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INDIA-QATAR TRADE AGREEMENT
MUST BE APPROACHED WITH
CAUTION: GTRI

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BJP leader and Delhi Chief Minister-designate Rekha Gupta after BJP legislature party meeting, at the Delhi BJP party office. Photos Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

Rekha Gupta is Delhi Chief Minister

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI
The suspense over Delhi's new chief minister ended on Wednesday as the BJP on Wednesday named first-time MLA Rekha Gupta, 50, as the new chief minister of Delhi, marking the BJP's comeback in the national capital after 27 years. She will be the fourth chief minister of Delhi after Sushma Swaraj, Sheila Dikshit and Atishi and the only woman chief minister among the states being ruled by the BJP at present. Gupta is an old Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), hand who was part of the Sangh's students' wing Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad. The decision was taken at a meeting of the party's legislature party on Wednesday evening in the presence of Central observers Ravi Shankar Prasad and O P Dhankar where she was chosen as the Leader of the House in the Delhi Assembly. The new BJP government, led by Gupta, will be sworn in at a grand ceremony at the Ramlila Maidan on Thursday afternoon in the presence of Prime

Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, chief ministers from the party-ruled states and many celebrities. The formal announcement came from the X handle of the Delhi BJP. "Hearty congratulations and best wishes to Mrs. Rekha Gupta ji on being elected the leader of the Delhi BJP Legislative Party. We have full faith that the state will progress under your leadership," read a rough translation of their Hindi post. After appointed as the Leader of the House of the BJP's legislative party, Chief Minister designate Gupta along with six ministers went to Raj Niwas to stake claim to form the government. She was accompanied by state BJP observers Ravi Shankar Prasad and OP Dhankar along with city BJP president Virendra Sachdeva, and Delhi MPs including Bansuri Swaraj, Praveen Khandelwal and Kamaljeet Sehrawat. BJP national vice-president Baijayant Jay Panda was also present at the Raj Niwas. Wishes poured in from across the political spectrum for the 50-year-old advocate, with Union ministers and

political rivals extending their regards. Union Home Minister Amit Shah congratulated Gupta, backing the BJP government under her leadership to "work day and night to fulfill the hopes and expectations with which the mothers and sisters of Delhi have blessed the BJP". The senior BJP leader also reposed full faith that she will "work with dedication in the direction of the resolution taken by Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji to make Delhi one of the top capitals of the world". Soon after the announcement, Gupta thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said she would work with full honesty, integrity and dedication for the welfare, empowerment and overall development of every citizen of Delhi. "I am fully committed to this important opportunity to take Delhi to new heights," Gupta said in a post on X. "I express my heartfelt gratitude to all the top leadership for trusting me and entrusting me with the responsibility of the post of chief minister. This trust and support of yours has given me new energy and inspiration."

Trump bellows at India



President Donald Trump speaks at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla. PTI

PTI ■ WASHINGTON
US President Donald Trump has said that he made it clear to Prime Minister Narendra Modi that India will not be spared from Washington's reciprocal tariffs, emphasising that "nobody can argue with me" on tariff structure. Trump made these remarks during an interview with Fox News' Sean Hannity recently. Fox News aired a joint television interview with President Trump and billionaire Elon Musk on Tuesday night. On February 13, hours before Prime Minister Modi's bilateral meeting with Trump in the White House, the US President announced reciprocal tariffs. Under the plan, the Trump administration "will work strenuously to counter non-reciprocal trading arrangements with trading partners by determining the equivalent of a reciprocal tariff with respect to each foreign trading partner." During the interview with Hannity,

Trump reiterated his stance on existing tariff structures between the US and its partners, including India. "I told Prime Minister Modi yesterday - he was here - I said, 'Here's what we're going to do: reciprocal. Whatever you charge, I'm charging,'" President Trump said. "He (Modi) goes, 'No, no, I don't like that.' 'No, no, whatever you charge, I'm going to charge.' I'm doing that with every country." India has very strong tariffs on certain imports from the US. Like in the automobile sector, India charges 100 per cent. Musk said, "It's 100 per cent - auto imports are 100 per cent." "Yeah, that's peanuts. So, much higher. And - and others too. I said, 'Here's what we're going to do: reciprocal. Whatever you charge, I'm charging,'" Trump said. Under the reciprocal tariff system, the US would impose the same level of tariffs on Indian imports as India does on American goods.

"Nobody can argue with me," President Trump insisted. "If I said 25 per cent, they'd say, 'Oh, that's terrible.' I don't say that anymore... Because I say, 'Whatever they charge, we'll charge.' And you know what? They stop." During Modi's visit to the US, while responding to a question on reciprocal tariffs on India, Trump said, "India has been, to us, just about the highest tariffed nation anywhere in the world. They've been very strong on tariffs, and I don't blame them, necessarily, but it's a different way of doing business. It's very hard to sell to India because they have trade barriers and very strong tariffs." "We are right now a reciprocal nation. We are going to - if it's India or if it's somebody else with low tariffs, we're going to have the same. We're going to have whatever India charges, we're charging them. Whatever another country charges, we're charging them. So, it's called reciprocal, which I think is a very fair way. We didn't have that. During his first term as the US president, Trump described India as a "tariff king" and in May 2019, terminated India's preferential market access - Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) - to the US, alleging India has not given the United States "equitable and reasonable access to its markets." Also, during the interview, Musk claimed that two NASA astronauts, including Indian-origin astronaut Sunita Williams, currently stuck in space, had been left there by the Biden administration "for political purposes." SpaceX, also founded and owned by Musk, has been contracted to bring Williams and Butch Wilmore home. Musk said the rescue attempts would be being made in less than a month. "They were left up there for political reasons, which is not good," he said. "Okay, it's not good... Well, we don't want to be complacent, but we have brought astronauts back from the space station many times before, and always with success." Trump chimed in "They didn't have the go-ahead with Biden. He was going to leave them in space."

Yogi counters pollution board claims of Ganga water unsafe

BISWAJEET BANERJEE/PNS ■ LUCKNOW/NEW DELHI
Amid claims by Central Government pollution body that the present condition of Ganga water in ensuing Maha Kumbh may contain high levels of faecal bacteria, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday countered by assuring the Sangam water in Prayagraj is safe for bathing and other rituals. A sort of controversy erupted over the claims by Central government pollution body which reported the Ganga water at Triveni Sangam, where lakhs of people are taking a holy dip every day during the ongoing Maha Kumbh, is currently unsafe for bathing. Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data informed the National Green Tribunal that Sangam water at Maha Kumbh exceeds the prescribed limit for biological oxygen demand (BOD), a key parameter to determine water quality. BOD refers to the amount of oxygen required by aerobic microorganisms to break down organic material in a water body. A higher BOD level indicates more organic content in the water. River water is considered fit for bathing if the BOD level is less than 3 milligrams per litre. In a report submitted to the NGT the CPCB said the river water quality did not meet bathing standards during monitoring on January 12-13 at most locations in Prayagraj. According to Uttar Pradesh government officials, 10,000 to 11,000 cuces of water is being released into the Ganga to



Puja material and other waste being collected at the Sangam for their disposal, during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj. PTI

ensure it meets bathing standards. Mahakumbh Nagar is the world's largest temporary city, accommodating 50 lakh to 1 crore devotees at any given time. These pilgrims generate at least 16 million litres of faecal waste and 240 million litres of greywater daily from activities like cooking, washing, and bathing. Yogi during the Budget Session in UP assembly countered and said water at the Sangam is fit for both bathing and ritual drinking (aachman) as confirmed by some recent reports. He informed the Uttar Pradesh Control Board and the CPCB are continuously monitoring the water quality at the Sangam. He also trained his guns at Opposition Samajwadi Party, saying the condition of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers was so poor

while it was in power that the Prime Minister of Mauritius refused to take a dip during the 2013 Kumbh. "This time, 81 drains have been tapped, treating 261 MLD (million liters per day) of sewage. In January and February, fecal coliform levels at the Sangam nose were found to be within the acceptable range, below 2,500 MPN per 100 ml, according to the UP Pollution (Control) Board," he said, according to an official statement. "The Central Pollution (Control) Board has also confirmed this in its report. The UP and Central Pollution Control Boards are continuously monitoring water quality, and recent reports confirm that the water at the Sangam is now fit for both bathing and ritual use," Adityanath told the state Assembly.

CBI arrests five rail officers in job bribery case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
The CBI has arrested five railway officers, including two of the Indian Railway Personnel Service posted at the Vadodra Division, for alleged bribery in favouring candidates in departmental examination, officials said Wednesday. The federal probe agency seized 650 grams of gold and Rs 5 lakh cash during its searches at 11 locations, including in Gujarat's Vadodra, a CBI spokesperson said. The CBI has arrested 2008-batch IRPS officer Sunil Bishnoi posted as a senior divisional personnel officer in Vadodra, 2018-batch IRPS officer Ankush Wasan, posted as divisional personnel officer there, Deputy Chief Commercial Manager Sanjay Kumar Tiwari posted at Mumbai's Churchgate, Deputy Station Superintendent Dinesh Kumar posted at Divisional Railway Hospital in Ahmedabad, officials said. The agency has also arrested Mukesh Meena in the case, they said. The CBI swung into action after registering an FIR on Tuesday against Wasan, Tiwari, Sinha and Meena on allegations that these officials in conspiracy with a private person.

HC slams railways over ticket sales

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Questioning the rationale of selling excess tickets, the Delhi High Court on Wednesday sought the response of Indian Railways on a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking safety measures to prevent stampedes similar to the one which happened recently at New Delhi Railway Station. During the hearing of the PIL, the Bench of Chief Justice DK Upadhyay and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela questioned the Railways for selling tickets in excess of the number of passengers that can be accommodated in a coach. "If you fix the number of passengers to be accommodated in a coach then why do you sell, why the number of tickets sold exceed that number? That is a problem," the Court said. The judges also referred to Section 57 of the Railways Act which mandates that the administration shall fix the maximum number of passengers which may be carried in a compartment. "If you implement a simple thing in a positive manner in letter and spirit, such situation can be avoided. On rush days you may increase that number to accommodate the rush depending on exigencies which keep on arriving from time to time. But not fixing the strength to be accommodated in a coach, this provision appears to have been neglected all along," observed the Court. The Court was hearing a petition moved by Arth Vidhi, an organisation of a group of lawyers, entrepreneurs and others professionals, in the backdrop of the recent stampede which resulted into death of at least 18 people at New Delhi Railway Station, overcrowded due to the ongoing rush of people to take part in the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. The PIL filed through advocate Aditya Trivedi said that various legal provisions and rules under the Railways Act should be implemented properly to prevent such incidents in future. "This petition highlights gross negligence and complete failure of administration that caused the stampede that occurred on February 15 at New Delhi Railway Station," the counsel told the Court. Justice Gedela pointed out that measures have been taken subsequently. "Are you aware of how many lakhs of people were at the station that day? Infrastructurally it may not be possible to control that kind of crowd. The subsequent measures were taken. It is not something like a railway accident to claim negligence." The petitioner's counsel insisted on the seriousness of the issue and highlighted the failures of Railways. "We highlight Section 57 and 157 of Railways Act. Airports have mechanisms to know how many people are there. Indian Railways has no such mechanism. There is no notification or circular for unreserved class. If Railways is not following its own rules, then how can we expect security," he said. "If we go to station right now, we will see a lot of crowd without platform ticket and train ticket. We don't see any compliance with the Railways Circular requiring platform ticket. If Railways had complied with its own rules, a lot of things could have been prevented. We have come in larger public interest. I am not commenting on infrastructure or any policy," he argued.



