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InSIDE

SPORTS THAT DAY BELONGED TO NADEEM: NEERAJ ON PARIS OLYMPICS JAVELIN FINAL



KASHMIR UNDER ATTACK



FILE PHOTO/PTI

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

In the second dastardly act of terror in the last two days, two non-local construction workers were killed and two others were injured by terrorists near Sonamarg in the Ganderbal district of Jammu and Kashmir late Sunday evening. This is also the second major incident of terrorist violence after the formation of the Omar Abdullah-led government in Jammu and Kashmir.

According to preliminary reports, the terrorists opened fire on the camp housing labourers of a private company working on the construction of a tunnel in the Gundal area in the Ganderbal district. The identity of the deceased could not be ascertained immediately. Both the workers were shot in the head. Their bodies were seen lying on the floor of the camp while pan-stricken migrant workers

were seen taking videos. The workers who were targeted by the group of terrorists were part of the construction team working on the Z Morh tunnel, connecting Gaganear to Sonamarg in Central Kashmir's Ganderbal district. The 6.412 km long Z-Morh tunnel, a flagship project, aims to ensure all-weather connectivity between Srinagar, Sonamarg and Kargil in Ladakh. A migrant worker, hailing from the Banka district of Bihar, was mercilessly killed by terrorists in the Wachi area of Shopian on Friday. He worked in the corn fields to earn his livelihood. Official sources claimed two labourers died on the spot while two others sustained injuries, they said, adding further details are awaited. Police and army have cordoned off the area to track down the footprints of the terrorists. Reacting to the news Chief Minister Omar Abdullah posted a message on X

(earlier Twitter), "Very sad news of a dastardly & cowardly attack on non-local labourers at Gagangir in Sonamarg region. These people were working on a key infrastructure project in the area. 2 have been killed & 2-3 more have been injured in this militant attack. I strongly condemn this attack on unarmed innocent people & send my condolences to their loved ones". In February this year, two migrant workers hailing from Amritsar were targeted from a close range by unidentified terrorists in the Shaheed Gunj area of Srinagar. A sikh carpenter identified as 31-year-old Amritpal Singh was killed on the spot while another person identified as Rohit Masih succumbed to his critical injuries the next day. In 2023, a total number of 14 civilians were killed in different incidents of terrorist-related violence while 31 were killed in 2022, 41 in 2021, 38 in 2020, and 44 in 2019 across J&K.



Hoax threats to airlines continue on Sunday

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The menace of hoax bomb threat calls to airlines continued on Sunday, with more than 24 flights of IndiGo, Air India, Akasa Air and Vistara flights receiving fresh bomb threats messages. This affected both domestic and international flights, scaring air passengers in the festive season. Six flights each of IndiGo, Vistara and Air India received the threats. So far this week, more than 90 flights have received bomb threats and most of them have turned out to be hoaxes. The overall impact of these hoax threats has resulted in financial losses of up to Rs 100 crore for various airlines.

IndiGo released a series of press statements sharing details of the bomb threat received by the flights. In its statement, IndiGo confirmed the airline is cognisant of a situation involving flight 6E 58 (Jeddah to Mumbai), 6E87 (Kozhikode to Dammam), 6E11 (Delhi to Istanbul), 6E17 (Mumbai to Istanbul), 6E133 (Pune to Jodhpur) and 6E112 operating (Goa to Ahmedabad). Security alerts were received for six Akasa Air flights - QP 1102 (Ahmedabad to Mumbai), QP 1378 (Delhi to Goa), QP 1385 (Mumbai to Bagdogra), QP 1406 (Delhi to Hyderabad), QP 1519 (Kochi to Mumbai) and QP 1526 (Lucknow to Mumbai). Vistara said it got security threats for six flights - UK25 (Delhi to Frankfurt), UK106 (Singapore to Mumbai), UK146 (Bali to Delhi), UK116 (Singapore to Delhi), UK110 (Singapore to Pune) and UK107 (Mumbai to Singapore). "In line with the protocols, all relevant authorities were immediately notified, and security procedures, as directed by them, are being carried out," a Vistara spokesperson said in a statement.

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Bomb blast shatters Delhi's Sunday slumber

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Shattered glass panes, showcases, signboards, frightened residents and heavy deployment of intra-department security forces marked a high stress Sunday in the National Capital. Delhi woke up to the shocking news of a 'bomb blast' near the renowned Central Reserve Police Forces (CRPF) school in Rohini Sector-14 on Sunday morning, when many had woken up early to begin rituals for Karwachauth, a festival celebrated by married women. While the school was closed for the weekend, the markets were to open as usual, especially sweet shops as the festive season has begun in the city. A quiet Sunday morning turned into a nightmare for the residents when they heard a loud blast around 7:45 am. The sound they recalled could be heard up to a kilometer away. The Prashant Vihar area where the blast occurred is densely populated and has residential buildings, schools, Rohini Court and Delhi Development Authority (DDA) complex. Pramod Chauhan, a security guard, who was on duty outside a jewelry shop right opposite of the school at the time of the blast, said that there was dense smoke for at least 10 minutes after a sudden loud noise was heard. "I was almost about to leave since my shift was over when the blast happened. I could not see anything for the next 10 minutes after the blast as there was thick white smoke all around. My heart started palpating very fast. The glass panes of the shops around were shattered, and cars that were parked near the school were also damaged," 52-year-old Chauhan said. He added that there was a "chemical-like smell" from the site, and that the police arrived about 20 minutes after the incident. The owner of the shop Vinod Kumar said that he incurred losses worth Rs 2 lakhs because of the blast. Ankit, a 25-year-old who lives near the CRPF school said the sound was so loud that it was heard for at



National Security Guard (NSG) personnel conduct investigations at the site of the blast at Prashant Vihar, near the CRPF school in Rohini area of New Delhi on Sunday

least a kilometer away from the place. According to police sources, the investigation may be transferred to the National Investigative Agency (NIA) by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Tuesday, after it sought a report from the Delhi Police on the matter. The Delhi Police has already submitted a preliminary report to the MHA. Police officials added that it seems to be a crude bomb made of ammonium nitrate and ammonium chloride. The usually bustling area which has markets and eateries was relatively quiet and many shops remained closed on Sunday. Residents also stayed in their homes. A frightened Kiran Sachdeva, a resident of the locality, described the blast as "an earthquake-like shock", that they felt in her house which was about 200-250 meters away from the site. A senior police official said, "On Sunday, at 07:47 am, a PCR call was received in which the caller informed that a blast with a lot of noise took

place near CRPF school Sector 14, Rohini. Local police reached the spot, where the school wall was found damaged with a foul smell. The glasses of a nearby shop and a car parked near the shop were found to be damaged." The place has been cordoned off and there is heavy deployment of officials from Crime team, Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) team, bomb squad team, National Security Guard (NSG) team, National Investigative Agency (NIA) team, CRPF Team and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) team visited the spot. "FSL and NSG teams conducted the inspection of spot and lifted samples. A case under section 326(g) (Mischief by injury, inundation, fire or explosive substance, etc) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 4 Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act and 3 Explosives Act has been registered at Prashant Vihar police station.

