There are some exceptions, mostly devotees of God. Why do we behave thus almost instinctively? There are two main reasons. One is doing so is easy. This way we don't have to take responsibility for our troubles, though this is the exact opposite of the 'Karmaphala Principle', which is "what we sow is what we reap." We are forever doing 'karmas' (acts) by our minds, speech and bodies. We may not think so, but it is true. When we have fearful thoughts, there are bodily manifestations like sweating, increased heartbeats, etc.

As regards speech, we know that when speak nicely we get rewarded. On the other hand, getting angry or abusing someone evokes similar responses. Bodily acts like working in an office brings us a salary. However, some acts do not bring immediate results or fruits; they do so in future, even in future lives. All our acts are duly recorded by the Divine Authority; they know exactly what we do. Nothing is hidden from them. This is God's arrangement under whose supervision they work. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 9.10) The other reason is acceptance that we are really small and quite ignorant. We have made mistakes in the past. This hurts our ego. All others can and do make mistakes except us. The feeling of superiority, which we lull ourselves to nurture, gets dented. What harm do we cause ourselves when we don't take responsibility for our acts at least internally? We won't do anything about correcting our flaws. They will continue to haunt us. Because we only can correct our faults; nobody else can. We have free will to decide what we do. And finding faults in others won't help, because they won't correct themselves just because we desire it. Therefore, whatever caused our troubles remain. Someone may point out that many times strangers cause us trouble like a drunk driver. Yes, it is true, but this happens because he only acted as a medium to cause us trouble, as it was destined according to the Karmaphala Principle. This is reality. The same is true about troubles given to us by natural forces. God has warned us that this will happen in this place of misery. (8.15) Then, we make enemies of people, who we blame. These are mostly near and dear ones, with whom we associate. What do you think is the primary cause of family feuds? It is a blame game when something goes wrong. These are the people, who are crucial for our peace of mind. We don't please God either, because blaming others for what wrong we have done is against 'dharma'. This way we distance ourselves from the only entity, who can help us to correct our flaws, especially in our nature. God has promised to even get us out of all troubles if we develop God's consciousness. (18.58) But will we listen? What is the solution? Start with the realisation that we are fallible; we will make mistakes as we have done in the past. We must have, otherwise we won't be bound to the birth and death cycle.

The quality of humility is very important in this regard, as it is in all interpersonal relationships. Starting to do spiritual practices, which suit our nature will help greatly. Why? God comes into the picture. He begins to take an interest in us. This is what I have done, and believe me results are unbelievable. My Lord is micromanaging my life. Minor miracles happen all the time leaving me astonished.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)

US sanctions: A bold move or another futile attempt



UTTAM GUPTA

The US has imposed a fresh round of sanctions on Russia's energy sector in a bid to cut its oil revenue. The crucial question remains: Will these measures be effective



“

DESPITE DEPENDING HEAVILY ON RUSSIA FOR THEIR ENERGY NEEDS, THE G7 COUNTRIES WANTED THOSE SUPPLIES SHOULD CONTINUE BUT THEY WOULDN'T PAY A PRICE MORE THAN WHAT THEY DEEMED FIT

On January 10, 2024, the outgoing Biden administration of the United States of America (USA) made public its latest round of sanctions - has set a deadline of February 27, 2024, for the delivery of all crude cargoes that were loaded on sanctioned vessels before January 10, 2024. Besides, the European Union (EU) bloc countries are contemplating phase-out import of Russian Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG).

Will these sanctions work? Before that, we need to ask whether sanctions worked in the past. In a bid to punish Russia for its military action against Ukraine, in June 2022, leaders of G7 viz., the United States, Germany, France, Britain, Italy, Canada and Japan had vowed to explore the feasibility of measures to bar imports of Russian oil at a price above a certain level. In September 2022, their finance ministers (FMs) said, "We confirm our joint political intention to finalize and implement a comprehensive prohibition of services, which enable maritime transportation of Russian-origin crude oil and petroleum products globally. Providing those services would only be allowed if the oil and petroleum products are purchased at or below a price (the price cap) determined by the broad coalition of countries adhering to and implementing the price cap."

On December 5, 2022, they set the price ceiling at US\$60 per barrel. It was meant to weaken Russia financially by undermining its ability to generate revenue from the export of petroleum products while ensuring that supplies to them (read: G7/EU) are not impacted. There was an inherent contradiction in this approach. Russia is the third-largest producer of crude oil with over 12 per cent share in global crude production and the second-largest exporter. In the case of natural gas (NG), it is the world's second-largest producer with a share of 10 per cent. In world export, its contribution is even higher at 25 per cent. When it comes to EU countries, their dependence on Russia is even higher, drawing 40 per cent of their NG supplies and 25 per cent of crude from it. Some countries in the bloc viz. Germany, Netherlands, and Poland source a much higher percentage of their requirements from Russia.

Despite depending heavily on Russia for their energy needs, the G7 countries wanted those supplies should continue but they wouldn't pay a price more than what they deemed fit. Curiously, that price would be determined by 'how much revenue they would wish Russia to earn from those sales' not by global demand-supply forces. One is reminded of the famous adage 'if wishes were horses, beggars would ride'. As expected, things didn't pan out as per their wish.

Even as the group members were busy forging a coalition and deliberating on 'what should be the cap', the imposition of sanctions led to disruption in supplies leading to a steep increase in the price of both crude oil and NG. The EU countries were forced to buy all their requirements at 'elevated' prices as during that period, the price cap wasn't in force. This led to a huge increase in their import bill. According to the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, Russia received about 158 billion euros in revenue for the sale of oil, NG and coal from February to August 2022, more than half of which - some 85 billion euros worth - was from the EU. Russia's revenue increased even as overall export volumes dropped by 18 per cent compared with the corresponding period before the invasion of Ukraine. Put simply, Russia earned more by selling fewer volumes. On December 5, 2022, the G7 bloc announced a ceiling price of US\$60 per barrel of crude. This achieved little in restricting Russia's earnings. As it is, fixing the cap at US\$60 per barrel is laughable considering that the cost of producing oil is substantially lower, in fact, a fraction of this number. Even if exports were made at this price (between December 2022 and June 2023, most of Russia's crude was selling at less than this price implying no violation), it would still be generating a lot of surpluses to keep its war machinery well-oiled. Since, July 2023, the price has been above the cap, courtesy, of reduced availability of oil worldwide as a result of Saudi Arabia and Russia cutting production by one million barrels per day (mbd) and 0.3 Mbps respectively over and above the cut agreed to in the meeting of OPEC+ in April 2023.

Russia has been able to benefit from this as well. For instance, according to S&P Global Platts, its key export grade crude sold at around US\$75 per barrel enabling it to garner oil income of US\$211 million a day during September 2023. The sanctions didn't work. The G7 wanted to enforce it by requiring buyers of Russian petroleum to make "attestations" to providers of services including insurance, finance, brokering, and navigation to oil cargoes, saying 'they bought at or below the cap'. What if the buyer gives a fudged document mentioning a price less than the cap? Still, the G7 countries can't take any action as per their agreement: 'services' providers can't be held liable for false pricing information provided by buyers and sellers.

It is also possible to circumvent the cap by setting the price as oil leaves a Russian port, not what's paid by a refinery in, say, India.

While the former can stay well within the \$60 per barrel level, transportation costs and margins of trading companies (albeit Russian-affiliated) in countries not participating in sanctions are inflated to yield the desired net back in Russian hands.

It is then no surprise that there are numerous instances of 'loading Russian oil at all ports within Russia' by vessels owned or insured by Western nations, with little sign of enforcement action initiated by the G7 authorities. Apart from this, there are umpteen parallel fleets and insurance companies - under non-Western ownership - that are being used for handling, shipping, and insuring Russian oil.

In case of NG, on December 19, 2022, the EU energy ministers had agreed to a price cap linked to the existing price of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Since, LNG prices are prone to fluctuations, the NG price cap would also fluctuate. It goes against the very idea of a ceiling price.

Besides, even this so called cap could be suspended if the EU faces a gas supply shortage, or if the cap causes a drop in trading volumes, a jump in gas use and so on. So, it was a non-starter.

Meanwhile, Russia has cut off most of its pipeline gas deliveries to EU forcing the latter to import record volumes of LNG from none other than Russia in 2024. In this backdrop, for EU to now proclaim that it will phase-out import of Russian LNG is plain rhetoric.

Thus far, the US/EU have roared like a toothless tiger. The latest sanctions announced by Biden don't change its basic character. They need to get adjusted to the realities of global demand-supply for energy and not let military objectives to dictate terms.

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

Trump's economic gamble: High tariffs, tax cuts and the risks of protectionism

By imposing steep tariffs on imports, Trump aims to boost US manufacturing, but the move has sparked fierce debate, with many questioning its effectiveness



ASHWANI MAHAJAN

Donald Trump, the newly elected President of the United States, has once again made headlines with his bold economic statements. Known for his unpredictability during his previous tenure, Trump is doubling down on his protectionist trade policies and tax reforms. His proposals, particularly those related to tariffs, taxation, and environmental policies, have sparked widespread debate over their economic viability and long-term impact on the country.

Tariff Wars and Protectionism: Trump has long argued that the U.S. suffers from an imbalance in trade due to high tariffs imposed by countries like China, India, and Brazil. To counter this, he proposes raising



policy is his call for American companies to relocate their manufacturing operations back to the US. He has warned businesses that failing to do so will subject them to high tariffs and taxes. In particular, he aims to boost production in pharmaceuticals, semiconduct

tariffs. To address these concerns, Trump has already announced tariff hikes on imports from Canada, Mexico, and China. However, these nations have retaliated with their own tariffs on US goods, sparking fears of an intensified trade war. Despite these risks, Trump remains firm on his stance that high tariffs will not only protect domestic industries but also help reduce reliance on imports.

The Controversial Tax Plan: One of Trump's most radical proposals is the complete abolition of income tax, which he suggests will be offset by increased import duties. This move aligns with his long-standing position of reducing tax burdens on wealthy Americans—a policy he also pursued in his previous tenure.

He further plans to reverse the income tax hikes imposed by former President Joe Biden on ultra-rich individuals. Trump's vision is to shift the tax burden onto foreign countries by raising tariffs while reducing domestic taxation. He argues that by doing so, disposable incomes will rise, leading to economic growth and prosperity. He frequently references the period from 1870 to 1913, a time when the US relied on tariff-based revenue and experienced significant economic expansion. However, modern economists caution that the global economy has evolved drastically since then, making a return to such a system risky and impractical.

Encouraging Domestic Production: Another key aspect of Trump's economic

tor manufacturing, and the steel industry. Trump argues that the decline of domestic industries, such as shipbuilding and defense manufacturing, is a direct consequence of outsourcing. By incentivising businesses to reshore their operations, he hopes to rebuild America's industrial strength and reduce dependency on foreign nations for critical goods.

Environmental Rollbacks and Energy Policies: In addition to his trade and tax policies, Trump has taken a firm stance against environmental regulations, which he believes have stifled economic growth. He has announced plans to dismantle wind and solar energy farms, claiming that they harm land value and hinder economic progress.

Furthermore, he intends to reverse restrictions on mining rare earth minerals, arguing that environmental concerns should not stand in the way of economic development.

Trump believes that reducing support for green energy initiatives will benefit traditional industries such as coal and oil. However, critics argue that these moves will set America back in the global race for clean energy innovation and environmental sustainability.

Potential Consequences

Inflation Risks: Increased tariffs on imports will raise the cost of goods, leading to higher inflation. Since many industries rely on global supply chains, US consumers may face rising prices for everyday products.

Retaliatory Measures: Other countries have already begun imposing counter-tariffs on American goods. For instance, Canada has responded with its own tariffs and urged its citizens to avoid US travel. If more countries follow suit, US exports could suffer significant losses.

Environmental and Technological Setbacks: Rolling back environmental protections and abandoning clean energy initiatives could make the US less competitive in the global economy. The growing market for EVs and renewable energy presents significant economic opportunities, which America may forfeit by shifting focus back to traditional industries.

(The author is Professor, PGDAV College, University of Delhi; views are personal)

Trump’s Gaza ‘take over’ suggestion rejected by all Palestinians fear repeat of 1948 mass expulsion



President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu take questions during a news conference in the East Room of the White House, Tuesday, in Washington.

PTI ■ DUBAI

President Donald Trump’s proposal that the United States “take over” the Gaza Strip and permanently resettle its Palestinian residents was swiftly rejected and denounced on Wednesday by American allies and adversaries alike.