Passengers at ticket counters of the New Delhi Railway Station. PTI

Maha economic Sangam at Kumbh raises UP's revenue

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI
The Maha Kumbh festival in the holy city of Prayagraj is estimated to have generated over Rs 3 Lakh Crore (\$360 Billion) in business through goods and services, making it one of India's largest economic events. According to the Uttar Pradesh government, more than 53 Crore devotees have already taken a holy dip in the sacred waters, with millions continuing to visit daily. It is projected that nearly 60 Crore people will participate in the ritual by February 26. The Mahakumbh, which occurs once every 144 years, is being held in

Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26, attracting millions of devotees over the six-week period. According to the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) Secretary General and Chandni Chowk MP Praveen Khandelwal, the Mahakumbh is boosting local trade with a surge in demand for Maha Kumbh-themed products such as diaries, calendars, jute bags, and stationery. "Due to the unprecedented enthusiasm across the country, it is now expected that nearly 60 Crore people will participate in the Maha Kumbh by February 26, leading to a massive business turnover

exceeding Rs 3 Lakh Crore. Sales are reported to have increased due to meticulous branding. It also proves that India's sanatana economy has deep-rooted strength, playing a significant role in the country's overall economic framework," Khandelwal added. This has provided a significant boost to Uttar Pradesh's economy and created new business opportunities. Before the commencement of the Maha Kumbh, initial estimates was projected the arrival of 40 Crore people and business transactions worth around Rs 2 Lakh Crore. According to the Uttar Pradesh government, over 53 Crore



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath speaks during the Budget session of the state Legislative Assembly, in Lucknow. PTI

devotees have already taken a holy dip in the sacred waters, with millions continuing to visit daily. Highlighting the economic impact of the Mahakumbh, Khandelwal noted that several business sectors have witnessed large-scale economic activities, including hospitality and accommodation; food and beverage sector; transport and logistics; religious attire; puja samagri, and handicrafts, textiles, apparel and other consumer goods; healthcare and wellness services; media, advertising and entertainment; civic services; telecom, mobile, AI-based technology, CCTV cameras, and other equipment. Khandelwal further pointed out that the economic benefits of Mahakumbh are not limited to Prayagraj. Cities and towns within a 150 km radius have also experienced a significant business surge, strengthening local economies. Additionally, Ayodhya, Varanasi, and other religious destinations have seen an increase in pilgrim visits, as devotees travel for the darshan and worship of Lord Ram in Ayodhya, Lord Shiva in Varanasi, and others in the nearby districts. This has further fueled massive economic activities in these areas.

ED arrests NRHM scam accused Pramod Singh after 12 summons

PNS : RANCHI

The Enforcement Directorate today arrested Pramod Singh, a big coal businessman from Dhanbad, accused in the National Rural Health Mission. Pramod Singh was issued 12 summons by the ED in the NRHM scam of Rs 6.97 crore, but he did not appear before the ED, so the ED finally arrested him.



remand of seven days. The special PMLA court ordered Pramod Singh to be given to the ED on a remand of three days. In this case related to NRHM, the ED raided

Pramod Singh's house in Dhanbad and his driver Ajit Singh's residence in Bhuli. Pramod Singh was earlier working in the health department. But now he is a big coal businessman and he is said to be the kingpin of the scam.

Pramod Singh was earlier working in the health department. But now he is a big coal businessman and he is said to be the kingpin of the scam. Jharkhand's Anti Corruption Bureau had filed an FIR against 10 people after the case of embezzlement of more than 6

crore 97 lakh 43 thousand rupees allocated for PHC (Primary Health Center) in the year 2011-12 under the National Rural Health Mission was detected.

It is alleged that they spent the amount allocated for PHC by getting it transferred to their accounts. Pramod Singh worked on contract in the health department and the money of 10 PHC accounts was transferred to his accounts. Money was also transferred to the account of his wife Priya Singh in an illegal manner.



Sunil Patnaik, Executive Vice President, Institutional & Government Banking Head (Jharkhand and Odisha) along with Shishir Kumar Sarangi paid a courtesy visit to Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar today at Raj Bhavan on Wednesday. PNS

3 matches played under the 82nd All India Men's Railway Hockey Championship

PNS : RANCHI

The 82nd All India Men's Railway Hockey Championship 2024-25 (League Stage) is being organized by South Eastern Railway Sports Association, Ranchi at Sersa Astroturf Hockey Stadium, Hatia from 17 February 2025 to 22 February 2025.

Today, on 19 February 2025, three matches under this championship were played at the Astroturf Hockey Stadium in Hatia between Central Railway, Mumbai vs North Western Railway, Rajasthan at 07:30 am, South Eastern Railway vs Integral Coach Factory, Chennai at 09:00 am and Rail Coach Factory, Kapurthala vs North Central Railway, Prayagraj at 15:00 pm. In the first match, Central Railway, Mumbai defeated North Western Railway, Rajasthan by 11-0 goals and in the second match, South Eastern Railway defeated Integral Coach Factory, Chennai by 4-1 goals and the third match was drawn 2-2 between Rail Coach Factory, Kapurthala and North Central Railway, Prayagraj. During the match, Senior Divisional Commercial Manager cum Divisional Sports Officer Nishant Kumar, Additional Chief Medical Superintendent Dr. Brajesh Sahu, Senior Divisional Finance Manager Laxman Kumar, Private Secretary to Divisional Railway Manager, (Gazetted) cum Assistant Divisional Sports Officer Ashutosh Kumar Sinha, Secretary of SERSA Ranchi Om Prakash Thakur and a large number of sports loving spectators were present in the hockey stadium.

Nishikant's 'Ailcha, Belcha, and Chamcha' jibe at Rahul

PNS : RANCHI

The new Chief Election Commissioner of India has been selected. Gyanesh Kumar has become the first Chief Election Commissioner to be appointed under the new law related to the appointment of Election Commissioners. Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi targeted the Modi government regarding this. He posted an X and alleged that the Supreme Court order was violated during the selection of the Election Commissioner. Now BJP MP Nishikant Dubey has given a statement regarding this. Dr. Nishikant Dubey, MP from Godda Lok Sabha seat of Jharkhand, shared Rahul Gandhi's post on social media X and wrote, "The cat went to Haj after eating a hundred rats? Congress, which made spades, shovel and spoons Election Commissioners for their entire lives, talks about dignity. Oh God, this terrible Kaliyug."



He further criticized the Congress party, saying, "A party that has appointed 'Ailcha, Belcha, and Chamcha' as Election Commissioners throughout its history now talks about dignity—Oh God, what a terrible Kaliyug!"

Dubey's remarks came after Rahul Gandhi accused the Modi government of violating Supreme Court orders in the selection of Gyanesh Kumar as the new CEC. In a meeting of the selection committee chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Kumar was appointed to the top election post. However, the Congress party has raised strong objections to the process.

In a post on X, Rahul Gandhi alleged that the government ignored the Supreme Court's directives by removing the Chief Justice of India from the selection committee. He stated that during the committee meeting, he submitted a dissent note to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, emphasizing that a free and fair Election Commission requires an independent selection process, free from executive interference.

Rahul further claimed that the Modi government's actions have raised concerns among millions of voters about the integrity of India's electoral process. He stressed his responsibility, as Leader of the Opposition, to uphold the ideals of Babasaheb Ambedkar and the founding leaders by holding the government accountable.

Additionally, he criticized the timing of the appointment, calling it "insulting and improper" for the Prime Minister and Home Minister to make a midnight decision while the Supreme Court is set to hear a case challenging the selection process within the next 48 hours.

Mukhiyas should monitor schools' activities at social level: DC



Rancho DC Manjunath Bhajantri during the one-day program "Mukhiya Sammelan" for the orientation of all the Mukhiyas of the district in the auditorium of Amar Shaheed Thakur Vishwanath Shahdev District Chief Minister Excellence School in Ranchi on Wednesday. PNS

PNS : RANCHI

Rancho Deputy Commissioner (DC), Manjunath Bhajantri has appealed to various Mukhiyas of the district to monitor the activities of the school at the social level.

Bhajantri Amar Shaheed Thakur Vishwanath Shahdev attended the one-day program "Mukhiya Sammelan" for the orientation of all the Mukhiyas of the district in the auditorium of District Chief Minister Excellence School, Ranchi. The Deputy Commissioner specifically

told all the Mukhiyas that all of you should make your important contribution in the development of education. Also, while discussing how to improve the education of the school, how to enroll 100 percent children, as well as the work being done in the schools from the funds of the Mukhiyas, he asked them to contribute. Along with this, Bhajantri said that all the Mukhiyas should socially monitor the activities of the school under the New Education Policy 2020. He said in the pro-

gram that it is the moral responsibility of the head of all the Panchayats to ensure that all the children of the Panchayat go to school 100 percent. Also, all the concerned officials and teachers should pay special attention to ensure that all the schools in the district get quality education.

While honoring 19 Mukhiyas for their important contribution in the development of education, the Deputy Commissioner said that with your participation many chil-

children are going to school, it was often seen that in rural areas children did not go to school and started working with their family in other works. "Due to which such children were not able to get proper education. But with everyone's participation, now such children are also going to school. Due to which there has been a lot of change in education. He also told all the Mukhiyas that all of you should play your part so that I will be very happy to honor you in the near future," he said. The District Council President and Vice President also gave guidance to all the honorable Mukhiyas for the development of education. District Education Superintendent Rancho, Badal Raj, District Council President, Nirmala Bhagat, Vice President, Veena Choudhary and the Mukhiyas of all the elected blocks of the district, District Panchayati Raj Officer Rancho, Rajesh Kumar Sahu, District Education Superintendent Rancho, Badal Raj, all the project officers and employees of the District Project Office were present in the program.

CCL Director Personnel receives top 'HR Innovator' award



PNS : RANCHI

Director (Personnel), Central Coalfields Limited (CCL), Harsh Nath Mishra was conferred with the top "HR Innovator" award for outstanding innovation and

visionary leadership in Human Resource Management (HR) at the World HRD Congress held in Mumbai.

This prestigious honour underlines his continuous efforts, commitment to innovation and his influential role in leading the organization towards excellence.

Under Mishra's leadership, CCL has taken impressive initiatives in various areas of HR and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which are not only developing an inclusive and strong work culture within the organization but are also creating a wide social impact.

Under the Director Personnel's guidance, CCL has implemented many progressive policies in the field of human resource development, in which special attention has been given to employee empowerment, leadership development,

skill enhancement and creation of positive environment at the workplace. Along with this, under CSR, CCL has implemented various schemes related to education, health, skill development and women empowerment. Effective implementation is being done, due to which the deprived sections of the society are getting direct benefits.