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Wayanad hills are alive, with the sound of politics



FILE PHOTO

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The stage is set for a battle royale from the Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency that sits atop the Western Ghats in Kerala which goes to the polls for a by-election on November 13. With the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) announcing its candidate from the constituency late Saturday evening, the lineup of contestants is ready. Priyanka Gandhi, the super star of Indian National Congress, is making her electoral

debut from Wayanad, which fell vacant following the decision of her sibling Rahul Gandhi to retain the family fiefdom of Rae Bareilly from where he won the 2024 election with a brute majority. Rahul had retained the Wayanad constituency with a mammoth margin of 3,64,422 votes (59.69 per cent of total votes polled) and had literally decimated all his rival candidates. Though the voters in Wayanad were disappointed by his decision to quit the constituency, Rahul had

promised the electorate that a person who would be adored and admired by them would be fielded by the Congress and that is how Priyanka entered the scene. The fact that Priyanka is making her electoral debut from the constituency has brought Wayanad to the global political map. On Sunday, the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee announced that Sonia Gandhi will hold a road show in Wayanad on Tuesday along with Priyanka and Rahul, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha. Sathyan Mokeri of the Communist Party of India (CPI) is the Left Democratic Front (LDF) candidate from Wayanad. The BJP has fielded Navya Haridas, leader of the Mahila Morcha (the women's wing of the party) as its fighter. Haridas, an articulate and suave politician is a councillor of Kozhikode Municipal Corporation.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and others during the inauguration of various projects at the newly-constructed stadium at Srigra, in Varanasi, Sunday

PM Modi gives Diwali gifts to Varanasi, brickbats to Opposition

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ VARANASI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered a sizable Diwali gift worth over Rs 6,100 Crore to the people of Varanasi. As a third-term Member of Parliament from the constituency, PM Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for 23 development projects valued at Rs 6,611.18 crore. The PM inaugurated a range of public facilities, including those related to healthcare, education, sports, religion, tourism, employment, housing, and aviation. This included laying the foundation stone for the expansion of Varanasi Airport and the

construction of a new terminal. Additionally, he inaugurated the RJ Shankara Eye Hospital. He also launched a scathing attack on the Opposition parties, including the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress, accusing them of stalling the nation's progress. The PM said that the BJP has been at the forefront of development, especially in honouring sports persons. Addressing a large gathering at the Srigra Stadium, PM Modi criticised the Opposition, stating, "These people have consistently hindered the country's development. Even today, they create obstacles in developmental work."

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BJP releases 99-strong Maharashtra list

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday retained 71 of its sitting MLAs, as it released its first list of 99 candidates for the Maharashtra Assembly polls that contained the names of its bigwigs like Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, state unit President Chandrashekar Bawankule and as many as 13 women candidates. With the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) still to formalise its tie-up among its constituents and its own MahaYuti allies - the Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) and Nationalist Congress Party (Ajit Pawar) having not released their lists of candidates yet, the BJP became the first major political party in Maharashtra to get off the blocks for the November 20 Assembly polls. The BJP, which heads the grand ruling alliance MahaYuti, is likely to contest anywhere from 155 to 160 seats out of the total 288 seats in the 2024 Assembly polls, as against 164 seats it had contested in the 2019 Maharashtra Assembly polls. The BJP released its first list of



Devendra Fadnis and Chandrashekar Bawankule

candidates in New Delhi on Sunday, after its central election committee cleared the names at a meeting held on October 16 in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Ministers Rajnath Singh and Party president J P Nadda. As many as 71 sitting BJP MLAs out of the total 105 seats the party won in the 2019 State Assembly polls, figure in the first list of candidates. The list also contains the names of second-generation and third-generation leaders. A five-time MLA, Fadnis will contest from Nagpur South West, while State BJP president Chandrashekar Bawankule, who is currently a MLC, would contest the Kamtee seat.

Speaker Rahul Narwekar, who has presided over hearings of disqualification petitions filed in connection with the splits in the Shiv Sena and NCP, will contest from Colaba. Among other things, the BJP has fielded former Chief Minister Ashok Chavan's daughter Shreejaya Chavan from the family seat of Bhokar, former Union Minister Raosaheb Danve's Santosh Raosaheb Danve from Bhokardan, Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg MP and former Chief Minister Narayan Rane's son Nitesh from Kankavli and late Congress Chief Minister Shivajirao Patil Nilangekar's grandson Sambhaji Patil Nilangekar from Nilanga.

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Meri car, meri marzi ... vehicle owners cock a snook at the law

High Security Registration Plates are mandatory since 2022, yet violations continue

BY SAUMYA SHUKLA

Even though High Security Registration Plates (HSRP) were made mandatory by the Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways (MoRTH) since 2022, a drive on the roads of the National Capital shows rampant violations of the same by many vehicles, be it cars, buses, auto-rickshaws or bikes, despite hefty challans of up to Rs 10,000 in force by the Delhi Police. A transport and traffic expert said that around 40 per cent of vehicles made prior to 2019, in Delhi, do not comply with the HSRP rule. The MoRTH had notified the HSRP in December 2018. The unique HSRP is linked electronically to the vehicle after its affixation, and comes embedded with a chromium-based Ashoka Chakra symbol in a blue-coloured hologram.

As per the guidelines of the Union Ministry, all motor vehicle owners must install an HSRP. All vehicles purchased after the year 2019 already have the HSRP installed. Mahesh Malhotra, Secretary of the Association of Registration Plate Manufacturers of India (ARPMI) revealed while there are guidelines to implement the same, real action is missing on the ground. "Under the Section 50 of CMVA (Central Motor Vehicles Act 1989), all vehicles after 1 April 2019 will be fitted with the HSRP at the time of the registration. With these provisions, all vehicles in Delhi after the said date have near 100 per cent compliance. However, vehicles prior to the date of order have not met with more than 40 per cent compliance," he stated, adding that although it is mandated by the law, the HSRP are also helpful



to the vehicle owners. One can easily distinguish between an ordinary number plate and an HSRP. Its distinctive design aids law enforcement in

tracking and identifying vehicles, reducing vehicle thefts and fraud. It is also impossible to make counterfeit plates, which enhances authenticity and

prevents fraudulent activities. Unlike conventional plates, the HSRPs are difficult to remove, alter, or tamper with. Their non-reusable and non-removable

locking system significantly reduces the risk of vehicle theft. However, due to the lack of strict implementation on the ground, many vehicles still have old

number plates affixed. The Delhi Traffic Police department stated, "As per order of MoRTH, HSRP plates are necessary for all vehicles-new and old-from 2022. Licence plates that are manufactured after April 2019 already have HSRP elements. After 2022, High Security Number Plates were compulsory to be obtained online or offline for cars that were bought before April 2019." However, despite the hefty fine of up to Rs 10,000 for the non-adherence of the same, the situation on the ground remains as such that those vehicles roam freely on the roads of Delhi without any fear of any challans. A traffic police source said that they avoid penalising such vehicles because the issue of licensing falls with the Delhi transport government and they have to lay down the guidelines properly to ensure action.





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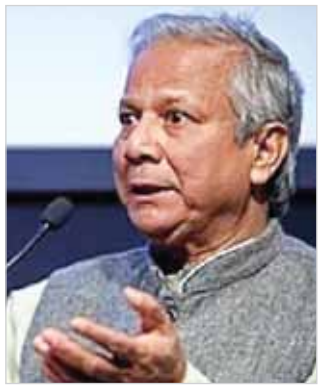
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PAPER WITH PASSION

A path to democracy

Amid Bangladesh's political turmoil, the possibility of general elections in 2025 presents an opportunity for renewal

After a long wait, the possibility of general elections taking place in Bangladesh in 2025 is now on the horizon. Bangladesh's Law Adviser Asif Nazrul has said the next election could be held in 2025 after completing the pre-election preparations, including the formation of a new Election Commission. Amid the escalating crisis in Bangladesh, there is growing pressure for a new general election to restore democratic order and bring stability. The possibility of holding general elections in 2025 has become a central topic of discussion in political circles. Many see the election as a necessary step to establish a legitimate government that can address the country's economic woes, restore law and order, and guide Bangladesh towards a more stable future. However, there are significant hurdles to overcome before an election can be held. The interim government, currently tasked with maintaining order, must establish a conducive environment for free and fair elections. This involves addressing concerns about electoral fraud, ensuring the safety of voters and candidates, and reforming the Election Commission, which has been criticised for its partisanship in recent years. International pressure, especially from the United States, and the European Union, is likely to play a role in pushing for transparent and credible elections. The international community's involvement may be instrumental in mediating dialogue among political factions and overseeing electoral reforms.



While the potential for a general election in 2025 offers a glimmer of hope, it is by no means a guaranteed solution. The path to stability will require a series of complex and delicate steps, including effective power-sharing arrangements, accountability for past political abuses, and economic policies aimed at alleviating the financial burden on citizens. The emergence of populist rhetoric and extremist groups could also pose threats to a peaceful electoral environment. Moreover, with Sheikh Hasina in exile and her Awami League party in disarray, a sizable section of Bangladesh's political milieu is likely to be away from the election process. Under Sheikh Hasina's leadership, the country experienced substantial economic growth. However, her tenure was also marred by accusations of authoritarianism, suppression of dissent, and manipulation of democratic institutions. The deterioration of democratic norms and crackdowns on opposition parties, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), exacerbated political polarisation and unrest. As Bangladesh teeters on the edge of a political precipice, the possibility of holding general elections in 2025 brings a mixture of hope and apprehension. The nation's future will largely depend on how the interim government manages the political transition and whether it can pave the way for a truly democratic process. The coming months will be crucial in determining whether Bangladesh can emerge from this turmoil with renewed democratic vigour or if it will remain mired in chaos and instability.