Trump’s suggestion came at a White House news conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who smiled several times as the president detailed a plan to build new settlements for Palestinians outside the Gaza Strip, and for the US to take “ownership” in redeveloping the war-torn territory into “the Riviera of the Middle

East.” “The US will take over the Gaza Strip, and we will do a job with it too,” Trump said. “We’ll own it and be responsible for dismantling all of the dangerous unexploded bombs and other weapons on the site, level the site, and get rid of the destroyed buildings, level it out, create an economic development that will supply unlimited numbers of jobs.” The comments came amid a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, during which the militant group has been turning over hostages in exchange for the release of prisoners held by Israel. Egypt, Jordan and other American allies in the Middle East have already rejected the idea of relocating more than 2

million Palestinians from Gaza elsewhere in the region. Saudi Arabia, an important American ally, weighed in quickly on Trump’s expanded idea to take over the Gaza Strip in a sharply worded statement, noting that its long call for an independent Palestinian state was a “firm, steadfast and unwavering position.” “The kingdom of Saudi Arabia also stresses what it had previously announced regarding its absolute rejection of infringement on the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, whether through Israeli settlement policies, annexation of Palestinian lands or efforts to displace the Palestinian people from their land,” the statement said.

Jerusalem (PTI): Palestinians will mark this year the 77th anniversary of their mass expulsion from what is now Israel, an event that is at the core of their national struggle.

But in many ways, that experience pales in comparison to the calamity now faced in the Gaza Strip — particularly as President Donald Trump has suggested that displaced Palestinians in Gaza be permanently resettled outside the war-torn territory and that the United States take “ownership” of the enclave. Palestinians refer to their 1948 expulsion as the Nakba, Arabic for catastrophe. Some 700,000 Palestinians — a majority of the prewar population — fled or were driven from their homes before and during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that followed Israel’s establishment. After the war, Israel refused to allow them to return because it would have resulted in a Palestinian majority within its borders. Instead, they became a seemingly permanent refugee community that now numbers some 6 million, with most living in slum-like urban refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

In Gaza, the refugees and their descendants make up around three-quarters of the population. Israel’s rejection of what Palestinians say is their right of return to their 1948 homes has been a core grievance in the conflict and was one of the thorniest issues in peace talks that last collapsed 15 years ago. The refugee camps have always been the main bastions of Palestinian militancy. Now, many Palestinians fear a repeat of their painful history on an even more cataclysmic scale. All across Gaza, Palestinians in recent days have been loading up cars and donkey carts or setting out on foot to visit their destroyed homes after a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war took

hold January 19. The images from several rounds of mass evacuations throughout the war — and their march back north on foot — are strikingly similar to black-and-white photographs from 1948.

Mustafa al-Gazzar, in his 80s, recalled in 2024 his family’s monthslong flight from their village in what is now central Israel to the southern city of Rafah, when he was 5. At one point they were bombed from the air, at another, they dug holes under a tree to sleep in for warmth.

Al-Gazzar, now a great-grandfather, was forced to flee again in the war, this time to a tent in Muwasi, a barren coastal area where some 450,000 Palestinians live in a squalid camp. He said then the conditions are worse than in 1948, when the UN agency for Palestinian refugees was able to regularly provide food and other essentials. “My hope in 1948 was to return, but my hope today is to survive,” he said.

The war in Gaza, which was triggered by Hamas’ October 7 attack into Israel, has killed over 47,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, making it by far the deadliest round of fighting in the history of the conflict. The initial Hamas attack killed some 1,200 Israelis.

The war has forced some 1.7 million Palestinians — around three quarters of the territory’s population — to flee their homes, often multiple times. That is well over twice the number that fled before and during the 1948 war. Israel has sealed its border. Egypt has only allowed a small number of Palestinians to leave, in part because it fears a mass influx of Palestinians could generate another long-term refugee crisis.

The international community is strongly opposed to any mass expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza — an idea embraced by far-right members of the Israeli government, who refer to it as “voluntary emigration.”

Indian embassy’s new unified service centre for expats in UAE agencies

AGENCIES ■ ABU DHABI

A significant change is underway for Indian expats in the UAE, as the Indian Embassy plans to establish a unified Indian Consular Application Centre (ICAC) across 14 locations in the country. This overhaul, aimed at streamlining consular services, is expected to take effect by the second quarter of 2025, our correspondent has learned. The Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi has reopened the tender process for service providers to manage the new centre, which will consolidate all passport, visa, and attestation services under one roof. This move comes after a previous tender issued in 2023 was revoked due to technical complications. The latest tender, which has stricter requirements, outlines plans for enhanced accessibility and efficiency for the estimated 4 million Indians living in the UAE. Currently, two different service providers, BLS International and IVS Global, handle the bulk of consular services. BLS processes passport and visa applications, while IVS Global manages attestation services. Additionally, some consular services are available directly through the Indian Embassy and Consulate in Dubai. The new system will replace these

separate providers with one integrated service centre across the UAE, with branches in 14 strategic locations, including Abu Dhabi (Al Khalidiya, Al Reem, Musafah), Dubai (Bur Dubai, JLT, Marina), Sharjah, Ajman, Fujairah, Umm Al Quwain, Khor Fakkan, and Ras Al Khaimah. The shift is designed to reduce waiting times and increase transparency. The centre will provide a streamlined process with features like a new appointment booking system, real-time tracking of applications, and strict deadlines for processing to ensure efficiency.

A fine system will be enforced for any delays in service delivery. “The service provider must ensure that appointment slots are available within five working days and that each application is processed within 30 minutes,” according to the Request for Proposal document.

The new facility is expected to handle more than 1.5 million consular transactions annually, with a focus on expediting processes while maintaining high service standards. For Indian expats, this unified approach promises faster and more accessible consular services in the UAE, greatly improving the expat experience.

‘Donald Trump, Musk shaking foundations of US democracy’

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

When Elon Musk debuted the Department of Government Efficiency recently at the Capitol, House Speaker Mike Johnson enthusiastically predicted the coming Trump administration would bring “a lot of change around here. Three weeks in, the change the Trump administration has brought is a disruption of the federal government on an unprecedented scale, dismantling longstanding programmes, sparking widespread public outcry and challenging the very role of Congress to create the nation’s laws and pay its bills. Government workers are being pushed to resign. Entire agencies are being shuttered. Federal funding to states and nonprofits was temporarily frozen. And the most sensitive Treasury Department information of countless Americans was opened to Musk’s DOGE team in an unprecedented breach of privacy and protocol. “This is an erosion of our democracy,” said Brian Riedl, a longtime economic adviser to conservative Republicans, now at the Manhattan Institute think tank. President Donald Trump has tapped Musk, the world’s richest man, to take on inner workings of the world’s oldest democracy, and so far the results are stunning, if not alarming and unlawful, being challenged in dozens of court cases nationwide. Congress is proving little match for DOGE as wary lawmakers watch it march through the bureaucracy. Instead, a rush of lawsuits is demanding interventions to stop the Republican president’s team from unilaterally gutting government. And protests are erupting outside government agencies and clog-

ging the congressional phone lines. “Whatever DOGE is doing, it is certainly not — not — what democracy looks like or has ever looked like in the grand history of this country,” Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said. “An unelected shadow government is conducting a hostile takeover of the federal government,” Schumer posted on Musk’s social media site X. Musk responded on his platform: “Hysterical reactions like this is how you know that DOGE is doing work that really matters.” Congress has been here before, tested during Trump’s first term by his willingness to break the norms and skirt the outer banks of legality, most notably when he steamrolled Congress and poached federal military housing and construction funds to build parts of his promised wall along the US-Mexico border. But Trump’s second-term partnership with Musk, who spent some USD 200 million on Trump’s White House bid and employs the tech world ethos of moving fast and breaking things, is escalating the confrontation. On a stated quest to save money by rooting out waste, fraud and abuse, they are making moves to upend American institutions, decimate the civil service and leave a reformed — or hollowed-out — federal government in its place. Sharon Parrott, president of the Centre on Budget and Policy Priorities, said it would be “catastrophic to our system of government” if the effort succeeds. “Many of the things they are doing are brazenly unlawful, and we’ve seen that the courts have been willing to intervene — and intervene quickly,” Parrott said.

Iran praises US for cutting foreign aid funding

PTI ■ TEHRAN

Iran’s government seems to be welcoming some recent decisions by the United States — even though they happen to come from a man Iranian operatives have allegedly been plotting to assassinate. President Donald Trump’s moves to freeze spending on foreign aid and overhaul, maybe even end, the US Agency for International Development have been lauded in Iranian state media. The reports say the decisions will halt funding for opponents of the country’s Shiite theocracy — pro-democracy activists and others supported through programmes as part of US government’s efforts to help democracy worldwide. At the same time, Iranian offi-

cials appear to be signalling that they are waiting for a message from Trump on whether he wants to negotiate over Tehran’s rapidly advancing nuclear programme. At stake are potentially billions of dollars withheld from Iran through crushing sanctions and the future of a programme on the precipice of enriching weapons-grade uranium. And even when signing an executive order to reimpose his “maximum pressure on Iran” on Tuesday, Trump suggested he wanted to deal with Tehran. Meanwhile, ordinary Iranians worry what all this could mean for them. On Wednesday, Iran’s currency, the rial, plunged to a record low of 850,000 to USD 1 after Trump’s order, showing the ongoing economic volatility they face. A decade ago, it

stood at 32,000 rials to USD 1. “It encourages hard-liners inside Iran to continue repressions because they feel the US would have less capability in supporting Iranian people who seek freedom,” said Maryam Faraji, a 27-year-old waitress in a coffee shop in northern Tehran. The state-run IRNA news agency said that “cutting the budget of foreign-based opposition” could “affect the sphere of relations” between Tehran and Washington. Newspapers, like the conservative Hamshahri daily, described Iran’s opposition as “counterrevolutionaries” who had been “celebrating” Trump’s election as heralding the “last days of life of the Islamic Republic.” They then “suddenly faced the

surprise of cut funding from their employer,” the newspaper crowed. Even the reformist newspaper Hammihan compared it to a “cold shower” for opponents of Iran’s theocracy abroad, an idea also expressed by the Foreign Ministry. “Those financial resources are not charity donations,” Esmail Bagahei, Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman, said during a briefing with reporters on Monday. “They are wages paid in exchange for services.” “This is a clear sign of America’s interventionist policy particularly during the Biden administration, which tried to pressure Iran and meddle in its domestic affairs through financial aid,” Bagahei added. It remains unclear how

funding for Iranian activists and opposition figures would be affected by the USAID decision. The lion’s share of money for civil society in Iran has come through the US State Department’s Near East Regional Democracy Fund, known by the acronym NERD, which grew as an American response to the Green Movement protests in 2009. Iran also noticed that the US avoided direct criticism of the Islamic Republic during a review by the United Nations Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva last week. For those in Iran’s government, there’s anticipation this could mean that Trump is willing to negotiate, something he repeatedly brought up in his election campaign as a possibility.

10 killed in Sweden’s worst mass shooting, gunman dead

Orebro (PTI): Sweden’s worst mass shooting left at least 11 people dead, including the gunman, and at least five seriously wounded at an adult education center west of Stockholm. The gunman’s motive hadn’t been determined by early Wednesday as the Scandinavian nation — where gun violence at schools is very rare — reeled from an attack. Officials said on Wednesday that three women and two men, all with gunshot wounds, underwent surgery at Orebro University Hospital. All were in serious but stable condition after being admitted to the hospital with life-threatening injuries. Another woman was treated for minor injuries and was stable. Jonas Claesson, regional director of health and medical services, said that two of the gunshot victims were in intensive care Wednesday. All of the victims are over age 18, officials said. No other patients related to the shooting were admitted to Orebro University Hospital overnight. The school, called Campus Risbergsgka, offers primary and secondary educational classes for adults age 20 and older, Swedish-language classes for immigrants, vocational training and programmes for people with intellectual disabilities. The school is on the outskirts of Orebro, which is about 200 kilometers (125 miles) west of Stockholm. Justice Minister Gunnar Strommer called the shooting “an event that shakes our entire society to its core”. King Carl XVI Gustaf and Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson ordered flags to be flown at half-staff at the Royal Palace and government buildings.



Britain’s Sophie, Duchess of Edinburgh, right, visits Maiti Nepal, a non-profit organization in Nepal dedicated to helping the victims of human trafficking in Kathmandu, Nepal, Wednesday.