Under his leadership, CCL has set new benchmarks of excellence by adopting the latest practices in HR management.

This achievement of Harsh Nath Mishra is a reflection of his unwavering commitment towards the organization, leadership skills and innovative thinking. His working style has given a new direction to CCL in the field of human resource management and has led it towards sustainable development.

Governor asks youth to help uplift Divyangjan



PNS: RANCHI

Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar, while interacting with the children of 'Pahla Kadam Divyang School' located in Dhanbad and the members of the school family at Raj Bhavan today, said that he has visited and observed this school. The Governor said that the Central Government is constantly striving for

the empowerment and overall development of the Divyangjan.

The Prime Minister addressed them as 'Divyang', which reveals his commitment towards the Divyangjan. He called upon the youth to play an active role in the upliftment of the Divyangjan and cooperate in the efforts to make them self-reliant.

The school management informed that this institute was started with only two children and today it is working to make the Divyang children self-reliant through various training programs. The students of the school have displayed their talent by participating in various competitions at the national and state level. On this occasion, the children presented a dance on the folk song of Jharkhand, which was appreciated by all.

The Governor appreciated the efforts of the school and wished all the children a bright future.

New Dress Code for Police in State

PNS : RANCHI

DGP Anurag Gupta has implemented a new dress code for police officers and jawans. Now no policeman will be able to wear colourful sweaters or jackets with the uniform. Everyone will have to wear only khaki coloured woolen sweaters and jackets.

The DGP has ordered that police officers and personnel will wear only the prescribed khaki coloured sweaters or jackets in the winter season. Apart from this, the jacket should also have a badge according to their post. SPs and officers of all districts and units will ensure compliance of this order. If any policeman does not follow this rule, disciplinary action will be taken against him.

The order also stated that during the tour and on social media, many policemen are seen wearing sweaters, jackets and shoes of different colors, which is inappropriate. Uniform allowance is given to policemen by the government, despite this they are not following the prescribed dress code. For this reason, the rules have now been strictly implemented.

The DGP has also clarified that it will be mandatory for policemen to wear name plates with uniforms during duty, especially when they are interacting with the general public. This will make it easier for people to know who the policeman in front of them is and which unit he is associated with.



Pooja Singhal among 15 IAS officers get new posts

ED has strongly opposed the reinstatement and allotment of new posting to Singhal who had spent 28 months in judicial custody



PNS : RANCHI

Jharkhand cadre IAS officer Pooja Singhal has got a posting. She has been appointed as the Secretary of the Department of Information Technology and e-Governance. She will also have the additional charge of Chief Executive Officer of Jharkhand Communication Network Limited. On Tuesday, the Department of Personnel, Administrative Reforms and Official Language issued its notification. The Personnel Department has issued an order for the transfer posting of 15 officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). 6 officers who were recently promoted as Indian Administrative Service have also got postings. The decision, taken

despite legal objections from the Enforcement Directorate (ED), has sparked considerable debate in political and administrative circles.

A 2000-batch IAS officer, Singhal was recently reinstated after spending nearly 28 months in judicial custody over her alleged involvement in the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) scam in Khunti district. The ED had arrested her in connection with a money laundering case, accusing her of amassing disproportionate assets through fraudulent means. The agency (ED) strongly opposed her reinstatement, arguing before the court that permitting Singhal to hold a sensitive government position could allow her to influence evidence and witnesses in the ongoing trial.

Despite this, the Hemant Soren-led Jharkhand government went ahead with her appointment, raising concerns about political patronage and administrative propriety. The reshuffle also includes other significant changes. The Planning and Development Department has been removed from the portfolio of Principal Secretary and 1996 batch IAS officer Mast Ram Meena, who will now focus solely on the Drinking Water and Sanitation Department.

Additionally, Secretary of Transport Department and 2005 batch IAS officer Kripinand Jha has been appointed as Secretary for ST/SC, Minorities, and Backward Class Department, while Vipra Bhal, an IAS officer of 2006 batch and previously the Secretary of Information Technology and E-Governance, has been moved to the Transport Department.

Other notable changes include: Arwa Rajkamal, Secretary of Building Construction, has been given the additional charge of Secretary of Mining and Geological Department, Industry, and Jharkhand State Mineral Development Corporation.

Jitendra Kumar, the current Secretary of Mining, has been appointed Secretary of Labour, Employment, and Training.

Mukesh Kumar, the current Labour Secretary, has been transferred to Secretary of Planning and Development. Rajeshwari B, who was awaiting posting, has been made Special Secretary in the Finance Department. Saurav Kumar Bhuvania, Joint Secretary (Finance), has been appointed Managing Director of Jharkhand Exploration and Mining Corporation Ltd. Vijay Kumar Sinha: Excise Commissioner of Jharkhand, also Managing Director of Jharkhand State Beverages Corporation.

Preeti Rani: Joint Secretary of Industries Department. Rajesh Prasad: Director of Secondary Education. Among the newly appointed IAS officers, Kanchan Singh has been posted as CEO of Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society, Dhananjaya Kumar Singh as Joint Secretary of Finance, Sita Pushpa as Joint Secretary of the School Education and Literacy Department, and Vijay Kumar Sinha as Excise Commissioner.

Experiential Learning Trip by SBPS



The students of Sarala Birla Public School, Ranchi embarked on an experiential learning trip to Ranchi Aquarium and

Butterfly Park. The visit provided an opportunity for the students to explore marine biodiversity, ecosystems, and conservation efforts in tandem with the Sustainable Development Goals in an interactive environment. They observed a variety of aquatic species along with the beautiful and exotic butterflies. The visit not only deepened their understanding of various ecosystems but also encouraged them to take an active role in environmental stewardship. It was an enriching experience for all blending fun with meaningful learning.

Raj Hospital gets NABH accreditation

The National Accreditation for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) have assessed the emergency department of Raj Hospitals and found that it complies with the Board's standards for an accredited Hospital Emergency Department in India. The Managing Director of Raj Hospitals, Ranchi Dr Birendra said that the NABH accreditation programme sets standards for healthcare facilities in India, including emergency care services, to ensure that they meet the Best quality and safety standards.

Bol to organise loan expo on Jan 20

Bank of India (BoI) is organizing a Housing Loan and Vehicle Loan Expo on Wednesday at Children Park, Near DAV Kapildev, Kadru, Ranchi. BoI General Manager Manoj Kumar said that this expo has been organized especially for the convenience of people wishing to take loan for building houses, buying flats and vehicles anywhere in India. Detailed information about loan schemes and interest rates is being provided in this. He said that Bank of India Housing Loan is available at 8.30 per cent interest rate and Vehicle Loan at 8.75 per cent interest rate. We are also doing home loan takeover at an interest rate of 8.25 per cent.



Punjab CM opposes US deportee flights, government defends move amid row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann taking exception to US flights carrying Indian deportees landing in Amritsar, government sources Wednesday defended the move, saying the state makes up for the biggest share of these illegal immigrants.

Sharing figures of the three flights that have arrived in India since February five, they said Punjab residents total 126 of the 333 people deported in US military aircraft, followed by 110 from neighbouring Haryana and 74 from Gujarat.

Eight of them were from Uttar Pradesh, five from Maharashtra, two each from Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Rajasthan and Goa, and one each from Jammu and Kashmir, and Uttarakhand. Each of the three flights on February 5, 15 and 16 carried over 100 Indians and 333 of them have been deported so far, they added. The total includes 262 men, 42 women and 29 minors, the sources added.

As many as 23 flights carrying Indian deportees have arrived in the country since May 2020 and all of them landed in Amritsar, they said.

Since Donald Trump's inauguration as US President, whose



Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann

campaign promises included a crackdown on illegal immigrants, three military aircraft have arrived in India carrying the deportees.

Opposition parties protested the treatment meted out to the deportees, including them being shackled, and asked the Indian government to take up the issue with the US.

After the first flight landed on February 5, Mann accused the Centre of trying to defame Punjab and said a holy city like Amritsar should not be made a "deport centre". This flight had 30 deportees from Punjab and 33

each from Haryana and Gujarat. He kept up his attack and said on Tuesday that if another US plane carrying deportees arrives in India, it may not land in the state following strong objections raised by him.

The second flight had 65 deportees from Punjab, 33 from Haryana and eight from Gujarat. The corresponding numbers for the third flight were 31, 44 and 33. Following the opposition's protest, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar told Parliament on February 6 that the government was engaging with the US to ensure that deported Indians

are not mistreated.

The minister, however, added that the process of deportation is not a new one, and the standard operating procedure for deportation by aircraft provides for the use of restraints. Women and children were not restrained, he added.

Government sources said the rules of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the agency tasked with such deportations, stipulate that the "detainees transported by ICE aircraft" will be fully restrained by the use of handcuffs, waist chains and leg irons.

Karge pulls up Congress socks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Days after a major organisational rejig in the party, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday stressed that the top workers will be held accountable for future election results in States under their charge and asking them to be wary of ideologically weak turncoats.

Addressing general secretaries and in-charges, including those appointed last week, at a meeting held at the party's new headquarters at Indira Bhawan, Kharge emphasised the importance of promoting those people who are committed to the ideology of the Congress and stand with us like a rock even in adverse circumstances.

Kharge also hinted at some more changes in the organisation, saying some changes have already taken place and some more are in the offing. "I want to talk to you about the most important thing of accountability. You all will be held accountable for revamping the organisations in states and for all future election results," he told the office-bearers. The party recently brought in new office bearers in the revamped organisation. Among those who attended the meeting



Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge in the Lok Sabha arrives for a meeting of party's general secretaries and state in-charges, in New Delhi

were former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, senior leaders Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, KC Venugopal and Jairam Ramesh, and all general secretaries and in-charges in various states.

At the meeting, Kharge also flagged the issue of alleged "voter list manipulation" and claimed that it is happening on a large scale in elections. He noted that Rahul Gandhi also raised a question about this in the Lok Sabha.

"All of you will realise that these days the names of our supporters are deleted from the voters list. Or the name is removed and added to the adjacent booth. New names are added by the BJP just before the election. This rigging has to be stopped at all

costs," the Congress chief asserted.

Kharge pointed out that earlier the Chief Justice was also included in the selection committee of Chief Election Commission (CEC) by the order of the Supreme Court but the CJI was removed from the panel by the Modi government.

"The government does not even trust the impartiality of the Chief Justice of the country. This matter was to be heard in the Supreme Court, but the government announced the new CEC before that. Rahul Ji also said that what is the use of such a selection committee, where you are using Leader of Opposition only for certification?" he said.

External Affairs minister to visit South Africa for G20 meeting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will be on a two-day visit to South Africa beginning February 20 to participate in the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Ministry of External Affairs(MEA) announced on Wednesday. The minister is expected to hold a few bilateral meetings on the margins of the meet. South Africa is currently the chair of the influential grouping.

"External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr S Jaishankar will be visiting Johannesburg, South Africa on 20 and 21 February 2025 to participate in the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM) at the invitation of the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, Mr. Ronald Lamola," MEA said in a statement.

The minister's participation in the G20 FMM will "strengthen" India's engagement with G20 countries and "bolster the voice of the Global South" in this important forum, it said.