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PICTALK



Visitors at the Virasat Mahotsav 2024, an art and heritage festival, in Dehradun

India-Canada relations sink over Khalistan issue



PARUL CHANDRA

As both countries grapple with domestic politics and external pressures, the ties are now at its most fragile point, threatening trade, security and people-to-people connections

Two of the world's leading democracies, India and Canada, are currently engaged in a rather unseemly, explosive diplomatic row over Ottawa's refusal to rein in Khalistani elements thriving on Canadian soil. New Delhi believes these elements, all Canadian nationals, have been allowed unfettered freedom, imperilling India's security interests. With Ottawa paying no heed to New Delhi's concerns, a traditionally close relationship nurtured over a long period now lies torn into shreds.

The spat with Canada could also impinge on India's geopolitical equations with members of the powerful intelligence-sharing 'Five Eyes' alliance. The Justin Trudeau-led government has approached the alliance and got the backing of the other four members – the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand – on its allegations linking the Indian government's "agents" to "criminal activities" in Canada, including the killing of Khalistani separatist Kuldeep Singh Nijjar in June last year. All these alliance partners have their eyes firmly set on the crucial Indo-Pacific. So does India. Surely, none would want the imbroglia to adversely impact their geostrategic alignment to counter China's aggressive expansionism in the region. If Ottawa's charges on the Indian government's involvement do turn out to be correct, New Delhi would have an egg on its face.

While covert operations to carry out hit jobs in foreign lands to take out elements inimical to a country's interests are nothing new, being caught with proof of overt involvement can prove to be a major embarrassment. It's noteworthy that the US, unlike Canada, has been far more discreet in its approach while seeking India's cooperation in investigating a plot to kill Khalistani separatist leader and its national Gurbatwant Singh Pannun, who leads Sikhs for Justice. The US strategy is driven in no small measure by its desire to not cause any major rift in bilateral strategic ties with India, even though it continues to put pressure on New Delhi on the issue. Trudeau, on the



other hand, is driven by his desire to woo for his domestic political gains a section of the Sikh diaspora who support Khalistan.

Discretion in such a sensitive matter, therefore, has been thrown to the winds. The Trudeau government's sovereignty concerns over the Nijjar killing, however, do not extend to alleged Chinese interference in Canadian federal elections both in 2019 and 2021. The crucial Indo-Pacific. So does India. Surely, none would want the imbroglia to adversely impact their geostrategic alignment to counter China's aggressive expansionism in the region. If Ottawa's charges on the Indian government's involvement do turn out to be correct, New Delhi would have an egg on its face. While covert operations to carry out hit jobs in foreign lands to take out elements inimical to a country's interests are nothing new, being caught with proof of overt involvement can prove to be a major embarrassment. It's noteworthy that the US, unlike Canada, has been far more discreet in its approach while seeking India's cooperation in investigating a plot to kill Khalistani separatist leader and its national Gurbatwant Singh Pannun, who leads Sikhs for Justice. The US strategy is driven in no small measure by its desire to not cause any major rift in bilateral strategic ties with India, even though it continues to put pressure on New Delhi on the issue. Trudeau, on the



IT'S NOTEWORTHY THAT THE US, UNLIKE CANADA, HAS BEEN FAR MORE DISCREET IN ITS APPROACH WHILE SEEKING INDIA'S COOPERATION IN INVESTIGATING A PLOT TO KILL KHALISTANI SEPARATIST LEADER AND ITS NATIONAL GURPATWANT SINGH PANNUN, WHO LEADS SIKHS FOR JUSTICE

Gandhi's assassination in processions to mark the 40th anniversary of 'Operation Bluestar', and recently even published posters issuing death threats to senior Indian diplomats, stoking New Delhi's concerns.

Trudeau's Liberal Party has thrived on support from the Sikh diaspora that exercises significant influence in some important parliamentary seats. A pro-Khalistani Canadian politician, Jagmeet Singh, who leads the New Democratic Party, has played a crucial role in enabling Trudeau's minority government to remain in power by signing a deal supporting it in no-confidence votes. Singh called off this deal last month but elections in Canada are slated to be held next year anyway if Trudeau's government can survive until then. New Delhi, in any case, will be happy to see the back of Trudeau. Now, with his government even threatening "sanctions" against India, it's fairly evident that Ottawa is willing to jeopardise even vital trade and economic ties with India. It halted negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in September last year as bilateral relations soured. Canada's own Indo-Pacific strategy had earlier recognised India as a "critical partner", seeking deeper trade and economic ties.

Bilateral trade was pegged at \$9.36 billion in 2023. The turbulence in ties can have a deleterious impact on trade and economic links. What could also take a hit are people-to-people ties, especially with Canada being a favoured destination for Indian students for higher education.

An estimated 4.27 lakh Indian students are studying in Canada, helping its educational institutes earn much-needed revenue. Canada is also home to a huge Indian diaspora of 1.8 million – Trudeau will only alienate himself from them while allowing Khalistani radicals to flourish. Trudeau would do well to remember that it was Khalistani separatist elements who carried out the bombing of AI Kanishka Flight 182 in June 1985, killing 329 persons of whom a majority were Canadian citizens of Indian origin. Allowing radical elements to thrive for the sake of political expediency has never done any nation good. As two mature democracies who have often cited this fact as one that underpins their bilateral ties, both India and Canada need to pull back from the diplomatic war they are engaged in. A sour relationship can only cause further damage in the long run.

(The writer is a senior New Delhi-based journalist who writes on foreign affairs; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SECTION 6A STAYS VALID

Madam — The Supreme Court's judgment on the validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act on Thursday not only put an end to concerns about an old issue reviving, but it also shed light on numerous factors that can help shape the current debate. In this regard, the ruling confirms the methodology established in the Assam Accord to address the issue of illegal immigrants in Assam.

The Supreme Court's five-member constitutional bench ruled Section 6A of the Citizenship Act statutory, clearing the door for the implementation of the 1985 accord reached by the Rajiv Gandhi government and the All-Assam Students Union (AASU). According to this agreement, by adding Section 6A to the Citizenship Act, those who came from Bangladesh before March 25, 1971, would be eligible for citizenship. Previously, this day was January 1, 1966. After the challenge to the constitutionality of this section of the Citizenship Act is dismissed, those who arrived in Assam from Bangladesh before March 25, 1971, will be permitted to petition for citizenship, but those who arrived after that date will be identified and deported. This ruling provided solace to all individuals who had arrived from other places and were living in Assam, feeling stuck in uncertainty. The verdict made it clear whose citizenship is safe, who can obtain citizenship, and who must be identified as illegal migrants and returned properly. In this sense, there is no room for ambiguity. Politics driven by immediate interests can be more harmful in this situation. The decision may have been made in the context of Assam, but the issue of illegal immigration is significant in many other locations.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

NEW JUSTICE STATUE UNVEILED

Madam—In a symbolic shift, a new statue of Nyay ki Devi (Lady of Justice) at the Supreme Court (SC) replaces the traditional blindfold (serves as a reminder of

Senior citizens get relief



The decision of the Group of Ministers to reduce GST on insurance policies (health insurance and life insurance) is certainly beneficial to many citizens who intend to have insurance cover for them or their families for meeting unexpected expenses of hospitalisation or even deaths. At the same time, the decision to recommend

a total waiver of GST on health insurance policies for senior citizens is definitely laudable. However, these recommendations will be put up in the GST Council meeting for a decision after October 30, which is too long a period. In fact, many of the health insurance policies involving senior citizens under group cover expire by 30th October itself, and they have to be renewed well in advance to continue the coverage. Therefore, the senior citizens, especially, are more concerned immediately and the waiver of GST as decided and recommended in the GOM meeting recently held, if implemented earlier, will certainly benefit the senior citizens who have to renew their policies by making premium payments.