PTI

‘Ohio shooting suspect worked at warehouse’

New Albany (US) (PTI): A suspect being sought on Wednesday in a shooting at cosmetics warehouse in Ohio that left one person dead and five others wounded worked at the facility, police said. There were no reports of any kind of confrontation or dispute that would have prompted Tuesday night’s shooting, New Albany Police Chief Greg Jones told reporters at a news conference. The suspect had been at work “for some time” before the shooting, which happened about 10:30 p.m., Jones said. Police have been checking addresses associated with the suspect, he said. All of the victims also worked at the facility, Jones said. Five of them were taken to hospitals for treatment, Jones said. He

said he couldn’t release their conditions. The sixth victim died in the building. The shooting happened at the warehouse for a company that makes products including cosmetics and toiletries. Jones said Wednesday morning that investigators didn’t have a motive for the shooting. A message seeking comment was sent to the company Wednesday morning. Jones earlier described the shooting as a “targeted type of attack” and he reiterated Wednesday morning that police don’t believe the suspect poses a general threat to the public. A handgun was found at the scene, Jones said. About 150 people were evacuated to a neighbouring building, Jones said.

Earthquakes keep rattling Santorini

PTI ■ ATHENS

Earthquakes rattled Greece’s volcanic island of Santorini every few minutes through the night and into Wednesday as authorities bolstered their emergency plans in case the hundreds of tremblors over the past few days are a harbinger of a larger quake to come. A coast guard vessel and a military landing craft were in the wider area as a contingency should an evacuation be required, Civil Protection Minister Vassilis Kikilias said during an emergency meeting with security officials, scientists and the prime minister in Athens Wednesday. “We are obliged to draw up scenarios for better and for worse regarding the prolonged seismic activity,” Kikilias said during the meeting, which was televised live. Predicting earthquakes is not scientifically possible, and experts cannot yet determine

definitively whether the seismic activity between the islands of Santorini and Amorgos could be a precursor to a significantly larger earthquake, or is part of an earthquake swarm that could continue shaking the area with small or moderate intensity quakes for weeks or months. “I understand the fear of what it means at the moment to be on a Santorini that is constantly moving,” Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said, as he called on residents to remain calm and follow authorities’ instructions. Rescue crews with a sniffer dog and drones have been deployed on Santorini as a precaution since Sunday, while authorities have banned access to several coastal areas and ordered schools on several islands to shut for the week. Public events on Santorini have been banned, and local authorities were restricting access to cliff-top areas that are among

the biggest tourist draws to the island. Thousands of residents and visitors have already left Santorini, frightened by the hundreds of earthquakes measuring between magnitude 3 and magnitude 5 that have struck the area since the week-end. Ferry lines and commercial airlines have added flights and ships to their schedules this week to accommodate the increased demand. However, ferry services were disrupted on Wednesday due to rough weather. The quakes, which all have epicentres beneath the seabed between Santorini and the Amorgos, have so far caused no injuries or major damage, although limited rockslides and cracks in some older buildings have been reported on Santorini. Greece lies in a highly seismically active part of the world and earthquakes are frequent. But it is extremely rare for any part of the country to experi-

ence such an intense barrage of frequent earthquakes. Last week, authorities said monitors had picked up increased volcanic activity within Santorini’s caldera, or flooded crater, but scientists say this is unrelated to the current quakes. They have also said the seismic activity northeast of the island is unlikely to trigger either of the two volcanoes in the area. Southeast Aegean regional governor Giorgos Hatzimarkos told Greek state television that the country’s electricity provider had sent staff and equipment to the island to prepare contingency plans in case of power cuts, while civil engineers were checking the road network. Digital Governance Deputy Minister Konstantinos Kyranakis said the government was working with telecommunications providers to ensure backup plans in case of a network outage in the area.

Philippine vice president impeached by House, faces Senate trial

Manila (PTI): Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte was impeached by the House of Representatives Wednesday after more than the required number of legislators, many of them allies of the president with whom she has had a bitter political feud, signed a petition to remove her from office. House of Representatives Secretary General Reginald Velasco told a plenary meeting of the lower chamber of Congress that at least 215 lawmakers have signed a petition to impeach Duterte, more than enough for the powerful House to impeach her. With enough endorsements by House legislators, the impeachment complaint was ordered transmitted to the Senate, which will serve as an impeachment tribunal that would try the vice president, the daughter of former President Rodrigo Duterte. The vice president, who didn’t immediately react to the House move to impeach her, and her father have been politically at odds with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and his camp, including a majority of House legislators. The vice president, regarded as a possible

presidential candidate after Marcos’s term ends in 2028, has faced at least four impeachment complaints by several legislators and left-wing activist groups over a range of issues. Those included a death threat she made against the president, his wife and House Speaker Martin Romualdez last year, irregularities in the use of her office’s intelligence funds and her failure to stand up to Chinese aggression in the disputed South China Sea. Only the latest impeachment complaint, accusing the vice president of violating the constitution, betraying the public trust, corruption and other high crimes, and signed by the 215 legislators would be sent to the Senate for her trial, according to legislators. Efforts to impeach the vice president may be hampered by a lack of time. The House impeachment came on the last day of congressional session before campaigning begins for midterm elections in May that would select new legislators for the House and Senate. A special session could be called to allow the Senate to bring

Duterte to a rapid trial. The vice president’s legal troubles have unfolded with the backdrop of her increasingly bitter political feud with the president and his allies. She said in online news conference on November 23 that she has contracted an assassin to kill Marcos, his wife and Speaker Martin Romualdez if she were killed, a threat she warned wasn’t a joke. She later said that she wasn’t threatening him, but was expressing concern for her own safety. The House has been investigating the alleged misuse of 612.5 million pesos (USD 10.3 million) of confidential and intelligence funds received by Duterte’s offices as vice president and education secretary. She has since left the education post after her political differences with Marcos deepened. She has refused to respond to questions in detail in tense televised hearings last year. Duterte also vehemently protested when her chief of staff, Zuleika Lopez, was ordered temporarily detained for allegedly hampering the inquiry. Lopez has since been released from hospital detention.

‘Terror attacks won’t end friendship with China’

PTI ■ BEIJING

Pakistan’s President Asif Ali Zardari said on Wednesday that his country’s friendship with China has “gone through ups and downs” but it won’t be broken down by terrorist attacks.

“Pakistan and China will always be friends, all-weather friends,” he said at the opening of talks with Chinese leader Xi Jinping. “No matter how many terrors, how many issues crop up in the world, I will stand. Pakistan people will stand with the people of China.”

Thousands of Chinese workers work in Pakistan on road and other infrastructure projects under China’s multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to improve trade routes and deepen China’s ties with the rest of the world.

Chinese workers have been among those targeted in attacks in recent years, including seven who died last year in two separate attacks that raised renewed alarm in China.

Zardari arrived in China on Tuesday on a four-day visit that will also take him to the wintry northeastern city of Harbin for the opening ceremony of the 9th Asian Winter Games. He said that many forces are trying to disturb the relationship between the two countries by launching attacks on “Chinese brothers”.



Chinese President Xi Jinping, right, shakes hands with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, Wednesday. AP

Xi said that China and Pakistan have an enduring friendship and have set a model for relations between two countries by advancing the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and cooperation in various fields.

A Chinese-funded USD 230 million airport, the largest in Pakistan, started operations last month in the coastal city of Gwadar in Balochistan province, where a separatist group has launched multiple attacks targeting many groups

including Chinese. A shipping port in Gwadar is the end of the envisioned economic corridor, which would cross the length of Pakistan to link the western Chinese region of Xinjiang with the Arabian Sea. “The Chinese side is willing to work with the Pakistani side to move forward hand-in-hand on our respective paths of modernisation,” Xi said. The start of operations at the airport was delayed from last year after a surge in attacks in Balochistan.

Pak wants to resolve all issues with India: Sharif

Islamabad (PTI): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said Pakistan wants to resolve all issues, including Kashmir, with India through talks as he reiterated his “unwavering” support for the Kashmiri people. Sharif made the remarks while addressing a special session of the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) Legislative Assembly in Muzaffarabad on the occasion of the “Kashmir Solidarity Day”, an annual Pakistani event to show support for the Kashmiris.

“We want all issues, including Kashmir, to be resolved through talks,” Sharif said. “India should come out of the thinking of August 5, 2019, and fulfil promises made to the UN and launch a dialogue,” he said, referring to the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution that revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcated the state into two Union Territories. Prime Minister Sharif said that the only way forward for Pakistan and India was a dialogue, as already written in the Lahore Declaration of 1999, which was agreed upon when then-prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Pakistan.

Aga Khan, spiritual leader of Ismaili Muslims, philanthropist, dies at 88

PTI ■ PARIS

The Aga Khan, who became the spiritual leader of the world’s millions of Ismaili Muslims at age 20 as a Harvard undergraduate and poured a material empire built on billions of dollars in tithes into building homes, hospitals and schools in developing countries, died Tuesday. He was 88. His Aga Khan Development Network and the Ismaili religious community announced that His Highness Prince Karim Al-Hussaini, the Aga Khan IV and 49th hereditary imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, died in Portugal surrounded by his family. His successor was designated in his will, which will be read in the presence of his family and religious leaders in Lisbon before the name is made public. A date has not been announced. The successor is chosen from among his male progeny or other relatives, according to the Ismaili community’s website. Considered by his followers to be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV was a student when his grandfather passed over his playboy father as his successor to lead the diaspora of Shia Ismaili Muslims, saying his followers should be led by a young man “who has been

brought up in the midst of the new age.” Over decades, the Aga Khan evolved into a business magnate and a philanthropist, moving between the spiritual and the worldly with ease. While his death was announced late in the day in Europe and the Middle East, ceremonies were already being held Tuesday in Ismaili communities in the US. Condolences poured in online from charity groups he supported, as well as the equestrian world, where he was a well-known figure. “An extraordinarily compassionate global leader,” Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Tuesday, calling him a very good friend. “He will be deeply, deeply missed by people around the world.” Treated as a head of state, the Aga Khan was given the title of “His Highness” by Queen Elizabeth in July 1957, two weeks after his grandfather the Aga Khan III unexpectedly made him heir to the family’s 1,300-year dynasty as leader of the Ismaili Muslim sect. He became the Aga Khan IV on October 19, 1957, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on the spot where his grandfather once had his weight equalled in diamonds in gifts from his followers. He had left Harvard to be at his ailing grandfather’s side, and

returned to school 18 months later with an entourage and a deep sense of responsibility. “I was an undergraduate who knew what his work for the rest of his life was going to be,” he said in a 2012 interview with Vanity Fair magazine. “I don’t think anyone in my situation would have been prepared.” A defender of Islamic culture and values, he was widely regarded as a builder of bridges between Muslim societies and the West despite — or perhaps because of — his reticence to become involved in politics. The Aga Khan Development Network, his main philanthropic organization, deals mainly with issues of health care, housing, education and rural economic development. It says it works in over 30 countries and has an annual budget of about USD 1 billion for nonprofit development activities. A network of hospitals bearing his name are scattered in places where health care had lacked for the poorest, including Bangladesh, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, where he spent tens of millions of dollars for development of local economies. The extent of the Aga Khan’s financial empire is hard to measure. Some reports estimated his personal wealth to be in the billions.

The Ismailis — a sect originally centred in India but which expanded to large communities in east Africa, Central and South Asia and the Middle East — consider it a duty to tithe up to 12.5 per cent of their income to him as steward. “We have no notion of the accumulation of wealth being evil,” he told Vanity Fair in 2012. “The Islamic ethic is that if God has given you the capacity or good fortune to be a privileged individual in society, you have a moral responsibility to society.” The Ismaili community’s website said he was born on December 13, 1936, in Creux-de-Genthod, near Geneva, Switzerland, the son of Joan Yarde-Buller and Aly Khan, and spent part of his childhood in Nairobi, Kenya — where a hospital now bears his name. He became well-known as a horse breeder and owner, and he represented Iran in the 1964 Winter Olympics as a skier. His eye for building and design led him to establish an architecture prize, and programmes for Islamic Architecture at MIT and Harvard. He restored ancient Islamic structures throughout the world. The Aga Khan lived at length in France and had been based in Portugal for the past several years.