India raises commitment to rural transformation in Africa-Asia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India is committed to rural transformation in member nations of the African-Asian Rural Development Organisation (AARDO) and will increase its technical contribution to the forum, Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said here on Wednesday.

He was speaking at the inauguration of the 77th session of the executive committee of the African-Asian Rural Development Organisation (AARDO).

"India gives the highest yearly membership contribution to AARDO, which is around USD 1,55,300, and the Indian government has been providing organisation, technical, and financial support to AARDO from time to time," he said.

"India will keep playing its role in rural transformation in



Shivraj Singh Chouhan addresses inaugural Session of 77th Session of Executive Committee of African Asian Rural Development, in New Delhi

member nations. India will also continue its technical support through 2025-27. The technical contribution will be increased to USD 2,50,000 per year from USD 2,00,000," he said.

Chouhan also said capacity building will remain a priority. "Education, technology and inclusive development are the

foundation stones on which we will build the future for the rural population of Asia and Africa," he said.

While talking about the Rural Development Ministry's schemes and initiatives, he said the participating nations will share their success stories, and learn from each other's experience.

Delhi HC asks Home Ministry to explain delay in Rahul Gandhi's citizenship case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday asked the Union Home Ministry why it has not responded to the petition of BJP leader Subramanian Swamy regarding the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's British citizenship issue, where he is facing show cause notice from the Ministry.

Home Ministry in April 2019, issued show cause notice to Rahul Gandhi on Subramanian Swamy's complaint based on the documents filed by Rahul in British company register, declaring himself as British citizen between 2002 to 2009.

A Division Bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela asked Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Chetan Sharma, who was representing the Central Government, to obtain



Rahul Gandhi in the Lok Sabha arrives for a meeting of party's general secretaries and state in-charges, in New Delhi

instructions regarding the matter.

"The prayer is not to make decision on the substantive issues of the pending matter

in either of the matters pending here or in Allahabad. He is only seeking directions on his representations. Seek instructions then

regarding stage of the proceeding regarding the letter," the Court told ASG Sharma.

This was after Swamy told the Court that the Home Ministry had issued a show cause notice to Rahul in 2019 asking him to explain his British citizenship. But there was no reply on the part of Rahul Gandhi to the same and no action was taken by the government too after that.

"The Government of India, on my letter to the Home Ministry, wrote a show cause notice to Gandhi to explain the data brought on record to show that he is also a British citizen.

Under Indian Law, no Indian can have citizenship of any other country. This was never replied, no reminders sent, no action taken by the government. The Government must complete its responsibility," Swamy contended. He was assisted by Advocate Satya Sabharwal.

The High Court posted the case for further hearing on March 26 while asking the ASG to obtain instructions on the status of the proceedings with respect to Swamy's representation.

"List on March 26 to enable ASG complete their instructions, specially keeping in view the document enclosed as Annexure P2 in the petition, which is a 2019 letter issued by MHA," the Court said, directing MHA to reply in three weeks.

In 2015, Subramanian Swamy brought documents of British company Registry showing Rahul Gandhi's statements, declaring himself as British Citizen. The documents show that Rahul floated a company named as BackOps Ltd in London between 2002 to 2009. The documents also showed that Rahul was a resident in London during this period, though he was Member of Parliament from 2004.

Gyanesh Kumar takes over as 26th CEC, Vivek Joshi as Election Commissioner

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Gyanesh Kumar on Wednesday took over as the 26th Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) while Vivek Joshi assumed charge as an Election Commissioner. An Election Commissioner since March 2024, Kumar was elevated as the CEC on Monday.

Gyanesh Kumar replaced Rajiv Kumar, who demitted office on Tuesday, as head of the poll panel. Sukhbir Singh Sandhu is the other election commissioner. Joshi, a former Haryana cadre IAS officer, was appointed as an Election Commissioner on Monday.

In his message to voters after assuming charge, Kumar said,



New Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar is greeted by Election Commissioner Vivek Joshi

"First step for nation building is voting. Therefore, every citizen of India who has completed 18 years of age should become an elector and should always vote." The CEC asserted that the "Election Commission was, is and will

always be with the voters". A mechanical engineer from IIT-Roorkee who has served as the chief secretary of Haryana, Vivek Joshi on Wednesday assumed charge as an election commissioner. At 58, Joshi is one

of the youngest members to be a part of the poll panel.

According to the law governing the appointment of CEC and ECs, the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners will hold office for a term of six years from the date on which they assume office or till they attain the age of 65 years, "whichever is earlier". Born on May 21, 1966, Joshi will turn 65 in May 2031, but as per the law, his term in the poll panel will end on February 18 of that year.

While CEC Gyanesh Kumar will demit office on January 26, 2029, the other election commissioner, Sukhbir Singh Sandhu will retire in July 2028. Joshi could possibly supervise the conduct of the Lok Sabha elections in 2029 as the next CEC.

Congress targets BJP in Gurugram civic polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Encouraged by the better performance in the recently held Lok Sabha and Assembly elections by the Congress party, the party has prepared many local issues to surround the ruling BJP government in the civic elections.

The party leaders will uplift issues of waterlogging, dirt, the construction of the Sheelta Mata temple, and road construction in Gurugram. Since the announcement of civic elections in early February, the party has been engaged in its preparations on a war footing.

Following an announcement of the Municipal Elections, the congress formed various committees by holding meetings at various levels, and all the committees were given their responsibilities.

Senior leaders of the party were included in the campaign and manifesto committee. Information about the issues related to the civic elections was also taken from all the senior leaders of the district.

It was decided that the party would raise the issues of waterlogging, dirt, road construction and other city issues loudly during the campaign. Party workers will go door-to-door and tell about the failures of the ruling BJP government and the schemes of the Congress.

The Congress leader said that in this election, the Congress will raise the issues of waterlogging, dirt, construction of the civil hospital, construction of Sheelta Mata temple, road construction, traffic jams and parking problems in Gurugram.

India, Malaysia to enhance defence cooperation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Malaysia on Wednesday reviewed the entire gamut of their bilateral defence ties and identified steps to further enhance cooperation in emerging areas such as cyber security and AI during talks between Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh Secretary General of Ministry of Defence, Malaysia Lokman Hakim Bin Ali, defence ministry said here.

Giving details, officials said the 13th meeting of Malaysia-India Defence Cooperation Committee (MIDCOM) took place in Kuala Lumpur. Both sides expressed happiness at the growing bilateral defence cooperation with regular engagements between the two Armed Forces in recent years. The two sides held wide-ranging discussions on effective and practical initiatives to further expand bilateral defence engagements and regional and global issues.

They identified ways to deepen existing collaboration, particularly in the defence industry, maritime security, and multilateral engagements. They agreed to form a joint focus group to address non-traditional maritime security threats.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to fully implement the new initiatives under the defence pillar of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Malaysian counterpart Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim during the latter's visit to India in August 2024. India and Malaysia also exchanged the finalised Terms of Reference (ToR) on the establishment of Strategic

Affairs Working Group. This forum will act as a consultative mechanism intermediate between the MIDCOM and the two sub-committees to progress all aspects of bilateral defence cooperation.

Both sides also exchanged the finalised ToR on the establishment of Su-30 forum as an outcome of MIDCOM. Su-30 Forum will enable closer cooperation between the two Air Forces in exchanging expertise and best practices in Su-30 maintenance.

The Defence Secretary highlighted the capability of the Indian defence industry, particularly its potential to collaborate with the Malaysian companies and the Armed Forces in their capability enhancement and modernisation.

He congratulated Malaysia on assuming the chairmanship of ASEAN and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus and wished MoD, Malaysia the best for conduct of ADMM Plus and ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting meetings this year. India supports ASEAN centrality and unity, which is a crucial element of India's Indo-Pacific Vision.

The Defence Secretary reiterated India's support to Malaysia's endeavours as ASEAN chair in promoting a stronger, unified, and prosperous ASEAN that plays a central role in shaping the evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region.

India considers Malaysia as an important partner in the Indo-Pacific as Malaysia lies at the confluence of three key foreign policy visions i.e. Act East Policy, SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative.

CVC issues new procedure for corruption complaints

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has issued a new procedure for handling corruption complaints referred to it for conducting preliminary inquiry by the Lokpal, an official order said.

The Lokpal directs the chief vigilance officers (CVOs) - who act as a distant arm of the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) - to conduct preliminary inquiry and submit reports in respect of certain complaints received by it.

"An instance has been noted by the Lokpal where the preliminary inquiry entrusted by it specifically to a CVO was submitted to the Lokpal under the signature of an authority other

than the CVO. "The CVOs are advised that any preliminary inquiry directed by the Lokpal should be submitted to it by the respective CVO concerned under his signature," the order issued on Tuesday by the probity watchdog said.

The Lokpal has the mandate to inquire into allegations of corruption against certain public functionaries.

As per the provisions contained under Section 20 (1) (b) of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, complaints in respect of public servants belonging to Group A, B, C or D are referred by the Lokpal to the CVC for preliminary inquiry. The CVC forwards such references to the CVOs concerned for preliminary inquiry and report.

NHRC stresses balance between digital innovation and human rights

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) chairperson Justice (retired) V Ramasubramanian emphasised that safeguarding "privacy as a human right" in the digital world is necessary, even as he pointed out that there is a "significant decline" in value systems and one must bear its consequences.

The NHRC chief's remarks came during an open house discussion on "Ensuring privacy and human rights in the digital era: A focus on corporate digital responsibility" held at its premises, with some participants joining virtually, according to an NHRC statement on Wednesday.

Some of the important suggestions that emanated from the discussion include simplifying user agreements and policy frameworks to enhance consumer understanding and control over personal data; establishing "clear accountability" structures for data breaches, especially for research institutions and third-party data processors; and strengthening user consent frameworks for greater transparency and informed decision-making.

Having "explicit penal provisions for non-compliance"; need for bilateral agreements to address cross-border security and data-sharing concerns; addressing the challenges arising from strict data localisation mandates; and having clear guidelines for obtaining verifiable parental

consent for minors, were also suggested. Addressing the participants, the NHRC chairperson "emphasised that safeguarding privacy as a human right in the digital world is necessary", the statement said.

The technological advancements should "align with fundamental human rights and privacy protection". The responsibility must begin with the individual user, it said.

Justice Ramasubramanian highlighted that "maintaining digital hygiene is crucial". He also pointed out the "significant decline in value systems, cautioning that one must bear the consequences of this shift", it said.

The NHRC chairperson reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to fostering inclusive

discussions on digital rights and corporate accountability for developing a robust regulatory framework that balances innovation, security, and individual privacy.

The intensity of the problem that arises due to misuse of data and data breaches were extensively discussed during the meeting. Further, several key provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 were also discussed, it said.

Many participants raised concerns over the "extensive control exerted by global technology companies on user data, which complicates regulatory enforcement". Law enforcement agencies often face challenges in accessing critical data due to data storage in offshore centres, the statement said.