K Durga Prasad Rao | Hyderabad

become more evident.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterje | Faridabad

GATISHAKTI BOOSTS CONNECTIVITY

Madam — PM Modi celebrates GatiShakti's success in streamlining India's infrastructure development for multimodal connectivity. PM Modi has praised the achievements of the PM GatiShakti National Master Plan for Multimodal Connectivity, which has significantly enhanced infrastructure efficiency over the past three years. Launched in October 2021, the initiative integrates various infrastructure schemes from different ministries and state governments, improving seamless movement of goods and addressing supply chain bottlenecks. The plan has identified numerous infrastructure gaps and aims to develop sustainable solutions, ultimately fostering entrepreneurship and innovation across India.

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The changing dynamics of Bihar politics

As Bihar prepares for the 2025 Assembly elections, Prashant Kishor launches his new party. The big question is, can it make a difference?

Prashant Kishor has entered Bihar politics with a clear message: his role is that of a guide, not a contender for power. "My work is like that of a potter who shapes the best with the right tools. We aim to bring forward the best people in society," he stated, dismissing speculations about his ambitions for the Chief Minister's post. He reiterated that his newly launched party, 'Jansuraj', will be run by its members, not him, and he would only contest elections if the party deemed it necessary.

Kishor's move has stirred the political waters in Bihar. His party's announcement to contest the upcoming Assembly elections has sparked debates on its potential impact on major alliances, the NDA, and the India Alliance. A former election strategist for both PM Narendra Modi and Bihar CM Nitish Kumar, Kishor has not aligned with the Congress or the RJD. Some political analysts even suggest that his presence might benefit the BJP by weakening the RJD's support base, an idea that



gained traction following the rally and Muslim unity meeting in Patna. Despite his history with the BJP, Kishor has not held back from criticising Nitish Kumar's governance. The Janata Dal (United) (JDU), however, remains firm on its stance, with leaders affirming that Nitish Kumar is still Bihar's true leader. In a recent meeting, JDU's acting national president Sanjay Jha dismissed any doubts about Kumar's relevance, pointing to the party's

resilience despite various narratives circulating before the elections. Ahead of the 2025 Assembly elections, Kishor has strategically targeted the Muslim and backward-caste communities, which represent a significant portion of the electorate—17.7 per cent and 36.1 per cent, respectively. He has announced plans to field more candidates from these communities and has emphasised inclusivity by appointing a Dalit as the party's working president.

This move has been seen as a counter to JDU's long-standing Mahadalit outreach.

Kishor has been preparing the ground for his political venture for the past two years, conducting a 'padyatra' across Bihar and engaging with the public through discussions in villages and towns. Drawing on the philosophies of Gandhi and Tagore, he has sought to resonate with the masses, though his stance on lifting the liquor ban has invited criticism for contradicting Gandhian ideals. The launch of 'Jansuraj' represents Kishor's effort to offer a new political alternative in Bihar. However, significant questions remain: can he address Bihar's pressing issues such as unemployment and crime? Will his strategies translate into a viable solution for the state's enduring challenges? As Bihar gears up for the next election, the answers to these questions will determine Kishor's political fate.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH



FIRST COLUMN

THE ART OF SAYING NO

Setting boundaries allows employees to focus on high-value tasks and protects their well-being



SAKSHI SETHI

In the modern workplace, professionals are often expected to handle a variety of tasks and responsibilities, making it easy to become overwhelmed. While many employees adopt a yes-boss mentality to stay in good favour or advance their careers, the ability to say no can be just as important. Learning to decline certain requests, combined with the effective use of delegation, is the key to managing time, preserving mental well-being and ensuring tasks that are completed efficiently and effectively. Looking at today's fast-paced and highly competitive work environment, learning to say no can be one of the most valuable skills for any professional. While the workplace often rewards the individual with a can-do attitude but the ability to refuse certain tasks or requests is equally essential to maintain productivity, well-being and professional integrity. There is often an underlying fear of being seen as uncooperative, damaging relationships with colleagues, or missing out on future opportunities.

The result of this is an overloaded schedule, which can lead to decreased productivity, poor work quality and even burnout. It can negatively impact both the individual and the organisation, as overstretched employees may struggle to meet deadlines or produce substandard work. The ability to refuse is not just about rejecting requests rather it's about setting boundaries that protect one's time and energy, ensuring that the most important tasks get the attention they deserve. Saying no to unnecessary or low-priority tasks allows professionals to focus on higher-value work, leading to better outcomes, a stronger contribution to the organisation and helps prevent individuals to maintain focus on their core responsibilities.



Despite its clear benefits, saying a no is often easier said than done. Many employees find it difficult to refuse tasks due to cultural or organisational pressures that equate being helpful with taking on as much work as possible. Some even fear that saying no could label them as difficult or unwilling to be a team player, leading to missed promotions or opportunities.

Moreover, individuals often grapple with personal barriers to saying no. Perfectionism, fear of conflict or a desire to please others can make it hard to set boundaries resulting in employees worrying that a simple refusal to additional tasks reflects their inabilities or lack of dedication towards the job. But in reality, saying no in the workplace brings several important benefits, both for the individual and the organisation.

Effective delegation can offer a constructive alternative when refusing a task outright is not an option for it allows work to be distributed across a team, which can increase overall productivity, help build confidence and foster a sense of ownership and responsibility within the team. It even helps concentrate on strategic tasks and high-priority responsibilities that require their attention and most importantly demonstrates trust in the abilities of individuals, which can improve team morale and encourage a more collaborative working environment.

While learning to say no and delegating effectively are two critical skills for success in the workplace. Saying no helps protect time and energy for the most important tasks, while delegation allows leaders to distribute work more effectively and empower others. By mastering the art of saying no and delegating, professionals can not only manage their workloads but also foster a more efficient and empowered team.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Indian immigrants to Canada bear brunt of diplomatic row



K S TOMAR

The fallout threatens to disrupt visa processes, immigration pathways, and opportunities for Indian workers and students in Canada



The fallout of the current diplomatic tensions between India and Canada, particularly in the wake of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's accusations and expulsions of diplomats by both countries, could have significant consequences for Indian citizens working, studying, or planning to immigrate to Canada. Trudeau's Liberal Party has been facing declining support, and his minority government has been kept afloat by the New Democratic Party (NDP), led by Jagmeet Singh, a prominent Sikh politician.

The NDP's support base includes a significant portion of Canada's Sikh population, and Trudeau may be attempting to retain their support by taking a tough stance against India, which is perceived by some Sikhs in Canada as being hostile to their interests. The deteriorating relations between the two countries may affect several key areas:

Impact on Indian Workers in Canada: Indians form a significant part of Canada's skilled workforce, especially in sectors like IT, healthcare, engineering and finance. Over the years, Canada has become a top destination for experienced professionals from India due to its immigration-friendly policies. Visa and Work Permit Issues: While the immediate impact on Indian workers in Canada has been limited, any prolonged diplomatic standoff could lead to delays in the processing of work permits, visa renewals and permanent residency (PR) applications. The processing times might increase, and stricter scrutiny could be imposed.

Uncertainty for Future Migrants: Potential immigrants or those awaiting work permits may face hurdles in terms of visa approvals. If relations continue to sour, Canada might impose tighter immigration controls on Indian workers, which could hamper the flow of professionals into the country.

Impact on Indian Students in Canada: There is large Indian Student Population in Canada as it has become a major destination for Indian students, with nearly 320,000 Indian students enrolled in Canadian universities as of 2023. The country's world-class education system, relatively easier immigration pathways



THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO MITIGATE THE FALLOUT IS THROUGH DIPLOMATIC DIALOGUE. BOTH GOVERNMENTS MUST FIND COMMON GROUND AND WORK TOWARDS DE-ESCALATION. DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS SHOULD PRIORITISE RESOLVING MISUNDERSTANDINGS WHILE PROTECTING THE INTERESTS OF CITIZENS ON BOTH SIDES

post-graduation, and diverse work opportunities have made it attractive for Indian students.

Visa Delays: The current diplomatic tension may lead to delays in student visa approvals or increased scrutiny of applications. While there is no immediate indication that Indian students will face outright rejections, the uncertainty could cause stress and delays in admission procedures, particularly for new applicants. Post-Graduation Work Opportunities: Many Indian students stay in Canada after completing their studies under post-graduation work permits (PGWP) and eventually apply for permanent residency.