Refugees agencies concerned as Pak orders Af relocations

Peshawar (PTI): International refugees and migration agencies on Wednesday expressed concern about recent developments requiring Afghan nationals in Pakistan to relocate from Islamabad Capital Territory and Rawalpindi or else face deportation. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) issued a joint statement on Wednesday seeking clarity from the Pakistani government on the modality and timeframe for relocating registered Afghan nationals. While UNHCR and IOM recognise that states may choose to limit freedom of movement for foreigners, including refugees, we jointly urge the Pakistani government to implement any relocation measures with due consideration for human rights standards, including due process, and the legal status of Proof of Registration (POR) and Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders, who have resided in Pakistan for an extended time.

The uncertain timeframe to plan for a dignified move is compounding a stressful situation, not to mention the immediate impact of such a move on livelihoods and the education of children, the statement said. Since January 1, an uptick in arrests of

Afghan nationals in Islamabad and Rawalpindi has caused significant distress, with reports of Afghan nationals of various documentation statuses being rounded up. More than 800 Afghan nationals, including women and children, have been deported so far this year from Islamabad and Rawalpindi alone. This latest relocation directive has increased fears of imminent deportation among Afghans in the capital region. A UNHCR-issued non-return advisory has been in place since 2021, calling for a suspension of forced returns of Afghan nationals from any country regardless of their status. The UNHCR and IOM are especially concerned for Afghan nationals, including ethnic and religious minorities, women and girls, journalists, human rights activists, and members of artistic professions like musicians and others, who may face a risk of harm upon return. “Pakistan has a proud tradition of hosting refugees, saving millions of lives.

Public Notice
The Uttar Bharat G.E.CO-OP Group Housing Society Ltd. Plot No.361,B-Block, Basement, Near Ambrahi Village Sec-19, Dwarka, New Delhi 110075 In accordance with rule 19(2) of DCS rules, 2007, it is to inform publicly that the following members of Uttar Bharat G.E. CGHS Ltd. have resigned from the society

(1) Smt Prem Lata Agarwal (M.No.127)
(2) Smt Bala Agarwal (M.No. 132)
(3) Smt Hem Lata (M.No.302)
(4) Shri Ram Niwas Rathee (M.No.318)
(5) Shri Nand Kishor Agarwal (M.No.392)
If anyone who is having objections, may lodge objections at the society office, which is located at Plot No. B-361, B-Block, Basement,Near Ambrahi Village, Sector-19,Dwarka,New Delhi-110075, or at the RCS office,Parliament Street,New Delhi within 7 days from the date of publication of the public notice.

Sd/-Secretary-Uttar Bharat G.E. CGHS Ltd.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Indian Network on Participatory Irrigation Management (IndiNPIM) (A society Created by Ministry of Jal Shakti Govt. of India in 1998, Regn.No.S-32596/1998)
EMPALEMENT OF EXPERTS / AGENCIES
IndiNPIM invites application from experts/reputed agencies and organizations for Project Design / Implementation / evaluation, Capacity Building, Awareness in Agriculture & Irrigation Farm productivity, Watershed Management, Food Routing, Erosion Control, Automation in Micro-Irrigation, Water Audit and other related fields.
Experts/reputed agencies and organizations are requested to apply for empanelment of above sectors.

Eligibility Criteria:
● Proven expertise in Agriculture & Irrigation Farm productivity, Watershed Management, Flood Routing, Erosion Control, Automation in Micro-Irrigation, Water Audit and other related fields.
● Demonstrated experience in stake holder engagement and awareness programs.
● Strong organizational capabilities to deliver results.
General Secretary of Indian Network on Participatory Irrigation Management (IndiNPIM) reserves the right to accept / reject any or all proposals without assigning any reason therefor. Send your proposals by post or email at: Room No. 318, 3rd Floor (Old Building), Central Soil & Material Research Station, Old Palme Marg, Hauz Khas, New Delhi-110016. Email: indiandnpim24@gmail.com. Tel : +91-8920912961, within **21 days** from the date of advertisement


B’desh govt making all efforts to bring back Sheikh Hasina

Dhaka (PTI): Bangladesh’s interim government is making all efforts to bring back ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina and others from India under the extradition treaty, Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd.) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said on Wednesday. Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 last year when she fled Bangladesh following a massive student-led protest that toppled her Awami League’s 16-year regime. Bangladesh’s International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and several former Cabinet ministers, advisers, and military and civil officials for “crimes against humanity and genocide”. “We are trying to bring back those who are under trial on charges of crimes against humanity at the ICT,” Chowdhury was quoted as saying by state-run BSS news agency. He made the remarks while replying to a question on steps taken by the

government to arrest over 100 accused against whom the ICT has issued arrest warrant. Last year, Dhaka sent a diplomatic note to New Delhi seeking the extradition of Hasina. The Home Adviser said they are arresting those staying in the country while efforts are on to bring back others who are staying abroad. “We’re arresting those who are staying in the country. The main person (Hasina) is not in the country. How we would arrest them who are abroad?” he said, adding that legal efforts are going on to bring them back. When asked about the progress of issuing red notices against them, police chief Baharul Alam said he hoped that Interpol would soon issue notice against the persons wanted by the ICT. “As the red notice has been issued by the ICT, the host country is liable to arrest them,” he said.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, M. Khandelwal S/o Late Shri Narayan Khandelwal, R/o SFS Flat No. 478, Second Floor, Category-II, Sector-A, Pocket-C, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-70, with scooter garage. I have lost the original documents (1) Original 5th and Final Demand Letter (2) Possession Letter/of this property , File No. F.99(21)86/SFS/KG/III. An Information report has been lodged in police station , crime branch, Delhi vide LR No. 2553416/2025 on 03/02/2025. If found contact 9810040267. Within 7 days from the publication.

PUBLIC NOTARY
TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN
This information for the General Public that my client **Gyanender Singh son of Puran Singh resident of House No.612, FF, Saraswatipuram, JNU New campus, South West Delhi, Delhi-110067**, has disowning and disimherited their son namely **Ravi and their daughter-in-law namely Hemani** from all their moveable & immoveable properties and have also severed all their relations from them. Therefore my client shall not be responsible for any act and conduct done by them in future. **Ombir Sangwan (Advocate)** Ch.No.5, Patiala House Court, ND-110001



Har Din. Har Din. Har Din.

THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD.
SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022. EPABX No. 0172-5041812.66

Notice Inviting Tender www.verka.coop

e tender is hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following items:-

Sr.	Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative Qty
1.	For Verka Head Office, Chandigarh	
	Liquid Nitrogen Gas	Annual/ 326200 Ltr

NOTE:

1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. eproc.punjab.gov.in.
2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.

NA/12/27905/2023/41407

Dy. General Manager (Purchase)

APPENDIX - IV { Section-B 910}
POSSESSION NOTICE (for Immoveable property)

Whereas, the undersigned being the authorised officer of the **Bank Of India** (name of the Institution) under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 17.09.2024 calling upon the borrower M/s Alok Enterprises to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs. 39,97,985.00 (Rupees Thirty Nine Lakhs Ninety Seven thousand and Nine hundred Eighty five) along with interest and other charges accrued thereon from 08.12.2023 within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section (4) of section 13 of Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on this the 1st day of Feb of the year 2025 The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the **Bank Of India** for an amount **Rs. 39,97,985.00** and interest thereon.


The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Description of the Immoveable Property : All that part and parcel of the property consisting of Shop/Unit bearing Pvt no. 201 on 2nd Floor, constructed on Plot No. VU3222 Gali Charan Dass, Charkhewalan, Chawri Bazar, Delhi-110006

Bounded as per valuation report : • On the North by Shop No. 202 • On the South by Common passage • On the East by Entrance/Common passage - On the West by Other's Shop

Description of Primary Security - Hypothecation of Stocks and book debts

Date : 1/2/25, Place : DELHI Authorised Officer - **Bank Of India**



सेन्ट्रल बैंक ऑफ इंडिया
Central Bank of India
1911 से आपके लिए "केंद्रित" "CENTRAL" TO YOU SINCE 1911

BRANCH OFFICE: GURUDWARA ROAD, APNA BAZAR, GURUGRAM, HARYANA-122001

PUBLIC NOTICE FOR BREAK OPEN LOCKERS | DATE: 06.02.2025

Be it known to the Locker hirers mentioned hereunder and public at large that the following locker holders of this Branch have failed to make payment of the respective overdue locker rent mentioned against their name, despite several reminders given by the bank from time to time on this account. Under these circumstances the Bank is constrained to break open such lockers and hence it is hereby informed that after 15 days from the publication of this public notice, the break opening proceeding will be initiated by the Bank as per Banking rules and regulations in case the respective locker holder(s) fails to make the payment of overdue rent of lockers plus applicable penalty by latest by the 15th day of the publication of this notice. The details of the locker to be broken open are as under:


S.No.	Locker A/C.No.	Name	Locker ID	Amount Rent Due (Without GST & Penalty)	Rent Paid Upto	Address
1.	4503661541	Mr. Surat Singh Yadav & Rajesh Yadav	93	₹ 16,200.00	30.04.2013	510/7 U.E. Gurgaon,M,M,M, Pin Code - 122001.
2.	4503744790	Mr. Krishan Lal & Kanta Gulati	305	₹ 15,700.00	30.09.2013	5D/18 Laxmi Garden, Gurgaon. Pin code - 122001
3.	4503758384	Mr. Amod Kumar Gupta	316	₹ 16,600.00	30.09.2013	C/o. Gupta Trading Co. New Railway Road Gurgaon-122001
4.	4503782362	Mr. Harish Kumar & Renu Malhotra.	523	₹ 5,971.00	30.06.2021	RO 432/11 Partap Nagar Gurgaon- 122001, M, M, M, M
5.	4504869887	Mrs. Madhu Bala Bhargav	97	₹ 14,800.00	30.06.2016	333/16 Friends Colony Gurgaon - 122001, M,M,M,M
6.	4503728166	Mr. Sushil Kumar Arya	202	₹ 6,754.00	30.06.2020	148/12 Adarsh Nagar Gurgaon Pincode - 122001
7.	4503772614	Mr. Pradosh Kumar Sinha & Ruma Sinha	440	₹ 6,400.00	30.06.2021	GM Rites Bhawan, No.1 Sector 29, Gurgaon, Pincode - 122001
8.	4503723452	Mrs. Kanta Tuteja & Mr. Om Prakash .	200	₹ 14,900.00	30.05.2014	1408 Arjun Nagar Gurgaon Pincode - 122001
9.	4503743059	Mr. Hoshari Singh & Dayawati Yadav.	265	₹ 10,000.00	30.06.2018	202/4 Lajpat Nagar New Railway, Road,- 122001, M,M
10.	4503758907	Mr. Kamlesh & Dalip Singh	265	₹ 17,100.00	01.08.2012	H.No. 147 Kirti Nagar Opposite Rail Vihar Gurugram -122001
11.	4504200555	Mrs. Sham Sunder Kohu & Simmi Kohu	235	₹ 21,850.00	01.09.2004	H.No.323/14, Jacompura, Gurgaon, Pincode -122001
12.	4503743242	Mrs Kiran Khurana & Harbans Khurana.	269	₹ 6,735.00	30.06.2020	H. No.4901, Punjabi Market Nuh, Gurgans - 122001
13.	4503744698	Mr. Satnaryan Mittal & Kanta Devi .	301	₹ 15,500.00	30.11.2013	H. No. 2, Street No.4, Rajiv Nagar, [West], Gurgaon, Pincode - 122001.
14.	4503661642	Mrs. Madhu Bala Bhargav	95	₹ 15,600.00	30.10.2013	333/16 Friends Colony Gurgaon, M,M,M, Pincode - 122001

*The above said Lockers will be broken open due to non-operation of the locker since long time , overdue rent & other issues despite several reminders given by the Bank from time to time. Hence it is hereby informed to all the concerned that they should contact the Locker department of the Branch immediately else after 15 days from the publication of this public notice Bank shall/may go for breaking opening of the Lockers to may further proceed to recover the overdue rent , break opening charges, costs met out towards publication of this notice and other applicable charges by disposing of the contents of the locker by the laid down procedure without any claim against the Bank and at the risk and responsibility of the locker hirers.