CM Yogi slams Opposition for spreading rumours about Mahakumbh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath strongly criticised the opposition for allegedly spreading misinformation about the ongoing Mahakumbh, stating that such actions insult the faith of millions. Addressing a brief discussion in the state assembly, he revealed that over 56 crore devotees have already participated in the holy event. "The Mahakumbh is not organised by any government; it is an event of *Sanatan* culture. Those spreading baseless allegations are insulting *Sanatan* beliefs. Politics should not be played over such a sacred event," he remarked. The CM also accused the Samajwadi Party (SP) of opposing the Mahakumbh from the beginning. He referenced statements by opposition leaders, including West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who allegedly referred to the event as *Mrityu Kumbh* (death fair), RJD leader Lalu Prasad Yadav, who dismissed it as meaningless, and Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, who claimed that stampedes

during the festival had resulted in thousands of deaths. "If following *Sanatan* traditions is a crime, then I will commit this crime a thousand times," Yogi asserted. Taking a dig at SP, he said, "A sick person can be treated, but not a sick mentality." He further mocked SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, claiming that despite his party's criticism, he secretly took a dip in the holy waters. **Opposition demands halt to power privatisation, Government stresses reforms** The opposition also raised concerns over privatisation of electricity, warning that it would increase tariffs and adversely impact consumers. They argued that the state electricity board has more experience than private firms, and called for an immediate rollback of privatization plans. Energy Minister A.K. Sharma defended the move, stating that privatisation is necessary for improving the power sector. "When BJP came to power in 2017, UP's electricity board was running a deficit of ₹1.42 Lakh Crore. Despite reforms, issues persist, and further improvements are needed," he explained. He



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath speaks during the Budget session of the state Legislative Assembly, in Lucknow

assured that employees' interests would be protected and power rates would not be hiked. **UP Budget to prioritise poor and middle class: Finance Minister** Finance Minister Suresh Khanna assured that the UP Budget would be pro-people, addressing the concerns of the poor and middle class while focusing on infrastructure development. He also dismissed Mamata Banerjee's remarks about Maha Kumbh, stating, "People who lack knowledge make such statements." **Speaker urges Opposition to fulfill responsibilities** Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana urged opposition leaders to ensure smooth proceedings in the house, allowing constructive debates. "The opposition has every right to criticise the government where necessary, but they must also act responsibly. Every member will be given the opportunity to raise their concerns," he assured. With discussions heating up in the assembly, political tensions remain high as the Maha Kumbh and other pressing governance issues continue to

dominate the agenda. **Urdu in Assembly Proceedings Sparks Heated Debate** Leader of Opposition Mata Prasad Pandey opposed the inclusion of English in assembly proceedings while advocating for Urdu alongside regional languages like Awadhi, Braj, Bundeli, and Bhojpuri. He accused CM Yogi of branding SP leaders as *kathmulla* (a term often used derogatorily for conservative Muslims) and questioned whether celebrated Urdu writers like Premchand, Raghupati Sahai Firaq Gorakhpuri, and other scholars should also be labeled as such. CM Yogi retorted, accusing SP leaders of hypocrisy: "They want their children to study in elite English-medium schools while pushing others towards Urdu. SP is leading the country towards fundamentalism." Parliamentary Affairs Minister Suresh Khanna clarified the government's stance, asserting that Hindi remains the language of assembly proceedings but members are free to speak in regional languages. "We are not imposing English, nor are we weakening Hindi," he added.

Mahakumbh: 10 sewage treatment plants operational in Prayagraj

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Mahakumbh 2025 has transcended beyond a spiritual ritual; it has evolved into a mass movement dedicated to cleanliness and environmental conservation. Under the Namami Gange Mission, 10 sewage treatment plants (STPs) have been activated to preserve the purity and sanctity of the Ganga, while work is progressing rapidly on three new STPs in Salori, Rasulabad, and Naini. Additionally, 37 drains have been fully tapped and treated, ensuring the cleanliness of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers. To provide a clean and hygienic experience for devotees, the fair area has been equipped with 12,000 FRP toilets, 16,100 prefabricated steel toilets, 20,000 community urinals, and 20,000 garbage bins. Waste disposal is managed efficiently with 37.75 lakh liner bags,

ensuring the area remains spotless despite the massive footfall. A team of 1500 trained 'Ganga Sevadoots' is actively raising awareness among devotees about cleanliness and Ganga conservation. This mission is being reinforced through street plays, poster campaigns, and public dialogues, transforming cleanliness into a collective movement. Namami Gange Communication Head, Najeeb Ahsan, stated that efforts toward biodiversity conservation, cleanliness, and the Ganga's ecology are being presented innovatively at the Namami Gange Pavilion. The interactive biodiversity tunnel showcases the rich aquatic life of the Ganga, while the digital exhibition highlights the success stories of the Ganga cleanliness campaign. Real-time data on water levels and quality of the Ganga,

Yamuna, and their tributaries is being displayed on the Prayag platform. Additionally, models showcasing sewage treatment, riverfront development, and a replica of the Gangetic dolphin are inspiring devotees to contribute to environmental protection efforts. New ghats constructed under the Namami Gange Mission have been designed with eco-friendly technologies and solar lighting, modern changing rooms, and comfortable seating arrangements. Regular cleanliness drives at the ghats ensure the continuous preservation of the Ganga's sanctity. Under the 'Paint My City' campaign, the walls and public spaces of Prayagraj are adorned with vibrant artwork and messages promoting environmental conservation. This initiative blends cleanliness with cultural awareness, leaving a lasting impact on visitors.

UP inmates in 75 jails to bathe in Sangam's holy water

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
LUCKNOW

In an unprecedented move, the Uttar Pradesh jail administration is set to bring the sacred water from Prayagraj's Sangam to all 75 jails across the state, allowing inmates to experience the spiritual essence of the Mahakumbh. This initiative, overseen by the Office of UP Jail Minister Dara Singh Chauhan, aims to provide over 90,000 prisoners an opportunity to partake in the revered ritual. As per officials from the Prison Department, the event will take place on February 21 from 9:30 AM to 10 AM. The initiative underscores the administration's commitment to ensuring that even those behind bars can connect with their faith and traditions. Director General (DG) of Prisons PV Ramaswamy confirmed that preparations are being carried out under the supervision of the jail minister. The collected holy water will be



An aerial view of devotees on boats at the Sangam during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela, in Prayagraj

mixed with regular water and stored in dedicated tanks within each prison. Inmates will be allowed to bathe in this sanctified water following prayers, marking their symbolic participation in the Maha Kumbh.

Minister Chauhan, along with senior jail officials, is expected to attend the ceremony at Lucknow jail. Jailor AK Kishwaha of Gorakhpur District Jail revealed that prison guard Arun Maurya has been

dispatched to Prayagraj to collect the holy water from the Sangam. Similarly, Naini Central Jail Senior Superintendent Rang Bahadur stated that the arrangements are being replicated across various facilities to ensure inmates can partake in the sacred tradition. Prayagraj District Jail Senior Superintendent Amita Dubey noted that around 1,350 prisoners have expressed enthusiasm about the ritual, eager for the chance to engage in this spiritual event despite their confinement. The initiative has already been set in motion, with Unnao Jail leading the way by organizing a preliminary 'snan' for its inmates on February 17. Superintendent Pankaj Kumar Singh shared that the decision had been under consideration for some time and that Unnao Jail will host another bathing ritual on February 21, reinforcing the administration's dedication to prisoner welfare and spiritual upliftment.

Naga tribal organisations calls for unity amid growing factionalism

PTI ■ DIMAPUR

Expressing concern over growing factionalism among Naga groups, tribal organisations from Nagaland and Manipur representing the community have called for an urgent need for all Naga political groups to unite and cooperate with one another to preserve the spirit of oneness. The appeal was made during a meeting between Naga tribal organisations and Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) on Tuesday. It was attended by representatives of 13 Naga tribes from Nagaland and Manipur, as well as leaders of FNR. "Representatives of various Naga tribes gathered in solidarity to express, in one voice, the urgent necessity for all Naga political groups to come together in unity and cooperation," a release issued by FNR said. During the meeting, it was resolved that Naga political groups must listen to the voice of the people, and that all efforts, without exception, must be made to ensure Naga unity in the spirit of oneness. On January 14, the Naga groups had agreed to implement the Council of Naga Cooperation and Relationship, a working mechanism, to advance unity. The Naga tribal organisations also urged all Naga political groups and the Naga people to participate in the Council of Naga Cooperation and Relationship. Furthermore, the meeting resolved to consciously promote and consolidate Naga solidarity by fostering a spirit of kinship without borders. The resolution was signed by three representatives each from the Chakhesang Public Organisation, Rengma Hoho and Sumi Hoho; two from Pochury Hoho, Phom Peoples' Council, Tikhir Tribal Council, Chang Khulei Setshang, and Mao Council; two from the Angami Public Organisation, Tangkhul Naga Long and Ao Senden and eight from FNR.

BJP knocks Governor's door as Mamata threatens Adhikari

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari on Wednesday accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of trying to threaten him into silence, warning no amount of threats would cow him down. This even as his party BJP wrote a complaint to State Governor against Banerjee seeking action. Adhikari who earlier said that he was going to write a letter to Home Minister Amit Shah for trying to jeopardise his security said quoting Banerjee on how she was trying to incite members of a particular community against him. Adhikari wrote Adhikari on the social media about a "veiled threat" that the Chief Minister had issued against him during her speech inside the State Assembly on Tuesday. "The veiled threat that you made yesterday on the floor of the Assembly, is nothing but a sinister conspiracy to threaten my safety and security," adding

though Banerjee would not name anyone that butt of her rant was easily discernible. Adhikari also wrote that the Chief Minister had a wrong conception that she could silence him by holding out such threats. "If you think that you can scare me by saying that, you are wrong," he later said adding how Banerjee had desecrated the State Assembly on a number of occasions. "Everyone remembers how you vandalised and ransacked the Assembly with your party men before coming to power. This was another occasion that you desecrated the historic House by making such remarks against the Opposition Leader," he said. Adhikari's statement was coupled with a letter and an 18-minute video clipping of Banerjee's Assembly speech being sent to State Governor C.V. Ananda Bose for his action. The complaint in reference to the video clipping sent by State BJP leader and advocate Kaustav Bagchi read, "It is

clearly evident that the Chief Minister is trying to intimidate the Leader of Opposition. In the light of the aforesaid you are requested to call for the records pursuant to today's speech of Mamata Banerjee, and also call for an explanation pursuant to the nature and intent of the speech delivered by her." Earlier while delivering her speech inside the Assembly on Tuesday Banerjee had, besides raising issue of stampede deaths during the Maha Kumbh, roundly attacked Adhikari for using "slanderous words" against a particular religion. Referring to an alleged remarks made by Adhikari that the Trinamool Congress Government was encouraging terrorist activities in Bengal and that she could be hand in gloves with the Bangladeshi fundamentalists Banerjee warned that BJP leader that he will not be able to hold on to himself if the people against whom he was using foul languages rose up in revolt.