The growing tension could complicate this process, making it harder for students to transition smoothly from education to employment.

Impact on Immigration Pathways: Canada's Express Entry programme, which has been highly favourable for Indian professionals and students seeking permanent residency, might slow down or become more stringent if the diplomatic rift deepens.

There could be longer processing times, more rigorous background checks, and even potential policy changes affecting Indian applicants.

Family Reunification: Indian citizens who have family members in Canada and are in the process of family reunification (sponsorship programmes) could face delays in their applications due to the diplomatic standoff.

Trade and Bilateral Agreements: Professional Mobility: If diplomatic tensions continue, professional exchanges, joint ventures, and corporate partnerships involving Indian and Canadian companies might slow down. This could reduce job opportunities for Indian professionals working for Canadian companies in sectors like IT, telecommuni-

cations, and consulting. Impact on New Immigration Streams: The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which India and Canada had been discussing, could be put on hold.

This would affect initiatives meant to streamline immigration for Indian professionals and create pathways for smoother trade and employment relations.

Solutions to Mitigate the Fallout: Diplomatic Resolution: The most effective way to mitigate the fallout is through diplomatic dialogue. Both governments must find common ground and work towards de-escalation. Diplomatic channels should prioritise resolving misunderstandings while protecting the interests of citizens on both sides.

Temporary Shift to Alternative Countries: While waiting for the situation to stabilise, students and professionals might consider alternative countries such as the UK, Australia, or Germany, which offer similar educational and work opportunities for Indian nationals.

Vote Bank Politics and the Sikh Community's Role in Canada: Canada has one of the largest Sikh populations outside of India, with an estimated 770,000 Sikhs, making up about 2 per cent of the total Canadian population.

Many of these Sikhs are concentrated in electoral districts in British Columbia, Ontario, and Alberta. In some constituencies, Sikhs represent a significant voting bloc, which can influence election outcomes.

Upcoming Elections: With elections expected by 2025, Trudeau needs to consolidate his support among key communities. Given the current minority government status, he must rely on alliances, such as with the NDP, and maintain his standing in immigrant-rich constituencies, including those dominated by

Sikhs. His recent diplomatic actions appear designed to shore up this support by aligning himself with issues important to these groups. The Sikh community has historically supported the Liberal Party, particularly under Trudeau. Many high-profile Sikh leaders, including ministers in his cabinet, are from this community.

Thus, maintaining their support is crucial for the Liberal Party's prospects in the next election. **Khalistan Issue:** While not all Sikhs in Canada support the Khalistan movement, those who do have formed influential advocacy groups that have pushed the issue into Canadian politics. Trudeau's overtures to this section of the electorate have been interpreted as efforts to protect his vote base, especially as his government faces increasing political pressure ahead of future elections.

Experts say that Trudeau may also be positioning himself as a defender of Canadian sovereignty by alleging foreign interference, a move that could resonate with voters concerned about national security.

This fits with broader concerns in the West about foreign interference in domestic politics, even though India has categorically denied the allegations.

India-Canada ties are indeed at their lowest ebb following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's accusation that Indian agents were involved in the killing of Khalistani leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar on Canadian soil.

This extreme diplomatic move, which has severely strained relations between the two countries, is seen as a combination of vote bank politics and Trudeau's handling of domestic pressures, especially in light of upcoming elections.

(Writer is a strategic columnist; views are personal)

India's strides towards the design and component ecosystem in telecom

The telecom sector is evolving from a service-led growth model to a robust manufacturing ecosystem

The telecommunications sector in India has grown to become the world's second-largest, contributing around 6.5 per cent to the nation's GDP and emerging as a key economic growth engine. While we take pride in this impressive growth, there is something even more exciting - the rise of the telecom manufacturing ecosystem. India's growth as a telecom equipment manufacturing destination can be attributed to the 'Make-in-India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiatives launched by the Government in recent years.

The Production Linked Incentives (PLI), launched in 2020, and its subsequent amendments in 2022 to facilitate design-led manu-



S P KOCHHAR

facturing at an additional incentive rate with an allocated sum of Rs 4,000 crores also provided a major boost to telecom manufacturing in India. As per the latest update by the Ministry of Communications, sales of telecom equipment have surpassed the Rs 50,000 crore milestone under the PLI scheme, with exports at about Rs 10,500 crore. During this

period, India exported mobile phones worth Rs 1.28 lakh crores and with 300 million units produced, it has emerged as the second-largest producer of mobile phones in the world.

On the telecom equipment front, India has become almost self-reliant in antennae, Gigabit Passive Optical Network (GPON) and Customer Premises Equipment (CPE). As a result, India's status has turned from importing telecom equipment worth Rs 74,116.21 crore in FY 13-14 to exporting equipment worth over Rs 1.49 lakh crore in FY 23-24.

Though we are still importing certain products, the gap between imports and exports has gone down significantly. Apart from fostering self-

reliance, indigenous manufacturing of telecom equipment national security concerns associated with telecom imports.

Manufacturing has emerged as an important aspect of the telecom sector's contribution to the GDP through the creation of substantial employment opportunities across the value chain, from manufacturing to research and development.

So far, telecom manufacturing has created more than 17,800 direct jobs and several indirect jobs. The Indian telecom industry is likely to attract investments in the areas of core competency and cutting-edge technologies; ensure efficiencies and create economies of scale, in turn, enhancing



exports and making India an integral part of the global value chain. Government's Push for 'Atmanirbhar' Under the government's 'Atmanirbharta Abhiyan', the Department of Telecom (DoT) aims to promote the ecosystem for research and development, transforming India into a glob-

al hub of technology development and telecom equipment manufacturing.

The Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia recently announced the Government's ambitions to set up telecommunication equipment manufacturing zones as the country expects more inflow of foreign direct investments (FDI). Prime Minister Narendra Modi too emphasised the need for "Design in India, Design for the World", calling for indigenous design capabilities and urging the citizens to create products that cater to both domestic and international markets. The Government has further established several task forces to ensure the smooth functioning of the telecom ecosystem. These include initiatives for

creating a component ecosystem, developing telecom chips from design to production, training skilled workers and designers, aggregating the demand for manufacturing from different departments and allocating them to eligible manufacturers, and optimising the use of test beds for product testing and certification. Following the Government's decision to allow 100 per cent FDI in telecom, the sector has attracted USD 39 billion in FDI for manufacturing, further boosting the momentum and solidifying India's role as a global telecom manufacturing hub.

Thanks to these concerted efforts, India has been able to bring down the trade deficit in telecom from Rs 68,000 crores to Rs 4,000 crores, over the last

five years. Focus on design and creation of IP is crucial to fulfilling India's ambitions as a product nation as design elements add substantial value to products. To build a strong ecosystem for 5G, DoT has sanctioned 17 companies under design-led manufacturing within the PLI scheme.

Further, global telecom equipment manufacturers like Cisco and Nokia have set up their manufacturing units in India, fostering world-class manufacturing prowess. These efforts, among others, emerge as a testament to the country's indigenous engineering and entrepreneurial capabilities, as well as manufacturing prowess.