PLACE: GURUGRAM
DATE: 05.02.2025

By Order of the (Branch Head)

Central Bank of India, Gurudwara Road, Apna Bazar, Gurugram



Office of the Superintending Engineer
1st Circle, Public Works Department, Almora
Phone/Fax: 05962-230295 Email: sepwdalm@rediffmail.com

Letter No. : 481(i)/ Nivida-01/2024-25
NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING (E-Tendering)
Short Term E-TENDER NOTICE

The Superintending Engineer, 1st Circle, PWD Almora invites tender through E-Tendering (Two Bid System) on behalf of Honourable Governor of Uttarakhand for following works. All other information will be available from dated **06/02/2025** & onwards on website **<http://www.uktenders.gov.in>**

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Cost of Tender Form	Earnest Money (Rupee in lakh)	Validity of Tender	Time of Completion	Contractor's Category of Registration for tendering
1	PD PWD Almora Improvement and Damarikaran work in Pokhari Bagniya and Pokhari Binwal via Chaykhan to Baliya Link Motor Road in Km 1 to 9 under CM Ghoshna No. 284/2024 in Jageshwar Constituency of District Almora.	₹ 5000.00 + 18% GST	₹ 12.25 Lakh	120 Days	15 Month (including Rainy Season and Winter Season)	Class “A” & Higher in Road work in Central Govt./ Any state Govt./ Any Govt. Undertaking.
2	CD PWD Almora Improvement and Damarikaran in Oliyagaon Lachhampur and Supakot Motor Road from 1.80 of Nirai Road in Someshwar Constituency of District Almora under State Sector.	₹ 5000.00 + 18% GST	₹ 4.00 Lakh	120 Days	12 Month (including Rainy Season and Winter Season)	Class “B” & Higher in Road work in Central Govt./ Any state Govt./ Any Govt. Undertaking.

RBI initiates talks on interest rate, 25-bps cut anticipated

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Days after the Union Budget, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday started deliberations on the monetary policy amid expectations of a 25 basis-points (bps) rate cut, which will be the first in five years, as inflation remains within central bank's comfort zone, though the sliding rupee continues to be a concern. The RBI had last reduced the repo rate by 40 basis points to four per cent in May 2020 to help the economy tide over the crisis following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown. But in May 2022 the central bank started a rate hike cycle in view of the Russia-Ukraine war and paused it only in May 2023. Newly appointed RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra will be chairing his first Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting starting Wednesday. The decision of the six-member panel will be announced on Friday (February 7). Experts opined that the situation is now conducive for a rate cut as it will complement the initiatives announced in the



Union Budget to push a consumption-led demand growth. A State Bank of India (SBI) research report said the Consumer Price Index (CPI) based retail inflation is expected to come down to 4.5 per cent in the fourth quarter and average 4.8 per in the current financial year. It also said the January inflation numbers are trending

closer to 4.5 per cent. Given the fiscal stimulus and the uncertain impact of trade wars, RBI faces the delicate task of balancing the risks. As the fiscal stimulus plays out, the central bank at least in the short run has room for rate cuts, it said. "We expect a 25-basis point rate cut in February 2025 policy. Cumulative rate cut over the

cycle could be at least 75 basis points, with 2 successive rate cuts over February and April 2025. With an intervening gap in June 2025, the second round of rate cuts could start from October 2025," said the research report from the economic department of the SBI. Pradeep Aggarwal, founder and chairman, Signature Global

(India) opined that a potential repo rate cut by the RBI in its upcoming MPC meeting could be a pivotal move in shaping India's economic momentum, particularly as the Union Budget 2025 is expected to drive consumption and investment. "In the real estate sector, such a policy shift could lead to more affordable home loans, improving housing affordability and stimulating demand—especially in the mid and premium segments," Aggarwal said and added that given India's rapid urbanisation and rising aspirations for homeownership, a proactive monetary policy can serve as a catalyst for long-term economic resilience and sustained real estate expansion. Dhruv Agarwala, Group CEO, Housing.Com said the real estate sector is keenly watching the RBI's decision, hoping for measures that boost housing demand and affordability. "A repo rate cut would provide much-needed relief to homebuyers, especially in the mid and affordable segments, where high loan rates remain a challenge," he said.

NSE Clearing faces ₹176.65 Crore liquidity shortfall

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

NSE Clearing Ltd, the clearing house of the National Stock Exchange (NSE), has failed to meet the capital markets regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India's (SEBI) mandated liquidity requirements, citing the non-payment of dues by rival BSE as the primary reason for the shortfall. In its December 2024 quarterly results, NSE Clearing, the exchange's unit responsible for clearing and settling its trades, reported a shortfall of ₹176.65 Crore in its minimum liquid assets. The company informed SEBI in a letter dated January 9 that this deficit was primarily due to the non-receipt of ₹312.37 Crore in dues from BSE. An NSE Clearing spokesperson said its auditors flagged the outstanding payment issue in their third-quarter financial review. The outstanding amount pertains to "interoperability arrangements," the official said. "The company is yet to receive outstanding dues of



over ₹300 Crore from BSE Ltd. NSE Clearing is communicating with BSE on this matter," the spokesperson added. The SEBI has prescribed risk-based capital and net worth requirements for clearing corporations, which must maintain adequate liquid assets to ensure financial stability. The regulator introduced a

framework for interoperability among clearing corporations on June 1, 2019, to reduce trading costs. This allows trading members to clear trades through a clearing firm of their choice rather than being restricted to the clearing corporation affiliated with the exchange where the trade was executed.

Centre mandates quality compliance for 150 products

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has expanded quality compliance requirements by mandating Quality Control Orders (QCOs) for over 150 products, ranging from household appliances to industrial materials, in a move aimed at ensuring stricter safety and performance standards. The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) said it has listed out 150-odd products in advance for better awareness purpose. The scope of these mandatory standards is extended to various sectors with varied enforcement dates for different sectors. The BIS will oversee the implementation of these orders, and the list covers a diverse range of products including vacuum cleaners, stainless steel utensils, and massage appliances. For electrical appliances operating on 250V single-phase or 415V three-phase power, the compliance deadline is set for March 20. In the furniture industry,

manufacturers must comply with quality norms for products such as block boards, plywood and wooden flush doors. The steel sector faces regulations for items including hot-rolled and cold-rolled steel strips, while the household segment covers everything from electric water heaters to solar water heating systems. "QCOs are designed to prevent the import of substandard goods and ensure consumer access to high-quality products," a senior official said. The number of products under QCO coverage has witnessed a significant jump from 106 in 2014 to over 732 products by October 2024. The move aligns with India's broader strategy to enhance domestic manufacturing standards while curbing the influx of low-quality imports. The chemical and petrochemical sector will also see new standards for various fatty acids, including those derived from palm, rice bran, and coconut sources.

India, Oman FTA talks advance with next round of negotiations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The negotiations for a proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and Oman are progressing at a healthy pace and the two sides will hold another round of talks to resolve the pending issues, an official said. The official said that issues pertaining to petrochemical products have been resolved. The negotiations received a much need impetus after the visit of Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal to Muscat last month. "One more round of negotiations on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) will happen," the official added. On January 27 in Muscat, trade ministers of India and Oman reviewed progress of the proposed agreement and focused on advancing the negotiations for the pact. The agreement was discussed between Goyal and Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed Al Youssef. On January 14, India and



Oman held the fifth round of talks for the agreement, aiming to boost bilateral economic ties. The negotiations for the agreement, officially dubbed CEPA, formally began in November 2023. In such agreements, two trading partners either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on a maximum number of goods traded between them.

They also ease norms to promote trade in services and attract investments. Oman is the third largest export destination among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries for India. India already has a similar agreement with another GCC member UAE which came into effect in May 2022. The bilateral trade has declined to USD 8.94 billion

(exports USD 4.42 billion and imports USD 4.5 billion) in 2023-24 from USD 12.39 billion (exports USD 4.47 billion and imports USD 7.91 billion) in 2022-23. India's key imports are petroleum products and urea. These account for over 70 per cent of imports. Other key products are propylene and ethylene polymers, pet coke, gypsum, chemicals, and iron and steel.

Info Edge Q3 net profit jumps 61 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Info Edge - the parent entity of Naukri - on Wednesday reported a 61 per cent year-on-year rise in consolidated net profit at about ₹242.6 Crore for quarter ended December 2024, and the board also approved split of shares in the ratio of 1:5. The share split is aimed at enhancing the liquidity of company's equity shares and encouraging participation of retail investors by making shares of the company more affordable, according to a statutory filing by Info Edge. The revenue from operations - on a consolidated basis - was nearly 15 per cent higher at ₹722.3 Crore in Q3FY25. The Q3FY25 net profit attributable to equity holders of parent stood at ₹242.59 Crore, up 61 per cent as compared to same period previous year. "Board of directors of the company at their meeting held today have considered and approved, sub-division, split of the existing one equity share of the company having face value

of ₹10 each fully paid-up, into five equity shares having face value of ₹2 each, fully paid-up," Info Edge said. This is subject to approval of the shareholders by way of postal ballot and any regulatory or statutory approvals, as may be required under applicable law, it further said. "The record date for the purpose of the sub-division or split of equity shares shall be decided after taking aforesaid approval of the shareholders of the company and the same will be intimated in due course," according to the BSE filing. Hitesh Oberoi, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, noted that in Q3, the company achieved 16 per cent billing growth, driven by consistent performance across all four verticals. "Our recruitment business continued its growth trajectory across all segments, contributing to improved operating profits. Additionally, the non-recruitment businesses are also nearing break-even, further strengthening our position for sustained growth," Oberoi said.

Sensex drops 312 points ahead of RBI policy

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Taking a breather after recent rally, stock markets closed lower on Wednesday as investors turned cautious ahead of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy decision later this week and trade war concerns. The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 312.53 points or 0.40 per cent to settle at 78,271.28 with 21 of constituents closing down and nine with gains. During the day, it went lower by 367.56 points or 0.46 per cent to 78,216.25. The NSE Nifty dropped 42.95 points or 0.18 per cent to 23,696.30. The index moved between a high of 23,807.30 and a low of 23,680.45 during the day.

Profit-taking after Tuesday's rally and the rupee plunging to record low levels also hit market sentiment. Sensex had jumped 1,397.07 points and Nifty soared 378.20 points to settle at one-month highs on Tuesday following firm global trends. From the 30-share Sensex pack, Asian Paints dropped over three per cent after the firm reported a 23.5 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at ₹1,128.43 Crore for the third quarter ended December 2024 amid downtrending due to muted demand and weak festive season. Titan, Nestle, Hindustan Unilever, State Bank of India, Larsen & Toubro, ITC, Zomato and Bajaj Finserv were also among the laggards. Adani Ports, IndusInd Bank,

Tata Motors and HDFC Bank were among the major gainers. "Markets mirrored weak global cues and ended lower amid selling in select banking, auto, realty and FMCG stocks. While all eyes will be on Friday's monetary policy announcement, intra-day volatility could intensify over next few sessions," Prashanth Tapse, senior VP (research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. "The domestic market traded within a narrow range in negative terrain. Investors are weighing the improved domestic outlook, buoyed by a favourable budget, against lingering global uncertainties stemming from the tariff war. While declining US bond yields and lower crude oil prices have supported market sentiment,

the rupee's depreciation could offset these gains," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.42 per cent and midcap index climbed 0.69 per cent. Among BSE sectoral indices, realty declined 1.66 per cent, FMCG (1.42 per cent), consumer durables (1.21 per cent), consumer discretionary (0.43 per cent) and auto (0.14 per cent). Oil & Gas jumped 1.89 per cent, services (1.59 per cent), metal (1.55 per cent), energy (1.30 per cent) and healthcare (1.21 per cent). The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday started deliberations on the monetary policy and the decision will be announced on Friday (February 7).

Rupee falls 39 paise against USD

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee plunged 39 paise to close at an all-time low of 87.46 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, as global trade war concerns fuelled risk aversion among investors. Forex traders said the rupee is trading with a negative bias over global trade war as market participants mulled the impact of tariffs being imposed by the United States and China. Moreover, rate cut concerns by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and broad strength of the American currency in the overseas market dented investor sentiments further. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened

on a weak note at 87.13 and touched an intraday low of 87.49 against the American currency during the session. The local unit finally settled at a record closing low of 87.46 (provisional), lower by 39 paise over its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee recovered four paise from its all-time low level to close at 87.07 against US dollar. Trump is pressing ahead with a 10 per cent tariff on US companies importing things from China. On Tuesday, China retaliated by announcing its own tariffs on some US products and an antitrust investigation into Google. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was

trading 0.35 per cent lower at 107.58. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.51 per cent to USD 75.81 per barrel in futures trade. Investors may remain cautious ahead of the Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy meeting this week, traders said. There are expectations of a 25 basis-points rate cut in benchmark policy rates, which will be the first in five years, as inflation remains within the central bank's comfort zone. The RBI had last reduced the repo rate by 40 basis points to four per cent in May 2020 to help the economy tide over the crisis following the outbreak of the Covid pandemic and subsequent lockdown.