"You have been using bad and slanderous words and spreading propaganda regarding the members of a religion, will be able to withstand the impact if they hit the streets and revolt one day," Banerjee during his speech said. The Opposition was not inside the House during her speech as the entire battery of BJP MLAs had staged a walkout protesting the suspension of Adhikari and four other MLAs for alleged misdemeanor, even as the BJP was demanding a debate on alleged disruption of Saraswati Pujas in many places early this month. Referring to how Banerjee's Government had filed 73 FIRs against him and how he had to move the High Court to obtain immunity from arrests and how he had to move the courts 74 times seeking permission for holding events, Adhikari said, "you can't scare me into silence. I will keep on fighting democratically till your corrupt, dynastic, appeasement politics regime comes to an end."

Lokayukta reports lack of evidence in MUDA site allotment case

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The Lokayukta police probing the Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA) site allotment case on Wednesday said that the charges against Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his wife Parvathi could not be proved for want of evidence. The probing officers said they have submitted the final report to the High Court. "Since the above allegations against accused one to accused four in the case have not been proven due to lack of evidence, the final report is being submitted to the High Court," the Lokayukta police said in a letter to activist Snehamayi Krishna who is a complainant in the MUDA case. Besides Siddaramaiah and his

wife, his brother-in-law Mallikarjuna Swamy and the land owner Devaraju are also the accused. The Lokayukta police said that further investigation will be conducted into the allegations of Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA) providing compensatory plots in the ratio of 50:50 from 2016 to 2024 and an additional final report will be submitted to the High Court under Section 173 (8) CrPC. In the MUDA site allotment case, it is alleged that compensatory sites were allotted to Siddaramaiah's wife in an upmarket area in Mysuru, which had higher property value as compared to the location of her land which had been "acquired" by the MUDA.

Marshals forcibly eject LoP in Council

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a turbulent session of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council, Leader of Opposition Lal Bihari Yadav was forcibly removed by marshals after demanding extended discussion time on the Kumbh Mela. The incident occurred when Yadav, representing the Samajwadi Party (SP), led his party members into the well of the House, disrupting proceedings. Despite repeated directives from the Chairman to return to their seats, the protesting members continued their agitation.

UP government ensures cleanliness at Mahakumbh

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

With over 55 Crore devotees already taken a dip during two months long congregation of extraordinary proportions at Mahakumbh, the Uttar Pradesh government has taken care of all efforts to ensure the cleanliness of the Sangam in Mahakumbh Nagar. Each day, an average of 10-15 Tonnes of floating waste is collected from the river and sent for recycling, demonstrating a strong commitment to maintaining environmental sustainability during this sacred event. But since this poses a complex array of logistical challenges, especially in managing the immense waste generated by such a gathering, deployment of trash skimmers at Prayagraj by the Urban Development Department as part of Swachh Bharat Mission is being executed by Cleantec Infra, and



Cleanliness drive at Mahakumbh mela in Prayagraj

focuses on the removal of floating debris. The trash skimmers patrol the Sangam 24 hours, collecting floral offerings, coconuts, discarded materials, and other debris left by pilgrims. While these offerings hold spiritual significance, their

accumulation can pose an environmental burden on the sacred waters. Amrit Abhijat, Principal Secretary, Urban Development Department, Government of Uttar Pradesh, in a social media post highlighted the significance

of the large-scale cleaning efforts underway at the Maha Kumbh. "Guided by the vision of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the department was working towards giving best experience to devotees with a fine blend of technology and human resources," said Abhijat. He added that these skimmers were critical to ensure that all leftovers and offerings by devotees are captured in real-time the waste is dispatched to the recycle plant at Baswar. He also highlighted the recycling of 600 MT of waste so far, construction of 1.5 lakh toilets and deployment of 16,000 sanitation workers to ensure cleanliness and hygiene. "Managing waste at the Maha Kumbh requires a multi-faceted approach," notes Gaurav Chopra, managing director and co-founder of Cleantec Infra. "The UP Government has demon-

strated foresight in implementing this initiative, and we are pleased to provide the technology and operational support. The priority is to maintain the sanctity of the Ganga while ensuring responsible waste management practices." The trash skimmers are designed for efficient collection and removal of floating trash. Each machine has a 13 cubic meter capacity and a 3,600-kilogram holding capacity. The daily collection of 10-15 tonnes, and up to 20-25 tonnes on peak days such as Maaghi Purnima, highlights the scale of the waste management challenge and the importance of this operation. The collected waste is deposited near Naini and subsequently transported to a recycling facility at Baswar, ensuring responsible disposal and minimising environmental impact.

Assam CM denies 'witch hunt' in Gogoi's wife's alleged ISI links

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said he is not on a "witch hunt" over the controversy surrounding Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi's British wife Elizabeth Colburn's alleged links with the ISI. Reacting to a post on X by another Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi, Sarma on Tuesday said he is driven by national security, which cannot be compromised. "You will be shocked in the coming months. Let me assure you, with all the responsibility vested in me, this is not a witch hunt. I, too, have served under Sri Tarun Gogoi, and I fully understand the gravity of such actions," the CM said. Sarma and the BJP have been

attacking Gaurav Gogoi, the Deputy Leader of Congress in Lok Sabha, over Colburn's alleged connection with Pakistan's spy agency. "What I am doing is driven solely by national security interests — an area where there can be no compromise. I have taken an oath to protect the security and sovereignty of our nation, and I will uphold it, no matter what," Sarma asserted. "This is a duty that transcends politics and personal ties - this is about our country," he added. Bordoloi had in a post on Sunday said, "People of Assam will never buy such a hypothesis of his Government and I would give a befitting reply to such Skulduggery politics of @himantabiswa in the earliest

opportunity they get in the near future." Earlier on Tuesday, Gogoi slammed Sarma, asserting that the BJP leader's fear of losing the 2026 assembly polls is the main reason behind the recent developments. The Assam Police on Monday constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe a case against Pakistan national Ali Tauqeer Sheikh for his social media comments on Assam and India's internal affairs. Sheikh, an advisor of the Pakistan Planning Commission and a former colleague of Colburn, was charged under various sections of the Bhatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Towards strategic partnership

Qatar, India sign historic agreements to strengthen cooperation in trade, energy, investments, technology and culture

Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, recent two-day official visit to India marks a significant milestone in the bilateral relations between the two nations. During this visit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Emir Al-Thani agreed to elevate their ties to a 'strategic partnership,' focusing on key areas such as trade, energy, investments, technology, food security, culture and people-to-people connections. India and Qatar have maintained a robust relationship for decades, characterised by strong economic, cultural and diplomatic ties. The Indian expatriate community in Qatar, is 830,000 strong and plays a pivotal role in the country's development and serves as a vital bridge between the two nations. A primary outcome of the Emir's visit is the ambitious goal to double bilateral trade to \$28 billion within the next five years. Both countries are exploring the possibility of signing a free trade agreement to facilitate this growth. Energy cooperation remains a cornerstone of the India-Qatar relationship. The discussions during the visit emphasised broadening energy ties, which could involve increased supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Qatar to India, thereby enhancing India's energy security.



The visit underscored the importance of cultural exchange and strengthening people-to-people connections. Initiatives in this area are expected to foster mutual understanding and goodwill between the populations of both countries. But the biggest takeaway from this visit is the security cooperation. By elevating their relationship to a strategic partnership, India and Qatar have committed to a more structured and comprehensive engagement, addressing regional and global issues of mutual interest. This strategic alignment is anticipated to enhance their collaborative efforts on various fronts. Besides, both countries have agreed to take their trade to next level. The targeted increase in trade volume and potential free trade agreement are expected to stimulate economic growth, create job opportunities and attract investments in both nations. For India, securing a stable and diversified energy supply from Qatar is crucial for its growing energy needs. For Qatar, strengthening ties with a major economy like India offers new markets and investment opportunities. Enhanced cultural exchanges will promote mutual respect and understanding, enriching the social fabric of both societies. A closer partnership between India and Qatar can contribute to regional stability, with both countries collaborating on security and diplomatic initiatives. The Emir of Qatar's visit to India has set the stage for a deeper and more multifaceted partnership between the two nations. By focusing on strategic areas India and Qatar are poised to reap significant benefits, reinforcing their longstanding ties and contributing to regional and global stability.

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PICTALK



A black-naped oriole bird perches on a bloomed cotton tree, in Birbhum

Confronting the escalating migration and refugee crises



SUDHIR HINDWAN

The refugee crisis is a perplexing issue for governments, requiring a delicate balance between maintaining national security and extending compassion to those in need

The paradoxes of rapid global changes are proving to be a contemporary reality, one that sheds light on the philosophical aphorism proposed by Samuel P. Huntington, that of "Political Decay." This concept is becoming increasingly evident in highly developed societies, particularly in the face of numerous challenges concerning security. The issue of illegal migration, human trafficking, and the plight of refugees has become a significant concern, with its implications stretching across borders, creating tension among nations, and fueling rising anxieties about national security.

A few years ago, the discovery of fifty refugees dead near eastern Austria, along the Slovakia-Hungarian border, prompted widespread discussion on the issue of illegal migration and related crimes. This tragic event highlighted a larger issue facing European countries-illegal migration and the security risks that come with it. Many individuals from underdeveloped regions, in their search for survival and opportunities, attempt to migrate to European countries, often taking illegal routes. The tragic drowning of more than 80 illegal migrants in a boat off the coast of Libya is just one example of the deadly risks faced by those desperate for a better life. In light of these challenges, it is imperative that European nations develop more sophisticated mechanisms to address this issue, one that has already caused significant tension between countries.

The broader problem of migration and refugees, particularly in regions such as Afghanistan and Central Asia, has created a complicated and often violent dynamic. As refugees flee war and persecution, they find themselves subject to not only economic exploitation but also social discrimination. According to reports, over 70 per cent of the 26 million refugees worldwide are women and children. These individuals are uprooted and displaced due to wars, ethnic conflicts, political instability and religious persecution. Since the mid-20th century, the number of



refugees has dramatically increased, driven by factors such as civil wars, regional conflicts, and natural disasters. The refugee crises have been particularly severe in regions like Africa, Southeast Asia and the West Asia, with countries such as Afghanistan, Rwanda, Vietnam, Bosnia and Iraq seeing millions displaced. These refugees often seek shelter in neighbouring countries, adding pressure to already fragile systems. While refugees are often subjected to exploitation and abuse, the refugee crisis has also attracted the attention of illegal and anti-social actors who exploit the vulnerability of displaced populations. The rise of global connectivity and the post-modernisation phase calls for new frameworks and models of governance to address these challenges.

The world is increasingly interconnected, and young generations must be equipped with the tools and understanding to overcome divisive and biased perceptions that arise from ignorance. It is essential that global societies shift their focus to new models that emphasise reforms in democracy, the environment, globalisation, and governance. These reforms should prioritise finding solutions that reduce manipulation and nepotism, addressing the core needs of vulnerable populations. The refugee problem is a com-



THE TRAGIC DROWNING OF MORE THAN 80 ILLEGAL MIGRANTS IN A BOAT OFF THE COAST OF LIBYA IS JUST ONE EXAMPLE OF THE DEADLY RISKS FACED BY THOSE DESPERATE FOR A BETTER LIFE

plex and multifaceted issue, and efforts have been made to create legal definitions and frameworks for addressing the crisis. The United Nations has provided a general consensus on defining refugees as individuals who are forced to leave their country due to war, foreign invasion, or other forms of aggression. However, individual nations often adapt this definition to suit their national interests, leading to inconsistencies in refugee treatment. For instance, Uganda's President Idi Amin's expulsion of foreign nationals in 1972 resulted in the displacement of over 38,000 people, highlighting the role of political instability in driving refugee crises. Several key factors contribute to the refugee crisis, including atrocities, civil wars, and regional conflicts. Over time, efforts have been made to improve the situation, with various organisations and countries attempting to address the economic and social needs of refugees.