(The writer is Director General, COAI; views are personal)

CNG price may go up on input supply cut

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has slashed by up to 20 per cent the supplies of cheaper domestically produced natural gas to city retailers -- a move that may result in Rs 4-6 per kg hike in the price of CNG sold to automobiles, unless excise duty on the fuel is cut, sources said. Natural gas pumped from below the ground and from under the seabed from sites ranging from the Arabian Sea to Bay of Bengal within India is the raw material that is turned into CNG for sale to automobiles and piped cooking gas to households. Production from legacy fields, whose price is regulated by the government and which are used to feed city gas retailers, has been falling by up to 5 per cent annually due to natural decline that has set in. This has led to supply cuts to city gas retailers, four sources in know of the matter said. While the input gas for piped cooking gas that households get is protected, the government has cut supply of raw material for CNG. Gas from legacy fields used to meet 90 per cent of the demand for CNG in May 2023 and has progressively fallen. The supply was cut to just 50.75 per cent of the CNG demand beginning October 16 from 67.74 per cent last month, they said. City gas retailers are forced to buy imported and costlier liquefied natural gas (LNG) to make up for the shortfall, which will lead to a hike in CNG prices that varies from Rs 4-6/kg. The gas from legacy fields is priced at USD 6.50 per million British thermal unit (mBtu) as against imported LNG that costs USD 11-12



per mBtu. For now, the retailers have not raised CNG rates as they are engaged with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas to find a solution, sources said. One of the options is for the government to cut excise duty on CNG. Currently, the central government levies a 14 per cent excise duty on CNG, which translates into Rs 14-15 per kg. If this is cut, the retailers will not have to pass on the increased cost to consumers, they said. CNG price hike is also a political issue since Maharashtra goes to the polls next month and elections are also due in Delhi soon. Delhi and Mumbai are among the biggest CNG markets in the country. Sources said the gas supplies to city gas retailers had to be cut after the government decided to restore fuel to ONGC-promoted OPaL petrochemical plant in Dahej, Gujarat. The plant was originally allocated 4.12 million

standard cubic meters per day of domestically produced natural gas. However, the allocation for various reasons was cut to 1.95 mmscmd and during Covid was halved. Lack of promised domestic gas was the main reason for OPaL running into losses, sources said, adding that the government has now approved a package to revive the unit. This package includes promoter Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) infusing additional Rs 10,501 crore as equity and the unit being made available to domestic producers. The Union Cabinet approved the allocation of 3.44 mmscmd of domestic gas -- mostly coming from new wells of ONGC. This led to lesser gas being available for city gas retailers. Girish Kadam, Senior Vice President & Group Head - Corporate Ratings, Icrs Ltd, said, "The APM gas allocation has been reduced for the CGD sector by 20 per cent of

the current domestic gas consumption by the sector. The reduction in APM allocation will have to be replaced by more expensive HPHT gas or (imported) LNG, which will push the overall gas costs for the sector." To maintain contribution margins at existing levels, CNG prices will have to be increased about Rs 5-5.5 per kg. Indraprastha Gas Ltd, which retails CNG in the national capital, and Mumbai-based Mahanagar Gas Ltd in regulatory filings stated that supplies of domestically produced gas, which was available at a capped rate half of the imported price, has been cut. "The company gets domestic gas allocation for meeting the requirement of CNG sales volumes at the pricing fixed by the government (presently at USD 6.5 per million British thermal unit). Based on communication received by GAIL

(India) Ltd (the nodal agency for domestic gas allocation), this is to inform that there has been a major reduction in domestic gas allocation to the company effective from October 16, 2024," IGL said in a filing. The revised domestic gas allocation to IGL is about 21 per cent less than previous allocation, "which will have an adverse impact on profitability of the company", it said, adding that it is in discussions with key stakeholders to minimise the impact. Separately, MGL said as per Policy Guideline dated August 10, 2022, issued by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, domestically produced Administrative Price Mechanisms (APM) natural gas is to be allocated to city gas distribution (CGD) companies for priority segments, specifically domestic piped natural gas and CNG (transport). The policy states that the supply of domestic gas to CGD entities will be made only up to the quantity available and allocated to GAIL (India) limited for these segments. "...The company is exploring options of sourcing gas through domestically produced high pressure high temperature (HPHT) gas, new well/well intervention gas (NWG) from ONGC and benchmark-linked long-term gas contracts, so as to continue to provide gas to its customers with price stability," MGL added. Adani Total Gas Ltd -- the other significant city gas retailer -- in its filing said the APM priced domestic gas allocation to the company has been reduced by about 16 per cent, effective October 16, 2024, compared to the earlier allocation.

India's bioeconomy hits \$150 billion, innovation key

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's biotechnology sector is witnessing remarkable growth, with the country's bioeconomy now valued at USD 150 billion but there is still significant untapped potential in innovation and product development, which could further elevate India's global standing in the sector, Dr Jitendra Kumar, Managing Director of the government's Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), said. BIRAC is a not-for-profit public sector enterprise set up by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) under the government that supports and promotes innovation, entrepreneurship, and research in the sector. In an interview with PTI, Kumar highlighted India's significant contributions to global healthcare, with 40 per cent of the world's generic medicines being supplied by Indian companies. "We have enormous potential and capability, but when it comes to the value of our bioeconomy, we are ranked 14th globally. This is because much of the value stems from patented, innovative products -- an area where India still needs to improve," Kumar said. "So that emphasis effort from the government and BIRAC side is to actually promote that which is why we will now be promoting innovations... That is why the biotech industry is concentrating on promoting new innovations and promoting and nurturing them," he said. To address this gap, BIRAC is emphasising innovation and nurturing startups through various programmes designed to convert academic



research into marketable products. "Our goal is to promote academic conversion into enterprise. Through initiatives like the Promoting Academic Conversion to Enterprise (PACE), we're helping scientists move their research out of labs and into the market," he said. Since its formation in 2012, BIRAC has played a critical role in creating a biotech innovation ecosystem, he said. Kumar shared that the number of biotech startups in India has grown exponentially from about 300 to over 8,000, with significant government support driving this expansion. Additionally, the bioeconomy has surged from USD 35 billion to USD 150 billion in just a decade. A key achievement of BIRAC, Kumar said, has been the creation of bio-incubation centres across India, providing crucial infrastructure for startups to develop proof-of-concept products. "Startups often face challenges in finding laboratory space. Our bio-incubation centres offer 'plug and play' laboratories, which have made it easier for startups to carry out their research and development," he added. However, despite these advancements, India still lags in research and development (R&D) spending, investing

just 0.8 per cent of its GDP in R&D compared to developed nations like the US and China, which spend over 2 per cent. Kumar stressed that increasing private-sector investment in R&D is essential for India to realise its potential as a global biotech leader. "We are working on programmes that encourage industries to invest in R&D alongside government funding. For instance, our Biotech Industry Partnership Program requires co-funding from industry players," he said. Kumar also acknowledged regulatory challenges faced by biotech startups but emphasised that BIRAC is working to alleviate these issues through regulatory advocacy and policy initiatives. "Many startups face difficulties due to a lack of understanding of regulatory processes. We have created a Regulatory and Policy Advocacy Cell to guide startups and engage with regulatory bodies to ease these challenges," he noted. Kumar said he is optimistic about India's biotech future. The government's commitment to increasing R&D investment through initiatives like the National Research Foundation and its efforts to align regulatory frameworks with global standards will be key drivers of future growth.

Mansukh Mandaviya to launch eShram-One Stop Solution

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya will launch 'eShram-One Stop Solution' for unorganised workers on Monday, the labour ministry said in a statement. EShram-One Stop Solution will act as a mediator to ensure that unorganised workers have easy access to a variety of government schemes/programmes, it stated. This initiative will help unorganised workers become aware of the schemes designed for them, it said. According to the statement, in keeping with the vision of the recent Budget Announcement on developing eShram as a one-stop-solution for unorganised labour sector to have access to various social sector schemes, Union Minister of Labour & Employment and Youth Affairs and Sports will launch the 'eShram-One Stop Solution' on October 21. EShram-One Stop Solution

aims to integrate information of beneficiaries of all social security and welfare schemes meant for unorganised workers in an effective manner through a single platform. EShram as a one-stop-solution will help facilitate identification and implementation of the social security & welfare schemes for the unorganised worker and to help saturation of the schemes in the fast and effective manner. Consequently, 12 schemes of different central ministries/departments have already been integrated/mapped with the eShram. Since the launch of the e-Shram on August 26, 2021, over 30 crore unorganised workers have been enrolled and it has demonstrated widespread appeal among the unorganised labour. This achievement underscores the social impact of the initiative and the government's commitment to support the nation's unorganised workers, it said.