Bombay HC to hear Skoda Volkswagen's \$1.4 Billion tax plea

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday said it would hear on February 17 a plea filed by Skoda Auto Volkswagen India challenging the tax demand of USD 1.4 billion by Indian customs authorities. The Volkswagen group, currently led in the country by Skoda Auto Volkswagen India, has been accused of deliberately misleading customs authorities through its mode of import of parts as individual units rather than as a component of a 'Completely Knocked Down' (CKD) unit, which attracts higher import duty. The automobile company last month filed a petition in the HC, challenging a show-cause notice issued by the authorities in September 2024 under the Customs Act. On Wednesday, the company's counsels mentioned the plea before a division bench of Justices BP Colabawalla and Firdosh Pooniwalla, seeking urgent hearing. The high court agreed to hear the plea on February 17. The notice alleged that the company misclassified its imports of Audi, Skoda and Volkswagen cars as "individual parts" instead of CKD units, thereby paying significantly lower customs duties.

Swiggy's Q3 loss widens to ₹799 Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Food and grocery delivery major Swiggy on Wednesday reported widening of consolidated loss to ₹799.08 Crore for the third quarter ended December 2024. The company had incurred a net loss of ₹574.38 Crore in the year-ago period. Total expenses surged to ₹4,898.27 Crore from ₹3,700 Crore in October-December FY24. Revenue from operations also increased to ₹3,993.06 Crore from ₹3,048.69 Crore, a regulatory filing said. Notably, Swiggy's overall Gross Order Value (GOV) grew 38 per cent year-on-year (YoY) to ₹12,165 Crore. "We continued our focus on

creating segmented offerings for the consumer during the festive quarter, which we believe will open up more consumption occasions," Sriharsha Majety, MD & Group CEO, Swiggy, said. He further said the secular expansion in food delivery margins and cash-flow generation is balanced by growth investments being made in quick-commerce including dark stores expansion and marketing, amidst high competitive intensity in the near term. The company's Food Delivery business GOV grew 19.2 per cent YoY to ₹7,436 Crore. Adjusted EBITDA grew 63.7 per cent QoQ to ₹184 Crore, delivering a 2.5 per cent margin, up from 0.3 per cent a

year ago, the company stated. Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA) is an alternate measure of profitability to net income which is used to assess a company's profitability and financial performance. Swiggy's quick commerce business Swiggy Instamart reported an 88 per cent YoY (15.5 per cent QoQ) rise in GOV to ₹3,907 Crore. Average order value increased by 14 per cent YoY to ₹534 driven by greater selection and increased consumer salience, Swiggy informed. Instamart added 96 new active stores during the quarter (up 16 per cent QoQ); driving up active dark store area to 2.45 million square feet, an increase

of 25 per cent QoQ). Growth investments in quick-commerce led to a reduction in contribution margin from -1.9 per cent in Q2FY25 to -4.6 per cent in Q3FY25, as the company ramped up user activation and dark store expansion across geographies. Swiggy's operating segments comprise food delivery, out-of-home consumption, quick commerce, supply chain and distribution, and platform innovations which consist of set of incubators for new service offerings including business verticals such as Private Brands, Swiggy-Genie, Swiggy-Minis, Insanely Good etc. The company's scrip settled at ₹418.10, down 3.59 per cent from its previous close on BSE.

India important market for AI, OpenAI: Sam Altman

PTI ■ MUMBAI

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman on Wednesday said that the country is important for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and OpenAI, and added that India - with its full stack model - should be among the leaders of the AI revolution. Altman, during a fireside chat with IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav, said OpenAI tripled its users here in the last year. He gave a ringing endorsement to India's efforts in building on AI at all levels of the stack, chips, models and "the incredible applications". "India is an incredibly important market for AI in general, for open AI in particular, it's our second biggest market. Tripled users here in the last year, but mostly

seeing what people in India are building with AI at all levels of the stack, chips, models, you know, all of the incredible applications," Altman, who is on a whirlwind India tour, said. Altman advocated India to go all out in its AI play. "I think India should be one of the leaders of the AI revolution. But it's really quite amazing to see what the country has done. Embraced the technology and is building the entire stack of things on top of it," Altman said. Asked about his advice, as India looks to have a global voice in AI and take a leadership position, Altman said "it seems to me like it's working". Altman's bullish view on India's AI efforts is a telling statement given that he had faced a backlash in 2023,

when he had expressed doubts about powerful AI models emerging outside of the United State. During the fireside chat on Wednesday, IT Minister Vaishnav said that innovation can come from anywhere in the world "why shouldn't it come from India". Altman's visit, his second one in two years, comes at an interesting juncture when OpenAI's (and indeed the western world's) dominance in artificial intelligence has abruptly been challenged by Chinese upstart DeepSeek, which turned heads with its low-cost AI model R1, built at less than USD six million and guzzling a fraction of compute power when compared to popular models like ChatGPT.

Focussed on games against England, Champions Trophy: Rohit

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Indian captain Rohit Sharma on Wednesday played down speculations about his future in international cricket, saying it is irrelevant to talk about his career at a time when he is “focussed” on the three ODIs against England and the Champions Trophy. India will tune up for the Champions Trophy, starting February 19, with the three One-Day Internationals against England beginning with the first one here on Thursday. “How it is relevant that I talk about my future plans when there are three ODIs and a Champions Trophy. The reports (on my future) are going on for a number of years and I am not here to clarify those reports,” Rohit said at the pre-match press conference. “For me, the three games (against England) and the Champions Trophy is very important. My focus is on these games and I will see what happens thereafter,” the India skipper added. The 37-year-old has been battling poor form for a while now, managing only 31 runs across five innings at an abysmal average of 6.20 in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia.

While there is no doubt that he is not looking to walk into international sunset anytime soon, there were reports that the BCCI has asked him to spell out his future plans after the Champions Trophy. With India now competing in ODI cricket, a format in which Rohit has enjoyed a lot of success, the skipper stressed that instead of harping on the past, he is focussed on the assignments ahead of him. “This is a different format, different time. As cricketers, there will be ups and downs and I have faced those a lot in my career. This is nothing new to me. We know everyday is a fresh day, every series is a fresh series,” and irate Rohit said when asked how confident he is feeling after his recent failure in red-ball cricket. “I am looking forward to the challenge, not looking at what has happened in the past. There is no reason for me to look behind too much. It’s important that I focus on what is coming up and what lies ahead for me. Look to try and start this series on a high,” he added. India have played only two ODI series — against South Africa and Sri Lanka — since their dominant run in the 2023 World Cup, where



they lost just one match -- the final -- while playing an aggressive brand of cricket under Rohit’s leadership. “There is a certain style and brand of cricket we want to play. Whether that means replicating what we did in the World Cup, we will try to do that.”

“But the World Cup was one and a half years ago, so we need to regroup and assess what is required for this series.” The Indian skipper emphasised that the players in the team are experienced enough to understand their roles and responsibilities.

“We don’t need to keep instructing players on how to prepare for every series. They know what is expected of them. It’s about coming together and picking up from where we left off during the World Cup. “If it takes some time, so be it. It’s not easy to immediately replicate

what we did back then. We need to start fresh and build momentum.”

Choosing between Rahul and Pant good headache

Rohit said the choice between KL Rahul and Rishabh Pant as the team’s wicketkeeper in ODIs is a good headache to have but hinted that the former is likely to retain his role.

Rahul had kept wickets in Pant’s absence during the 2023 World Cup, in which he performed with considerable success.

“KL has been keeping wickets for us in the ODI format for a number of years now and he has done pretty well. If you look at the last 10-15 ODIs, he has done exactly what the team required him to do. “Rishabh as well, he is there. We have got an option of playing either one of them. Both are quite capable of winning games on their own.

“It’s a good headache to have whether to play KL or Rishabh. But looking at what we have done in the past, having that continuity is also very important for us. That is where we stand as a team,” Rohit said.

India have added Varun Chakravorthy to the ODI squad and Rohit said the in-form

mystery spinner will get a chance to play if the opportunity arises. “Varun has certainly shown something different. I understand that it is a T20 format but he’s clearly got something different about him. So we just wanted to have an option and see what we can do with him.

“If the series presents us an opportunity to play him at some stage and we will see what he’s capable of. Right now, we are not thinking about whether we’re going to take him (to Champions Trophy) or not.

“But definitely, he will be in contention if things pan out really well for us and he does what is required.”

Rohit threw his weight behind veteran pacer Mohammed Shami who has been included into the CT squad despite an underwhelming domestic games post his return from injury.

“He has not played cricket for 1 or 1.5 years. Don’t judge the player so soon. He has been playing cricket for the last 10-12 years and has won us matches single-handedly.”

Rohit added that the team is awaiting scan reports that will determine Jasprit Bumrah’s availability in the coming days.



Balraj Panwar shines with men’s single scull gold in National Games

PTI ■ TEHRI

Paris Olympian Balraj Panwar, who narrowly missed out on a bronze medal at the Asian Games in China last year, strengthened his status as one of the country’s top rowers as he defended his men’s single scull gold at the National Games here on Wednesday.

Panwar, born in Haryana but competing for Services here, clocked 7 minute and 26.68 seconds to row past the 2km distance and take the first place at the Water Sports Complex here. Navdeep Singh (7:41.17) of Uttarakhand and Guru Pratap Singh (8:04.01) of Maharashtra took the silver and bronze respectively. The 25-year-old Indian Army rower, who is also a two-time national champion, had finished fourth in the men’s single scull event in his maiden appearance at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China last year, clocking 7:01.27. He later qualified for the Paris Olympics where he finished 23rd.

Services and Madhya Pradesh shared the spoils in a straight fight for rowing supremacy as both collected five gold each. The neck-and-neck rivalry was expected as both are among the top-class rowing facility providers in the country. Indian Army and Navy (whose athletes compete for Services) have top-class training facilities for

rowers, the same in case of Madhya Pradesh also, especially in Bhopal. Panwar had won the men’s singles scull gold in the 2023 Goa National Games with a time of 6:28.5. For Madhya Pradesh, rising rower Khushpreet Kaur gave them the first gold by winning the women’s single scull final with a time of 8:40.35. Maharashtra’s Mrunmayee Nilesh (8:47.65) and Andaman and Nicobar’s Amrita Minj (8:48.18) took the silver and bronze respectively.

Other Results:
1. Men’s double scull: Gold: Kulvinder Singh and Jaspinder Singh (Services) - 6:44.67; Silver: Satnam Singh and Parminder Singh (Odisha) - 6:47.93; Bronze: Prabhakar Singh and Robin (Madhya Pradesh) - 6:59.50.
2. Men’s lightweight double scull: Gold: Ujwal Kumar and Ajay Tyagi (Services) - 6:43.80; Silver: Lakshay and Rohit (Haryana) - 6:45.15; Bronze: Nitin Deol and Sushil (Madhya Pradesh) - 7:02.66.

3. Men’s coxless four scull: Gold: Sannee Kumar, Iqbal Singh, Babulal Yadav and Yogesh Kumar (Services) - 6:25.08; Silver: Aashish Goliyan, Saurav Kumar, Neeraj and Ravi (Uttarakhand) - 6:34.43; Bronze: Anil Kumar, Ankush, Sankit and Bhanu Pratap Singh (Madhya Pradesh) - 6:44.39.

4. Men’s quadruple scull: Gold: Karamjit Singh, Salman Khan, Jakar Khan and Arvind Singh (Services) - 6:11.05; Silver: Lakshya, Ajay, Ravi and Manjeet (Haryana) - 6:16.22; Bronze: Sunil, Kaushlesh Pratap Singh, Rahul and Nitin Deol (Madhya Pradesh) - 6:20.72.
5. Women’s lightweight double scull: Gold: Poonam and Rukmani (Madhya Pradesh) - 7:51.96; Silver: Savita and Diksha (Haryana) - 7:58.10; Bronze: B Anadhi and Kiran Devi (Meghalaya) - 8:01.52.
6. Men’s Coxless Pair: Manmohan and Bheem Singh - (Madhya Pradesh) - 7:11.40; Silver: Punit Kumar and Mohd Adil (Uttar Pradesh) - 7:15.52; Bronze: Jasveer Singh and Harinder Singh (Uttarakhand) - 7:24.23.