To address the refugee crisis, it is crucial to develop local infrastructure that promotes refugees' self-sufficiency and to involve NGOs more extensively in the solution. Comprehensive training for staff involved in rescue operations and coordination between local governments and the UNHCR will enhance effectiveness. Increased financial support is needed to

implement new programmes for refugees. Challenges persist in addressing the refugee crisis, particularly due to inadequate infrastructure and logistical support in host countries. A global burden-sharing approach is needed to prevent undue strain on any single nation. Refugees often face detention based on illegal immigration suspicions, and camps are sometimes attacked, increasing their vulnerability. Governments, NGOs, and international bodies must ensure refugee protection, especially for women and children, while fostering long-term solutions like job creation and education. Though eliminating illegal migration entirely may not be possible, nations must manage migration while safeguarding refugees' rights. The rise in human trafficking and exploitation adds complexity, requiring swift action from governments. In regions like South Asia, the Rohingya refugee crisis has intensified security and humanitarian concerns, with policies often facing international criticism. A coordinated, inclusive approach is vital to meeting the needs of displaced populations without compromising national interests. (The author, a recipient of Bharat Gaurav award is a professor and an expert on strategic affairs; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SAM PITRODA SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Madam — The latest controversial statement of Indian Overseas President Sam Pitroda negating Chinese threats to India has stoked a fierce controversy. Though Congress has distanced himself, very obviously his statement is in tune with the Congress line on China and statements of Rahul Gandhi praising and advocating China. His statement may be seen in the light of the recent successful visit of PM Modi to the US, causing heartburn and discomfort in Congress leadership. His timing of the pro-China statement is very conspicuous and contradicts the foreign policy of India. The security threats from China need no elaboration. Sam Pitroda is no stranger to controversies. Sam Pitroda had ignited a firestorm while speaking on the diversity of India, referring to how people in the South "look like Africans and those in the East look like Chinese and those in the East look like Arabs."

In June 2023, amid anticipation for the grand opening of the Ram Mandir, Sam Pitroda sparked controversy by asserting that temples wouldn't address India's pressing issues such as unemployment, inflation, education, and health. In May 2019, Sam Pitroda drew ire by dismissively remarking, 'hua to hua, so what,' when questioned about the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. During the aftermath of the Pulwama attack in February 2019, Sam Pitroda ignited controversy by questioning the efficacy of retaliatory airstrikes conducted by the Indian Air Force on Balakot. His remarks stirred debate on India's response to terrorist incidents and the appropriate diplomatic approach to such crises. Despite all controversies, he continued to be Indian Overseas President. Congress is experimenting through Sam Pitroda but his controversies are maligning the country. Vinod Johri | Delhi

INDIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY FAILS

Madam — Refers to the article 'Bangladesh wipes out history, shuns India at its own peril.' India's neighbour first policy is a

Gyanesh Kumar is new CEC



This refers to the main page headline "Gyanesh Kumar is the 26th CEC." Notwithstanding a dissenting note from the LoP Rahul Gandhi, Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar has been appointed as the CEC by a three-member panel headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, comprising Home Minister Amit Shah and LoP

Rahul Gandhi. The reason behind Gandhi's dissent was that the matter is still pending before the court, raising the question of why the appointment was rushed. Previously, the Chief Justice of India was part of the selection panel; however, this changed after the NDA government passed the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act, 2023. Keeping this in mind, the Vice President recently voiced his support for excluding the CJI from the selection process. It appears that the power to choose the next CEC and other election commissioners is now tilted entirely in favour of the central government. Aarohi Gupta | Ujjain

MAMATA SLAMS KUMBH MANAGEMENT

Madam — West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has asserted that the Maha Kumbh has turned into a "Mrityu Kumbh" due to incidents of stampede, claiming that the actual toll at the mega religious gathering was suppressed by authorities. At least 30 people died and 60 were injured in a stampede in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj, while 18 people lost their lives in a recent stampede at an overcrowded New Delhi railway station. More than 54 crore people had so far taken a dip at the Sangam. During Maha Shivratri, a further surge of crowd is expected. More than half the total population of India, by that time, should have taken a dip. The discipline of the people, coupled with poor crowd management, led to the stampede. But her comment that it is a 'mirthy Kumbh' is unwanted and uncalled for. It is an attack on sanatana dharma and people's belief and faith. It is an attack on Hindus. N R Ramchandran | Chennai

Faith's double-edged sword: Reflections on the Mahakumbh



ASHA IYER KUMAR

The Mahakumbh presents a profound paradox: can a moment of divine immersion truly cleanse years of sin, or have we reduced the quest for spiritual evolution to mere ritual

In the predawn darkness, millions of pilgrims converge at the sacred confluence of the Ganges, their faith burning brighter than the stars above. The Mahakumbh, humanity's largest gathering of spiritual seekers, presents a profound paradox of our times — the sublime beauty of collective devotion juxtaposed against the perils of unquestioning faith. What compels ordinary men and women to undertake arduous journeys, risking life and limb in pursuit of divine grace?

The answer lies perhaps in our eternal quest for transformation — that deep-seated belief that a single moment of sacred communion can wash away the accumulated weight of our transgressions. The Mahakumbh's promise is alluring in its simplicity: A holy dip in the Ganges during this auspicious period can cleanse one's soul of sin. Yet, as tragedy strikes in the form of stampedes and accidents, we must pause to examine whether blind faith has led us astray from spirituality's true essence. These incidents are not merely statistical casualties; they



are poignant reminders of how religious fervour, when unchecked by reason, can transform the path to salvation into a road to suffering. There is something deeply moving about the unwavering conviction that draws millions to these sacred waters. Yet, as I watch the faithful immerse themselves in the river's embrace, I cannot help but wonder: Can the complex tableau of human actions, choices, and consequences truly be undone by a moment's submersion? Does spiritual transformation work in such absolute terms, where years of misconduct can be erased in an instant? The Ganges itself presents another layer of this spiritual paradox. In our rush to cleanse our souls, have we forgotten our duty to preserve the very source of that purification?

The question that haunts me is not whether faith has value — it undoubtedly does — but whether we have reduced the profound journey of spiritual evolution to mere ritual. True transformation, I believe, lies not in momentary acts of devotion but in the sustained practice of compassion, integrity and mindful living. The real pilgrimage is not to a geographical location but to the depths of our consciousness, where we confront our shadows and choose, day after day, to act with kindness and purpose. What if the purest form of spiritual practice is simply this: to live each day with such awareness and empathy that we leave every person and place better than we found them? To cultivate a heart so clear that no wily thought finds root there, to build relationships so genuine that they become temples of mutual growth?

Perhaps this daily practice of goodness is the true holy dip of our souls need. None of this is to diminish the power of faith or the beauty of religious tradition. The Mahakumbh remains a remarkable proof of human spirituality, a mirror reflecting our deepest yearning

for connection with the divine. But perhaps its greatest lesson lies not in the promise of instant release but in showing us how collective faith can move millions to action. Imagine if this same power could be channelled into sustained ethical living, into creating communities of care and consciousness.

As the sun sets over the Mahakumbh, casting long shadows over the devoted masses, I am reminded that faith, like the Ganges itself, must flow between the banks of reason and compassion. When it overflows these boundaries, it risks becoming a force of destruction rather than salvation. The challenge before us is not to abandon faith but to evolve it — to transform it from a series of external rituals into an internal compass that guides us toward genuine goodness. The true miracle, perhaps, is not in the holy dip but in the daily choice to live with such purity that our very existence becomes a prayer, our actions a continuous act of worship. (The author is a Dubai-based columnist and children's writing coach. Views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

True forgiveness requires honesty, self-awareness, and the willingness to release resentment



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

People across the globe, from all cultures and traditions, embrace love and forgiveness in daily life. These values are universally viewed as central to the fabric of humanity. But is it as easy to forgive as it sounds to be? Forgiveness, like so many other things in life, is easier said than done. We all seek forgiveness when we do something wrong right? But our stance is quite different when someone seeks forgiveness from us. We find it hard to let go of what's happened to us. The ability to forgive others depends on how honest we are with ourselves. We must remember that forgiveness can only occur because we have been given the gift of the ability to make choices. Hence, if we want to forgive someone, no one can stop us, no matter how poorly they may act, because ultimately, it's our choice to forgive or not to forgive. This ability to forgive is a manifestation of the personal control we have over our lives. Hence each one of us should ask this question to ourselves: Have we journeyed through life pure, perfect, and clean, with never a wrong thought, a wrong word, or action? If we look at ourselves honestly, then how can we not forgive another? Most of us regret many



things that we have said or done in the past. It's a fact that we all have acted wrongly, either because of not knowing what is right, or out of fear or misunderstanding. However, with time and knowledge, we realize what is right and begin to make amends. Just by having this desire to change ourselves, we begin the process of forgiving ourselves, which in turn helps us to forgive others. If this process is to progress, we have to forgive others. We just cannot condemn others and excuse ourselves. This is cheating, and the universally applicable Law of Karma will not allow it. Remember! If we do not learn to forgive, resentment will poison us, and we will end up carrying a double burden: both the resentful thoughts of others' injustice and the hidden reality of our injustice. The power to forgive comes from compassion, which means we should compassionately and peacefully move forward with what is good, towards what is better. Forgiveness dissolves the compulsive need to prove ourselves right. It removes the indignation we feel at imagined injustice. It melts the hardness of another's heart. Our forgiveness, at first, may puzzle them. To forgive and forget is love in action. But we must first learn to forgive ourselves, as well as others, otherwise, the process of releasing this burden neither begins nor progresses.

Forgiving ourselves means letting go of the past. But it also means not making the same mistakes again and again; not inventing convenient ways to excuse ourselves. Remember! A person who has hardened his own heart against others cannot feel even God's forgiveness and compassion. Hence, if we want to be forgiven, then we must be willing to forgive first because the one who forgives first not only proves his justice but especially proves his love. That is why it is said that 'A life well lived is your best revenge.' So, instead of focusing on your wounded feelings, and thereby giving the person who caused you pain the power over you, learn to look for the love, beauty, and kindness around you. This will make the world a better place to live in.