India's solar imports may hit \$30 Billion by 2030

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's target of installing 500 GW of renewable energy by 2030 may push solar equipment import bill to about USD 30 billion per year and increase dependence on Chinese goods, think tank GTRI said in a report on Sunday. It said developing a self-reliant solar manufacturing industry in India will require significant investment to create an integrated supply chain, especially in areas like polysilicon and wafer production. Without this, India may continue to face high import costs and struggle to meet its renewable energy goals. India installed 15 GW of solar capacity in 2023-24, raising the total to 90.8 GW by September, compared to just 2.8 GW in 2014, it said. To meet the government's target of installing 500 GW of renewable energy by 2030, India needs to significantly ramp up installations to 65-70 GW each year, with over 80 per cent of this target expected to come from solar power, according to the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI). "This target seems ambitious,

particularly given India's reliance on imports, which could push solar import to USD 30 billion annually," it said. In 2023-24, India imported USD 7 billion worth of solar equipment, with China supplying 62.6 per cent. China controls 97 per cent of global polysilicon production and 80 per cent of solar module manufacturing, making it difficult for India or any country to compete due to lower prices from China. GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said while initiatives like the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme aims to boost local manufacturing, impact is limited as it relies on large scale use of imported inputs. The report said India's solar manufacturing industry is in early stages, with most projects relying on imported ready-to-use modules. During the last fiscal year, ready-to-use solar modules imports reached USD 4.4 billion. The country also imported solar cells worth USD 1.9 billion and USD 1 billion worth of other essential parts such as inverters, and cables, junction boxes, transformers, and other electrical components needed for solar installations.



"Local production is import-dependent and mainly focuses on the final two stages. 90 per cent of solar manufacturing in India involves assembling solar modules from imported cells with 15 per cent local value addition," it said. It added that few Indian companies manufacture commercial scale solar cells from imported polysilicon or wafers that add 30-40 per cent value locally and no one produces solar cells from scratch-using silica sands. "To cut down on imports, India needs to produce solar cells starting from silica refining, which involves costly and energy-intensive polysilicon production and requires advanced technology," Srivastava said.

He added that cheap imports disrupt local pricing and the country has to also locally produce aluminum frames, glass, and other materials, which will require strong R&D efforts and government support. According to the report, China is India's largest supplier, providing USD 3.89 billion worth of solar cells and modules, which accounts for 62.6 per cent of total imports. It is followed by Vietnam (USD 1.02 billion -- 16.5 per cent), Malaysia (USD 549.8 million -- 8.9 per cent, and Thailand (USD 248.8 million -- 4 per cent). To reduce dependency on Chinese imports, India imposed a 40 per cent customs duty on solar modules and a 25 per cent

duty on solar cells. However, imports from Vietnam, Malaysia, and Thailand are exempt from these tariffs under the India-Asean free trade agreement (FTA), provided they add at least 35 per cent value to the imported inputs used in their export products. The think tank has suggested seven steps to boost domestic manufacturing and cut imports and that includes pushing investments in upstream solar production, from raw materials like silica sand to finished solar panels, reducing dependency on imported wafers, polysilicon, and cells. There is also an urgent need to focus on building local production capacity for aluminum frames, glass, and other critical materials used in solar panel manufacturing. It asked to expand the scope of initiatives like the PLI scheme to cover early-stage solar manufacturing and provide targeted subsidies to attract private investment; and create a skilled workforce capable of managing large-scale solar installations and manufacturing processes. "India should partner with the US, the EU, and Japan to establish large-scale solar manufacturing facilities,

fostering an independent and resilient solar industry," Srivastava said, adding that the country's current import duties on solar modules and cells should be reassessed to ensure they promote local manufacturing without raising costs for consumers. Further he said the global shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy, led by the US, EU, Japan, and India, hinges heavily on solar power, which makes up 50-80 per cent of the renewable energy mix in most countries. China now dominates over 80 per cent of global solar production and exports, controlling 97 per cent of the world's polysilicon supply. In 2023, China exported 227 GW of solar modules worth USD 39.5 billion and 38 GW of solar cells worth USD 4.2 billion, it said. Producing solar panels involves six stages, from mining silica sand to assembling the final panel. Most countries import fully assembled solar modules, preferring this route over building domestic capacity. Due to this dependence, it said the US, the EU, India, and Japan can consider establishing global-scale solar cell manufacturing facilities, starting from scratch.

Automobile exports from India rise 14 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Automobile exports from India in the first six months of the current fiscal year rose 14 per cent year-on-year, led by gains in shipments of passenger vehicles and two-wheelers. According to Siam data, the overall exports in the April-September period stood at 25,28,248 units, up 14 per cent as compared with 22,11,457 units in the year-ago period. "Key markets like Latin America and Africa, which had slowed down for various reasons, have bounced back. This has been the main reason for exports coming back," Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) President Shailesh Chandra said. He was replying to a query on the reasons for the bouncing back of vehicle exports in the April-September period. Various African nations and



other regions faced challenges due to devaluation of currencies. This impacted the vehicle shipments as the nations focussed on import of essential items. Automobile exports declined 5.5 per cent in FY24 due to the monetary crisis in various overseas markets. Overall exports stood at 45,00,492 units in the last fiscal year as compared with

47,61,299 units in FY23. Total passenger vehicle shipments rose 12 per cent year-on-year to 3,76,679 units in the first half of the current fiscal year as against 3,36,754 units in the September quarter of FY24. The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki led the vertical with shipments of 1,47,063 units, an increase of 12 per cent over 1,31,546

units in the year-ago period. Hyundai Motor India exported 84,900 units, a drop of 1 per cent, as against 86,105 units in April-September period of the previous fiscal year. Two-wheeler exports rose 16 per cent year-on-year to 19,59,145 units in the April-September period this fiscal year as compared with 16,85,907 units in the year-ago period. Scooter shipments increased 19 per cent to 3,14,533 units while motorcycle exports rose 16 per cent to 16,41,804 units during the period under review. Commercial vehicle exports rose 12 per cent year-on-year to 35,731 units in the first six months of the fiscal year. Three-wheeler shipments, however, declined 1 per cent during the period to 1,53,199 units as compared with 1,55,154 units in the April-September period of the 2023-24 fiscal year.

Mcap of most valued firms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Four of the top-10 most-valued firms together added Rs 81,151.31 crore in market valuation last week, with ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank emerging as the biggest gainers. Last week, the BSE benchmark declined 156.61 points, or 0.19 per cent. While HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, and the State Bank of India were the gainers, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, Hindustan Unilever, ITC, and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) suffered a combined erosion of Rs 76,622.05 crore from their market valuation. ICICI Bank added Rs 28,495.14 crore, taking its market valuation to Rs 8,90,191.38 crore. The valuation of HDFC Bank jumped Rs 23,579.11 crore to Rs 12,82,848.30 crore. State Bank of India's market

valuation climbed Rs 17,804.61 crore to Rs 7,31,773.56 crore and that of Bharti Airtel went up Rs 11,272.45 crore to Rs 9,71,707.61 crore. On the other hand, the market capitalisation (mcap) of Infosys slumped Rs 23,314.31 crore to Rs 7,80,126.10 crore. The valuation of Reliance Industries declined Rs 16,645.39 crore to Rs 18,38,721.14 crore. The mcap of Hindustan Unilever tumbled Rs 15,248.85 crore to Rs 6,38,066.75 crore and that of TCS diminished by Rs 10,402.01 crore to Rs 14,91,321.40 crore. LIC's valuation went lower by Rs 8,760.12 crore to Rs 5,91,418.91 crore. The mcap of ITC dipped Rs 2,251.37 crore to Rs 6,08,682.29 crore. Reliance Industries continued to remain the most-valued domestic firm.

INBRIEF

KHALSA COLLEGE & SHAHZADA NAND COLLEGE WON CHAMPIONSHIP TROPHIES

AMRITSAR: 'A' Zone Zonal Youth Festival of Amritsar district colleges affiliated to the Guru Nanak Dev University concluded in Dasmesh Auditorium of the University. In 'A' Division, Khalsa College, Amritsar bagged the first position, Guru Nanak Dev University secured the second position.

BHAIRABI - SAIRANG RAILWAY PROJECT PROGRESSING TOWARDS COMPLETION

MALIGAON: Indian Railways is significantly contributing towards transforming North-eastern states by executing several new railway line projects. The Bhairabi-Sairang New Line Railway Project to connect the capital of the North-eastern state of Mizoram to the rest of the country is one such project which is at an advance stage of completion.

FINANZA 2024 CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD INVESTOR WEEK

AMRITSAR: The Dinero Finance Club of University Business School of Guru Nanak Dev University organised FINANZA 2024, an inter-department Finance Fest in association with Career Launcher and Black Swan Stock Market Academy.