7. Women’s Coxless Pair: Gold: Gurubani Kaur and Diljot Kaur (Madhya Pradesh) - 8:09.45; Silver: Vijina Mol and Aleena Anto (Kerala) - 8:18.53; Bronze: Jaismeen Kaur and Jashanpreet Kaur (Punjab) - 8:23.71.
8. Women’s Quadruple Scull: Gold: Santosh Yadav, Poonam, Khushpreet Kaur and Rukmani (Madhya Pradesh) - 7:08.40; Silver: Suman Devi, Kiran, Pavitra and Diksha (Haryana) - 7:14.45; Bronze: Anna Helan Joseph, Gouri Nandak, Saniya J Krishna and Aswani Kumaran (Kerala) - 7:18.06.

PTI ■ DUBAI

Former skipper Ravi Shastri reckons that Jasprit Bumrah’s potential absence could severely weaken the Indian team in the Champions Trophy but advised against rushing the premier fast bowler’s return to the national side.

Bumrah suffered back spasms in the fifth Test against Australia at Sydney in January, and did not bowl in the second innings. He hasn’t bowled for India since then, though he has been included in the initial squad for the prestigious ODI tournament.

Bumrah is undergoing rehabilitation at the NCA and is not in the ODI squad for the three-match series against England beginning Thursday. The sports science experts are expected to provide an update on his fitness to the BCCI after which a call would be taken on the Champions Trophy, which

will be held in Pakistan and UAE. The opening game is scheduled in Karachi on February 19 while India will play all their games in Dubai. “Bumrah not fit will reduce India’s chances (of winning the Champions Trophy) by 30%, literally by 30-35%,” Shastri said in the latest edition of ICC Review. “With a fully fit Bumrah playing, you are guaranteed of those death overs. It would’ve been a different ball game altogether,” opined Shastri. Bumrah, who had a sensational last year to claim the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy for ICC Men’s Cricketer of the Year as well as the ICC Men’s Test Cricketer of the Year, played a pivotal role in India winning the 2024 T20 World Cup held in the West Indies and the USA. He also claimed 32 wickets, the highest from both sides, in the five-match Border-Gavaskar Tests in Australia.



Shastri warned against rushing the stalwart back

“I think it’s high risk. There’s too much big cricket coming up for India. And at this stage of his career, I think he’s too precious to be just called on for one game out of the blue and asked to deliver.

“The expectations will be so much. They’ll think that he’ll come in straight away and set the world on fire. It’s never that easy when you come back from injury,” said Shastri.

Legendary Australian cricketer Ponting said Bumrah’s absence could shift the focus on Shami, who recently returned to the India side following a 14-month injury layoff and rehabilitation. He felt the back spasms Bumrah suffered in Australia could be due to the pacer not getting the support of Shami. “My biggest concern about India when they came for Australia in the Test series was Bumrah not having Shami

there as a backup and him having to burden most of the load,” Ponting said on The ICC Review.

“And that’s probably what happened, and might even have something to do with why he (Bumrah) got hurt. He probably ended up having to bowl a bit more in that series with Shami not being there. So look, if Shami’s fit, that’s a positive,” said Ponting. Shastri said Shami’s fitness would be keenly followed in the ODI series against England.

“It will be interesting to see if India play him out in all three, or they give him the first one and the third one, and then ease him into the Champions Trophy. “But he’ll be watched very closely because 10 overs is totally different to four overs, and then you’re going to see how he pulls up in the field as well having bowled those 10 overs.”

MI CapeTown defeat Paarl Royals to enter SA20 final

PTI ■ GOEBERHA

Continuing their dream run in the tournament, MI CapeTown defeated Paarl Royals by 39 runs in the First Qualifier to enter their maiden SA20 final here.

The final will be played at the Wanderers on Saturday, while Paarl Royals will play the Second Qualifier on Thursday against the winner of the Eliminator between two-times champion Sunrisers Eastern Cape and Joburg Super Kings on Wednesday.

MI CapeTown scored 199 for 4 and then dismissed Paarl Royals for 160 in 19.4 overs. In-form openers Rassie Van Der Dussen (40 off 32 balls, 3 fours and 2 sixes) and Ryan Rickelton (44 off 27, 4 fours and 2 sixes) again gave MI CapeTown a flying start, smashing 66 runs in powerplay.

This was MI CapeTown’s fifth win on the trot this season, having last lost to the same team on January 15 at Paarl,

while it was the hat-trick of loss for Paarl Royals.

Paarl Royals’ in-form bowler Kwená Maphaka conceded 15 runs in the fourth over, while Bjorn Fortuin gave away 20 in the next over.

Royals captain David Miller brought Dunitz Wellalage into the attack in the seventh over. He could have got an immediate breakthrough but Mujeeb Ur Rahman dropped Rickelton’s catch when he was on 33.

Dayyaan Galiem finally broke the 87-run opening partnership when Van Der Dussen gave a simple catch to Miller at mid-off. Rickelton too departed in the next over of Wellalage caught at the boundary by Mitchell Owen.

MI CapeTown lost three wickets for six runs and found themselves in trouble at were 93/3. But George Linde and Dewald Brevis did not let the momentum slip and built a 74-run partnership in just 32 balls to give the team the highest total at St George’s park this season.

Cummins ‘heavily unlikely’ for Champions Trophy: McDonald

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australia captain and pace spearhead Pat Cummins is “heavily unlikely” to be fit in time for this month’s Champions Trophy, head coach Andrew McDonald has revealed, opening up the possibility of either Steve Smith or Travis Head leading the side. Cummins hasn’t been able to resume training after he missed the Test series in Sri Lanka due to the birth of his second child, while also nursing an ankle problem, which flared up during the gruelling five-Test Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India.

“Pat Cummins hasn’t been able to resume any type of bowling so he’s heavily unlikely, so that would mean that we do need a captain,” ICC quoted McDonald as saying on SEN Radio.

“Steve Smith and Travis Head are the two that we’ve been having conversations with while we’ve been building out that Champions Trophy team



along with Pat (Cummins) back home. They’ll be the two that we look at for that leadership post,” added McDonald.

The Champions Trophy will be held in Pakistan and UAE beginning February 19 in Karachi.

With Smith doing a commendable job in the first Test against Sri Lanka, leading the visitors to a massive innings and 242-run win at Galle recently, the onus could likely fall on him as he has served in leadership roles for a very long time before the ‘sandpaper-gate’ scandal broke out.

Head too has been in sublime

form, playing a pivotal role in Australia’s 3-1 series win in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy recently.

“They’re (Smith and Head) the two obvious ones. Steve has done a great job here in the (first) Test match (against Sri Lanka). He’s done some good work in one-day international cricket across the journey as well. So it’s between those two,” said McDonald.

Australia could be forced to make three changes to the Champions Trophy squad as experienced all-rounder Mitchell Marsh has already been ruled out due to a lower back injury, while pacer Josh Hazlewood too has not fully recovered from a side strain.

“As I said, Patty (Cummins) is hugely unlikely, which is a bit of shame, and we’ve also got Josh Hazlewood, who is battling (to be fit) at the moment. So that medical information will land over the next couple of days and we’ll be able to shore that up and let everyone know the direction,” added McDonald.

Depth of talent in India is exciting for any coach: Edwards

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai Indians’ head coach Charlotte Edwards on Wednesday said that the depth of talent in Indian cricket is exciting for anybody in charge of a team, while conceding that her side, the inaugural Women’s Premier League champions, did not play as well as they should have in the second edition last year.

Mumbai roped in G Kamalini, who finished as the third-highest run-scorer in recently-concluded U-19 T20 World Cup in Malaysia, along with Sanskriti Gupta, Akshita Maheshwari and South Africa’s Nadine de Klerk in the WPL auction last year. “We’re really happy to come out of the auction with the

players we had and to add to our squad,” Charlotte told PTI in an exclusive interview.

“I’m certainly a better coach for having this experience. I’ve learned so much. I’ve really loved the experience and watching the Indian domestic players really grow throughout the tournament. “And to see the depth of talent India have got, for any coach that is exciting. I’m in a really privileged position where I can come over here and hopefully make a difference and that’s all you want to do as a coaching staff member,” she added. The winners of WPL 2023, Mumbai Indians had lost to eventual champions of the last year’s edition Royal Challengers Bengaluru in 2024.

“Last year we didn’t play as well as we probably could have, but we probably should have still made the final and that gives me great heart going into this year,” Edwards said.

“I know when we’re playing our best cricket, we’re unstoppable. That, hopefully, will give us a great amount of confidence.” Edwards, who led England to title wins in the 2009 T20 World Cup and ODI World Cup, said two years of WPL have seen Indian domestic players rise to the challenge of playing against the best in the world.

“The real plus point of the WPL is that we’ve had players come. Saika (Ishaque) is a great example. The way she performed, she then, within sort of six to 12



months, was playing for India and it was a great story,” Edwards said. “But looking back to two years ago, to see those players come in, then to see where they are now, it is

worlds apart. The way they’ve risen to the challenge of playing at this level, the opportunities they’ve had as a result of the WPL. Yeah, it makes me smile,” she said. “It makes me very happy to

think how much the team has grown in these two years. I guess (it) just builds excitement for what we can achieve this year, because the players are so much better,” she added.

Edwards said letting go England player Issy Wong, who took the first-ever hat-trick of WPL in the first season, was incredibly difficult.

“Izzy has been such a big part of Mumbai Indians for the first two years and especially in year one, she was absolutely outstanding,” she said.

“The addition of Shabnim Ismail probably didn’t help Issy’s cause in many ways. To get a player of that calibre in year two was great for us, but probably not so great for Issy. Her form has dipped

over the last year or so as well,” she added.

With fielding and power-hitting being constantly the talking points in Indian women’s cricket, Edwards said it’s something Mumbai Indians are focussed on improving.

“Fielding is a massive part of the game. In T20 cricket, we want power (game) now in women’s cricket. It’s a focus constantly,” she said.

Losing Ashes might be ‘line in the sand’ moment

Edwards, who was a member of five Ashes-winning England teams during her career, said she did not see a 0-16 loss coming at the hands of Australia.

“As an ex-player, I’ve obviously followed the Ashes very closely. I’m hugely disappointed, as I’m

sure the players are. I certainly didn’t see a 16-0 whitewash coming, especially after 2023. It was such an exciting series,” she said.

“I’m sure the England team will go away from this. It might be that line in the sand moment that we need to hopefully move the team forward. But Australia have shown their dominance within women’s cricket.”

Edwards added that the incident of former England player Alex Hartley being refused TV interview by Sophie Ecclestone was something that was “avoidable.”

“Absolutely. I think we all can see now that it could have been avoided and I’m sure that will be looked at,” she said.

Abhishek climbs to second spot in T20 ranking

PTI ■ DUBAI

In-form India opener Abhishek Sharma leapfrogged 38 places to the second spot in the ICC Men's T20I Player Rankings for batters while his teammate Tilak Verma dropped a rung to the third place on Wednesday. Abhishek produced the best innings of his fledgling international career when he smashed a quick-fire 135 in the fifth and final T20 against England in Mumbai, leading India to a thumping 4-1 series win. Abhishek's innings came off just 54 deliveries and was adorned with 13 sixes. It was the highest score by an Indian men's player in the shortest format. As a result, the 24-year-old zoomed to the second spot in the latest ranking. Australia star Travis Head continues to lead the T20I batters' chart, but Abhishek is just 26 rating points behind him following his record-breaking effort at Wankhede. Skipper Suryakumar Yadav is placed fifth and all within striking distance of Head, while his India teammates Hardik Pandya (up five rungs to equal 51st) and Shivam Dube (up 38 spots to 58th)



also moved up the rankings chart following some good scores against England. It's a similar story on the bowlers' rankings with spinner Varun Chakravarthy moving up three places to

joint second with Adil Rashid on the back of his 14 wickets and player-of-the-series effort against England. Fellow spinner Ravi Bishnoi (up four places to sixth) also climbed the list after taking

five wickets in the series against England. Left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh also finds himself in top 10 at ninth place. West Indies spinner Akeal Hosein re-claims his spot as

the No.1 bowler after he lost the mantle to Rashid a week earlier. A host of Australian players gained ground in the latest Test rankings following their impressive effort in defeating

Sri Lanka by an innings and 242 runs during the recent first Test in Galle. Stand-in skipper Steve Smith gained three places to move up to fifth following his 35th Test century, while opener Usman Khawaja climbed six places to 11th after contributing his highest Test score of 232 during the romp. Yashavi Jaiswal remained on the fourth spot in the Test batters list, which is being headed by England's Joe Root, followed by Harry Brook and New Zealand's Kane Williamson. Jasprit Bumrah, who is recovering from back spasm, maintained his top spot. He was recently named ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year and ICC Men's Test Cricketer of the Year. Left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja is the other Indian in top 10 at the ninth spot. South Africa's Kagiso Rabada jumped a spot to the second while Australia captain Pat Cummins is at third position, followed by Josh Hazlewood and Noman Ali of Pakistan. Veteran Australia spinner Nathan Lyon has improved two spots to jump to sixth overall and pacer Mitchell Starc is up two places to 12th following their efforts in Galle.