THE REVELATIONS OF 'THE LIVING PLANET' REPORT 2024'

With population as a threat in Asia including India and the Pacific, recorded 60% average decline in wildlife writes ABHI SINGHAL

World Wide Fund's 15th biennial edition of the 'The Living Planet Report 2024' (LPR) reveals that there has been a catastrophic 73% decline in the average size of monitored wildlife (mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and fish) populations over just 50 years (1970-2020). The Living Planet Report (LPR) is a study of trends in global biodiversity and the health of the planet. There has been a strong decline seen, with the highest in the freshwater populations (85%), followed by terrestrial (69%) and marine (56%) populations. Declines in wildlife populations can act as an early warning indicator of increasing extinction risk and the potential loss of healthy ecosystems. When ecosystems are damaged, they can become more vulnerable to tipping points - being pushed beyond a critical threshold resulting in substantial and potentially irreversible change. There have been



...India is home to the largest population of wild tigers globally and the All-India Tiger Estimation 2022 recorded a minimum of 3,682 tigers, a significant increase from the 2,967 estimated in 2018

India i.e. the white-rumped vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*), Indian vulture (*Gyps indicus*), and slender-billed vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*) between 1992 and 2002. The research tells that despite a decline in many wildlife populations in India, some populations have stabilised and shown recovery, largely due to proactive government initiatives, effective habitat management, and robust scientific monitoring, combined with community engagement and public support. It found that India is home to the largest population of wild tigers globally and the All-India Tiger Estimation 2022 recorded a minimum of 3,682 tigers, a significant increase from the 2,967 estimated in 2018. On being asked if with such circumstances, we still have a chance of conserving the endangered wildlife species, the LPR panel said that it depends a lot on the species and the status of the species. They have seen it with some species like with the rhinos, tigers and if the action comes on the right time, at the right scale, and if the species itself is a species which can biologically recover, then we will see that change. The efforts need to be increased, and also some bit of scientific monitoring of this population. Long term monitoring is required, because currently, most of the monitoring that is happening there, they're voluntary or NGO actions. The LPR states that the only way to make progress on the global goals of halting and reversing nature loss by 2030 and addressing the drivers of climate change is by transforming our energy, food and finance systems. At the same time, we must scale-up effective and inclusive conservation action, taking account of the rights, needs and values of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Ecosystem based adaptation (EbA) - approaches which benefit biodiversity, climate and human well-being at the same time - hold enormous potential.



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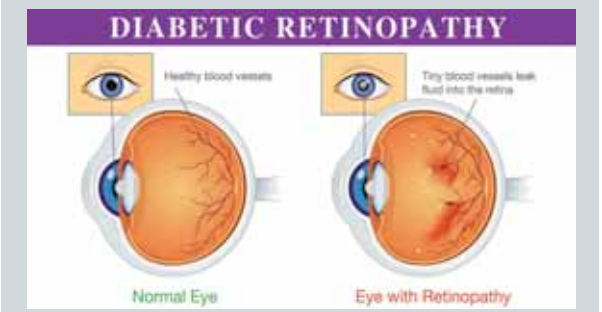
DIABETIC RETINOPATHY: A SERIOUSLY OVERLOOKED DISEASE

Early screening can prevent vision loss in diabetic patients, says ABHI SINGHAL

There are over 101 million people affected with diabetes in India and the number is expected to grow to 225 million by 2030. Studies also predict that one in five adults will be diagnosed with diabetes in their working age in coming years. This has resulted in the simultaneous and sharp rise in the prevalence of diabetes-related preventable vision loss. Diabetes-related elevated blood sugar is the cause of diabetic retinopathy. Over time, high blood sugar levels can harm your retina, which is the portion of your eye that senses light and uses the optic nerve (located in the back of the eye) to transmit signals to your brain. All over the body, blood vessels are harmed by diabetes. One might notice changes in their vision, like trouble reading or seeing faraway objects as a symptom. In the later stage blood vessels in the retina begin to leak into the vitreous, the gel-like fluid that fills your eye, as the disease progresses. To combat this issue the Vitreo Retinal Society of India (VRSI) and Research Society for the Study of Diabetes in India (RSSDI) have collaborated to formulate first-of-its-kind Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Guidelines. These guidelines from VRSI and RSSDI will help every physician and diabetologists in India to educate their patients regarding diabetic retinopathy. The Diabetic retinopathy screening guidelines for physicians in India: position statement by the Vitreoretinal Society of India (VRSI) and the Research Society for the Study of Diabetes in India (RSSDI). The Type 1 diabetes mellitus should be given



initial eye examination recommended 5 years following diagnosis of type 1 diabetes mellitus. Type 2 diabetes mellitus should be recommended for initial eye examination at the time of diagnosis of type 2 diabetes mellitus. The patients with pregnancy with diabetes mellitus the eye examination prior to conception and early during 1st trimester is recommended and follow-up should be individualised based on severity and recent changes in retinopathy. "It is important to realise that earlier, diabetes was considered a disease of the elite, but it is no longer like that. It is equally affecting all stratas of the society. We are having an equal prevalence of diabetes, both in rural and urban settings of our country," said Dr. Manisha Agarwal, General Secretary, Vitreoretinal Society of India. A diabetologist plays an important role in timely screening for diabetic retinopathy and referring to an ophthalmologist for its management. With the increasing prevalence of diabetes and the associated risk of diabetic retinopathy, early screening and timely interventions for the same are crucial. It's essential for individuals with diabetes to schedule regular eye exams and for healthcare providers to follow the VRSI and RSSDI guidelines. Together, we can prevent vision loss and improve the quality of life for millions of people in India.



WHY AVOCADOS

Everything you need to know!



BY KAVITA DEVGAN

With the search for healthy foods picking up pace, it is no surprise that we are looking ever more intently at what we are eating. That search has taken us far and wide - and one of the emerging options is something that is quite flavourful as well! Some Indians are familiar with the trendy avocado toast and its nutty deliciousness, but the benefits of the avocado go well beyond. There is no doubt about the fact that avocados are delicious. But how much do we know about this fruit? Avocado (*Persea americana*) a native of South America, also known as alligator pear or avocado pear, is actually a large berry with a rather oily exterior containing a single large stone. Domesticated and harvested locally in Latin America for thousands of years, it comes in a number of variants that range in size, colour, and texture. The trees are native to the tropics, and are today cultivated across continents. What has led to the popularity of the fruit is its soft buttery texture combined with their unusual alluring taste. However, it also packs

AVOCADOS ARE ALSO A SOURCE OF 'GOOD FATS', AND ITS REGULAR CONSUMPTION IS LINKED TO LOWER LEVELS OF BAD (LDL) CHOLESTEROL. IT ALSO CONTAINS A LOT OF FIBRE, WHICH IS GOOD FOR DIGESTIVE HEALTH. AVOCADOS ALSO CONTAIN MINERALS SUCH CALCIUM, MAGNESIUM, AND SODIUM, ALL ESSENTIAL FOR THE HUMAN BODY'S HEALTH

a lot of benefits that complement its flavour. They deliver multiple disease-fighting compounds such as lutein, beta-carotene (precursor to vitamin A), and vitamin E. Results have shown that 1 serving of avocado has 114 calories, and is a rich source of several B vitamins (such as pantothenic acid) and vitamin K, with moderate contents of vitamin C, vitamin E, and potassium. Avocados are also a source of 'good fats', and its regular consumption is linked to lower levels of bad (LDL) cholesterol. It also contains a lot of fibre, which is good for digestive health. Avocados also contain minerals such calcium, magnesium, and sodium, all essential for the human body's health. It is also packed with antioxidants. The human heart needs special attention, and avocados are fortunately a fabulous heart-friendly fruit. They are loaded with health-promoting MUFA

(Monounsaturated fatty acids) that are great for our heart, and potassium, a mineral that helps regulate blood pressure, and even the elusive folate, which again is a wonderful heart health nutrient. Nutrient-rich avocado oil has a multitude of uses for salads or cooking and is also being used increasingly in cosmetics and soap products. The most common way to have it however remains as a nutritious addition to a meal. So next time instead of just eyeing this perfect blend of taste and health on other people's Instagram feeds, or at the supermarket, get them home and cook with them. Go on and make the most of avocado's health.

The author is a leading dietitian and holistic health consultant.



Natasha Moor in collaboration with Nykaa at her masterclass in New Delhi.