Umpire Nitin Menon opts out of CT 2025

PTI ■ DUBAI

India's only representative in the ICC Elite Panel of Umpires, Nitin Menon, has opted out of officiating in the Champions Trophy (CT) in Pakistan this month due to personal reasons. The ICC on Wednesday announced a list of 15 match officials, including three match referees and 12 umpires for the marquee tournament, scheduled to commence in Karachi on February 19 with the final on March 9. Australian legend David Boon, Sri Lankan great great Ranjan Madugalle and Zimbabwe's Andrew Pycroft were named as match referees for the eight-team tournament. The event will be held at three venues in Pakistan -- Karachi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi --, while India will play all their matches in Dubai, starting with a clash against Bangladesh on February 20, owing to security concerns. "The ICC wanted to put him (Menon) on the Champions Trophy roster. But he decided against travelling to Pakistan due to personal reasons," a BCCI source told PTI. Menon could not have stood in the matches in Dubai as the ICC follows the policy of appointing neutral umpires. The world body did not comment on Menon in its statement to unveil the list of officials. All the three match referees chosen for the tournament are experienced. Boon has featured in the 2017 Champions Trophy final, while Madugalle is back after officiating the 2013 final. Pycroft also featured in the 2017 tournament. "A distinguished panel of 12 umpires will officiate the eight-team event, with six

returning officials from the 2017 edition, including Richard Kettleborough, who stood in the final of the previous Champions Trophy in the UK," the ICC said in a release. Kettleborough, a veteran of 108 ODIs, will be joined by fellow umpires Chris Gaffaney, Kumar Dharmasena, Richard Illingworth, Paul Reiffel, and Rod Tucker, who also officiated in the 2017 tournament. "Dharmasena will be extending his stint of officiating 132 ODIs at the upcoming tournament, a record for an umpire from Sri Lanka in the One-Day format," Kettleborough and Illingworth, who both stood together during the 2023 World Cup final in Ahmedabad, will be joined by Michael Gough, Adrian Holdstock, Ahsan Raza, Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid, Alex Wharf, and Joel Wilson. All of them officiated at the World Cup in India. ICC's senior manager (umpires and referees), Sean Easey, said the extensive experience of the match officials will provide high-quality games. "We always strive to appoint the most deserving officials for such prestigious events, and we are confident that this group will do an outstanding job in both Pakistan and the UAE. We wish them all the best for a memorable tournament," he said. Match Officials: Umpires: Kumar Dharmasena, Chris Gaffaney, Michael Gough, Adrian Holdstock, Richard Illingworth, Richard Kettleborough, Ahsan Raza, Paul Reiffel, Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid, Rodney Tucker, Alex Wharf, Joel Wilson.



India tour is a good preparation for Champions Trophy: Buttler

PTI ■ NAGPUR

It hasn't quite gone the way England would have liked but skipper Jos Buttler on Wednesday said the ongoing tour of India is "as good a preparation as you can have" for this month's Champions Trophy given the similarities in conditions with Pakistan where his team will be based for the event. Buttler also believes that veteran batter Joe Root will play a pivotal role in both the ODI series against India, starting Thursday, and the upcoming Champions Trophy, given his experience. England, coming off a disappointing 1-4 T20I series loss, have received a much-needed boost with Root's return. The seasoned batter, who has 171 ODIs under his belt, recently enjoyed a successful stint in SA20 with Paarl Royals, further reinforcing his form. "Root is one of the great players of the game, so in all the formats here he's obviously been a vital part of ODI cricket for England for a long time," Buttler told reporters on the eve of the first ODI here. "He's got loads of experience

in ODI cricket, which would be great for some of the guys who haven't played as much in our group. He's been a vital player for England in all formats, and we feel like he's got a crucial role for us to play in these games." The ODI series serves as England's final preparation before the Champions Trophy, where Buttler and his team will begin their campaign against Australia on February 22 in Lahore. "As preparation goes for any tournament, I think taking on India in India is always going to be a great challenge and as good a preparation as you can have," Buttler said. "The conditions here in India may be similar (to those in Pakistan). Each ground that we play at always has their own nuances and a little bit of difference. We're always trying to adapt to that," he added. The England captain reaffirmed his team's commitment to the aggressive brand of cricket that has come to define it. "We want to find ways to put pressure on the opposition with the bat. You've got to take wickets, I think, and it's crucial you see how, if you let

guys back for a period of time, they can go on to hurt you. "So, we'll be desperate to try and find ways of taking wickets," he said. "It's always about execution, really. Whether you want to be aggressive, you want to be conservative, you want to be measured, you've still got to go out there and execute it and play it well," he added. Buttler was all praise for under-fire India skipper Rohit Sharma, who will look to regain form in the series. "If I look back at that World Cup (2023), the two teams in the final were playing a really positive and aggressive round of cricket, you think of the way Travis Head took that final on with the bats, so you see it can be successful," he said. "Obviously, Rohit takes a lot of credit for the way he's come out and played himself as a captain and pushed India more towards that style of cricket, so absolutely, we want to be exactly the same." The growth of T20 cricket and resurgence of Tests has raised serious questions over the relevance of the 50-over game, and concerns for its future. Buttler said he too understands the doubts.

Odisha FC chase first-ever ISL win against FC Goa

PTI ■ MARGAO

Odisha FC will look to secure their first-ever ISL win against FC Goa to bridge the gap and enter playoffs when the two sides lock horns here on Wednesday. The Gaurs are aiming for a third league double against Odisha FC, since they had won the reverse fixture by a 4-2 margin on January 4. FC Goa have won seven out of the 11 encounters against the Juggernauts in the ISL, which makes them only one of the two teams in the league's history besides Mohun Bagan Super Giant (against East Bengal FC), to stay unbeaten against a single opponent after facing them over 10 times. In their previous clash, FC



Goa lost 1-3 to Jamshedpur FC, which snapped their 12-game-long unbeaten run that comprised eight triumphs. The Gaurs will be eyeing to avoid consecutive defeats in the same season for the first time since April last year, when they were defeated by Mumbai City FC twice. Odisha FC, on the other hand, have momentum in their side since they won their last away game by 3-2

against Bengaluru FC and then drew 2-2 at home against NorthEast United FC. Prior to the match against the Blues, the Sergio Lobera-coached side was on a three-game-long winless streak on the road (D2 L1). The Juggernauts have previously managed back-to-back away wins only twice, between November-December 2024 and December 2023-February 2024. FC Goa are placed third in the points table with 33 points from 18 matches, as they have won nine encounters and drawn six times. They will want to surpass the second-placed Jamshedpur FC (34), whereas Odisha FC are also three points (25) adrift the sixth-placed Mumbai City FC (28).

India need to manage Bumrah's workload smartly: Philander

PTI ■ GOEBERHA

Former South Africa fast bowler Vernon Philander says Jasprit Bumrah has set high standards for pacers across the world but India will need to manage his workload smartly to keep him injury-free. With a loaded international calendar, Philander feels Bumrah should be utilised tactfully. "I think he (Bumrah) has really set the standard high. His skill set, the ability to shift his pace up and down, I think he has just been wonderful for the game. Overall, if you look at the amount of games that India plays, obviously over the calendar year, that load is quite massive," Philander said in a select media interaction on the sidelines of SA20 here.

"I think it's more about how the Indian management manage him. I would say, you look at a guy like Jasprit Bumrah, and you want him to be playing all the key series, all the key tournaments. So they have to manage his workload in between tournaments," said the cricketer-turned-commentator. He suggested that India should avoid the temptation of involving Bumrah in every series. "With IPL coming up, you want a player like him to be available for most games but how do you manage him throughout the IPL season? So I would say you perhaps want to look at playing him in all the main features and give other bowlers an opportunity in less important matches," said Philander, who has taken 224 wickets in 64 Tests for



South Africa. "But again, it's such a tough chat to have, because as a bowler, you want to go out there, you know, there's records to be broken, so you want to keep playing," he said. Speaking about bowler's workload in general, Philander said it will be a

massive talking point ahead of the Champions Trophy. "I think also from a bowling load management point of view fitness trainers and physios will have to guide the conversation in terms of what's allowed for a particular player. "With leagues popping up

everywhere and you only have X amount of balls in your body, and you want to make sure that you deliver those balls at the right time, at the right competition. If you look at Champions Trophy coming up, I think that will be a massive talking point as well," he said. He also wants to see Bumrah playing in the SA20 along with Suryakumar Yadav and Virat Kohli in future. "I think Suryakumar would be right up there. Jasprit, without a shadow of doubt as his skill set on these kinds of wickets would be phenomenal to watch in action. And then I think you want to see a guy like Kohli who has obviously built a massive name for himself over the last decade or so," he said.

WPL will play big role in India's preparations for WC: Harmanpreet

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India and Mumbai Indians' captain Harmanpreet Kaur believes the upcoming edition of the Women's Premier League will play a big role in preparation for the ODI World Cup which the country is hosting later this year. She also said that the India U-19 women's team has set a new benchmark with their second T20 World Cup title win in Malaysia recently. "This WPL is going to play a very big role because this year we have ODI World Cup. After the WPL, we have a very good window where we can work on our fitness," Kaur told the media during

Mumbai Indians' pre-season press conference here on Wednesday. "Our U-19 team is setting a benchmark with back-to-back trophies and it's a very proud moment for all of us," she added. India legend Jhulan Goswami, MI's bowling coach and team mentor, said their side has a "quality core team" for WPL and domestic players have also been impressive. "All of them are very quality (players), they have done very well in domestic cricket and they have performed really well. One of them has just now won the U-19 (T20) World Cup, G Kamalini... (and there is) Sanskriti Gupta

too," Goswami said. "We have a quality core team; we have a few youngsters who have picked it up this season. All of them are very quality (players), equally balanced, they understand their game well and it's important to have a balanced team," she added. Mumbai head coach Charlotte Edwards said the team will continue to monitor India seamer Pooja Vastrakar, who is currently injured. "Pooja is injured at the moment so we will be making a call on that very, very soon. Clearly, she has been a big player for us for the last couple of seasons but we are monitoring her fitness



and hopefully we should be able to announce something really soon," Edwards said. Goswami said WPL has changed the perspective about women's cricket and

those who are seen in the event get recognition. "Most importantly, if you go to domestic cricket, you will see their (players') mindset, their approach towards the

game, it was not there earlier. You will see they (now) want to come and play good brand of cricket, try to impress those scout people to get a chance to play in WPL," Goswami said. "It's (has had) a huge impact. People recognise all those cricketers who have done well in the last three (two) years in WPL. If you go to different parts -- I travel with the Bengal team and I know -- where we never used to get that recognition, now people (have) started to follow, they understand the game, they want to know when the next WPL is, when the next auction is," she added. Edwards said the difference

can be witnessed even during trials in the off-season. "(As) someone who is new to Indian cricket, to see the difference from year one to year three now, the calibre of players, as you say, the impact it's having in the domestic cricket and the quality that's come through... In the trials recently, when I compare that to year one, it's on a different level and it's hugely exciting for Indian cricket," she said. "We are seeing year-on-year, this wonderful talent coming through and we have just seen it at the U-19 (T20) World Cup. It's a very exciting time for India, a bit scary for England," Edwards added.

The inaugural edition of the WPL was held entirely in one city, Mumbai, whereas the second edition was held in New Delhi and Bengaluru. With four venues -- Vadodara, Bengaluru, Lucknow and Mumbai -- hosting the competition this year, Goswami welcomed the move. "The best thing about WPL is going to different places in our country and it will impact local young girls, motivate them, encourage them and that is the ultimate motive of WPL," she said. "This season, (I'm) really happy that we are getting a chance to play in front of our fans because last season, we really missed that," Kaur said.