A tribute to my Guru Dr Nalini Didi

With profound grief, I share that Rajyogini Brahmakumari Dr Nalini Didi, a Senior Functionary of the Brahma Kumaris and my revered teacher, passed away in Mumbai on February 9, 2025. A renowned columnist and spiritual mentor, she dedicated 66 years to the service of humanity, spreading spiritual wisdom to millions. Her journey began at 16 after a transformative lecture by Prajapita Brahma, inspiring her lifelong mission of world transformation through Rajyoga education. A gifted speaker, writer and artist, she tirelessly promoted social harmony and earned numerous accolades, including an honorary D.Litt. Her guidance profoundly shaped my spiritual path.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and columnist, views are personal)

Lord Dannatt's Chagos proposal: A testament to imperial arrogance



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

In a stunning display of imperial indifference, a former British Army chief has urged Keir Starmer to abandon plans to return the Chagos Islands to Mauritius and instead hand them over to the US



The call made by Lord Dannatt, former British Army chief, as reported by The Independent (UK), urging Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer to abandon plans to cede control of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius and instead consider handing the islands to the United States under the leadership of Donald Trump, is a moment of brutal clarity in the ongoing saga of colonial legacy, imperial arrogance and military hegemony. It is, perhaps, the most unambiguous and openly cynical articulation of an attitude that has plagued British foreign policy for decades: indifference to justice when the imperial or military agenda is at stake. In this shocking proposal, Lord Dannatt not only trivialises the long-standing historical injustice suffered by the Chagossian people but also reveals a chilling truth about the global order — one in which the rights of dispossessed peoples are inconsequential when the might of military power is involved.

The Chagos Islands, particularly Diego Garcia, remain a crucial outpost for both British and American military operations in the Indian Ocean, a key region for global military and economic dominance. The brutal truth is that the displacement of the Chagossians, the abduction of their homes, their lands, and their futures, was merely a strategic calculation by the British government, sanctioned and enabled by the United States.

These islands have been stripped of their rightful inhabitants, and instead of facing international condemnation, they remain a linchpin in the projection of military power. Lord Dannatt's proposal that the UK should relinquish control of the islands not to Mauritius, but directly to the US, serves as a blunt reminder that this military realpolitik is not just a policy but an ideology — one that continues to shape decisions about sovereignty, justice and human lives in ways that are both morally



THE TRUTH IS THIS: THE CHAGOS ISLANDS ARE NOT JUST A STRETCH OF LAND — THEY SYMBOLISE EVERYTHING THAT IS CORRUPT IN THE GLOBAL ORDER. A SYSTEM WHERE POWER ECLIPSES JUSTICE, AND HUMAN LIVES ARE SACRIFICED FOR THE SAKE OF GEOPOLITICAL DOMINANCE

bankrupt and legally indefensible. The truth is that the Chagossians were forcibly displaced, their families scattered across the world, and their right to return systematically denied. These are not mere footnotes in a distant history; this is an ongoing systematic injustice that has been buried beneath the murky layers of military necessity and imperial prerogative.

The United Nations and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have ruled unequivocally that the separation of the Chagos Islands from Mauritius is illegal, that the Chagossians' forced expulsion violated fundamental human rights and that their right to return to their homeland must be respected. These rulings are binding principles of international law, upheld by the court of global conscience. Yet the British government, in collusion with the United States, has continued to flout these legal rulings, with a callousness that is matched only by the complicity of global institutions that have failed to hold them to account.

The UK and its allies continue to demonstrate a dissonance between the legal obligation to return the islands to Mauritius and the military significance of Diego Garcia. The £18 billion (approximately \$22.52 billion USD) leaseback deal designed to ensure that the UK retains control of the islands is a financial burden, a sum that could instead be better spent on bolstering Britain's own defence capacity. But here's the crux: the Chagos Islands, specifically Diego Garcia, are not just a military base. They are a symbol of the power dynamics that have defined the post-war world order — a world where military interests, not

human dignity or sovereignty, govern the actions of nations. It is worth noting that Lord Dannatt's rhetoric is not an anomaly.

He is merely the latest in a long line of British military and political figures who have justified colonial dispossession in the name of military expediency. Diego Garcia, a military outpost of unparalleled strategic importance, is where American bombers take off for strikes in the West Asia, where naval forces project power across the Indian Ocean, and where the surveillance apparatus of the global superpowers monitors and controls vast swathes of the world. In short, Diego Garcia is a symbol of global military dominance — a fortress built upon the foundation of historical dispossession, suffering, and legal nullification. The fact that the Chagossians' right to return to their homeland is still not respected is a contemptuous affront to international law. The UK government's refusal to comply with ICJ rulings, while continuing to enjoy a special relationship with the US, sends a clear message to the world: law and justice are subordinate to power and strategy.

The international legal community can issue as many judgments as it likes, but it is all for naught when the major powers choose to ignore or bypass those rulings in favour of military interests. The declassified documents from the 1960s and 1970s reveal the collusion between the US and the UK to create a military enclave on Diego Garcia, with the forcible removal of the Chagossians merely an administrative detail to be swept under the carpet. In those documents, we see the foundations of a dirty deal that placed

geopolitical strategy above the basic human rights of a people. It is colonialism dressed as military necessity, and those who challenge this narrative are dismissed as idealists, outliers, or irrelevant. This is not just a matter of the Chagossians' rights; it is a fundamental crisis of the global legal and moral order.

It is a scandal that has gone largely ignored, an injustice that has been swept under the rug of strategic necessity, and an entire people's history erased in the name of military convenience. How can anyone with even a hint of conscience ignore these flagrant breaches of international law, perpetrated by those who claim to champion human rights while posing as defenders of democracy? Our complicity, fuelled by willful indifference, contributes to the erosion of international law and the degradation of fundamental human dignity.

The truth is this: the Chagos Islands are not just a stretch of land — they symbolise everything that is corrupt in the global order. A system where power eclipses justice, and human lives are sacrificed for the sake of geopolitical dominance. The silence that surrounds this injustice is as damning as the apathy that sustains it.

The Chagossians have been denied their homeland for over half a century. It is high time that the world demands the return of their land, not just out of legal obligation, but out of a moral imperative to right the wrongs of the past and give these forgotten people the future they have been denied for so long.

(The writer is a journalist and policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Empowering India's workforce: The crucial role of upskilling and inclusive hiring

With evolving industry demands and a rising need for skilled labour, organisations must bridge skill gaps and create sustainable employment opportunities

In today's rapidly changing job market, skill development and inclusive hiring are more critical than ever, particularly for the blue-collar workforce. As industries evolve and the demand for skilled labour increases, organisations must focus on bridging skill gaps and creating pathways to meaningful employment.

By prioritising upskilling and inclusive hiring practices, companies can empower individuals, enhance service quality, and contribute to the overall growth of the economy.

Investing in Skill Development Continuous learning is essential for the blue-collar workforce, where technological advancements and changing industry standards require a skilled and adaptable labour



DHIRAJ SINGH

pool. According to a report by the Global Labor Market Conference (GLMC), 55 per cent of professionals fear their skills may become partially or fully obsolete within the next five years, prompting many to consider reskilling. Organisations are increasingly offering a variety of skill

development programmes tailored specifically for their blue-collar employees. These programs encompass technical training, crisis management, digital security and leadership development, equipping workers with the expertise necessary for career advancement. In recent years, many companies have implemented structured upskilling initiatives that have led to significant improvements in service quality, efficiency and employee satisfaction.

Empowering the Grassroots Workforce Blue-collar workers, who make up over 80 per cent of India's non-agricultural workforce, are essential to the country's economic growth across various sectors. According to McKinsey and Company, by 2030, 70 per cent of the 90 mil-

lion new jobs expected in India will be blue-collar positions. These roles account for about 80 per cent of jobs in both the organised and unorganised sectors, acting as the primary engine of the economy. Their fulfilment is crucial for the growth of key sectors such as manufacturing and logistics. Recognising the unique challenges faced by grassroots workers, many organisations have developed targeted skilling initiatives that address the specific needs of this demographic.

These programs are designed to empower individuals at the community level, providing them with the tools and knowledge necessary to thrive in their roles. Through hands-on training and mentorship, companies are fostering a cul-



ture of skill enhancement that encourages employees to take ownership of their career paths.

Success Stories: Behind every blue-collar worker is a story of ambition and determination. Many individuals have experienced transformative career journeys through upskilling initiatives. For instance, frontline workers have advanced to supervisory

roles after completing leadership training, while others have gained expertise in emerging technologies, securing higher-paying positions. However, a report by WorkIndia reveals that more than 40 per cent of blue-collar workers are employed but actively seeking new job opportunities. The drive for better salaries, career growth, and personal motivations are leading factors. Concerns over layoffs and financial instability also prompt job searches.

Expanding Opportunities: Inclusive Hiring Practices Organisations are not merely filling positions; they are creating futures. With a commitment to inclusive hiring, particularly in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities where job opportunities can be limited, companies are

working to ensure that more individuals, regardless of gender or background, can build stable and rewarding careers. With an increasing focus on safety and a surge in residential technology-driven training and fostering a culture of continuous learning, companies aim to set new standards in workforce development.

Women in the Workforce: Breaking Barriers Empowering women in the workforce is a crucial aspect of inclusive hiring. More women are stepping into roles as individual contributors, frontline managers, and even executive leadership positions, demonstrating that gender is no barrier to success.

These initiatives foster a workplace culture where women can not only succeed but thrive.

The Road Ahead: Looking ahead, organizations are set to expand their upskilling programs to cater to India's growing middle class and evolving job market needs. By integrating technology-driven training and fostering a culture of continuous learning, companies aim to set new standards in workforce development.

With strategic hiring approaches and robust skill enhancement initiatives, organisations are not just providing jobs; they are building careers and transforming lives. Investing in upskilling and creating employment opportunities at the grassroots level is not just a matter of social responsibility; it is also a key economic imperative.

(The writer is CEO SIS Ltd; views are personal)

Russia, US agree to work for ending Ukraine war in major diplomatic shift

PTI ■ RIYADH

Russia and the US agreed on Tuesday to start working toward ending the war in Ukraine and improving their diplomatic and economic ties, the two countries' top diplomats said after talks that reflected an extraordinary about-face in US foreign policy under President Donald Trump.

In an interview with AP after the meeting, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the two sides agreed broadly to pursue three goals — restore staffing at their respective embassies in Washington and Moscow, create a high-level team to support Ukraine peace talks and explore closer relations and economic cooperation.

He stressed, however, that the talks — attended by his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov and other senior Russian and US officials — marked the beginning of a conversation, and more work needs to be done. Lavrov echoed Rubio's remarks and told reporters that "the conversation was very useful".

Trump's national security advisor Michael Waltz and special Mideast envoy Steven Witkoff joined Rubio at the table, along with Lavrov and Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign affairs advisor Yuri

Ushakov. No Ukrainian officials were present at the meeting, which came as the beleaguered country is slowly but steadily losing ground against more numerous Russian troops in a grinding war that began nearly three years ago.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his country would not accept any outcome from the talks since Kyiv didn't take part, and postponed his own trip to the kingdom scheduled for Wednesday.

European allies have also expressed concerns that they are being sidelined. Trump showed little patience for Ukraine's objections to being excluded from the talks.

"Today I heard, 'Oh, well, we weren't invited.' Well, you been there for three years. You should have ended it three years ago," Trump said during a news conference at his Florida residence. "You should have never started it. You could have made a deal."

Ties between Russia and the US have fallen to their lowest level in decades in recent years — a rift that has been widening ever since Russia illegally annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and only worsened after Moscow's full-scale invasion. The US, along with European

nations, imposed a raft of sanctions on Russia in an effort to damage its economy. And embassies in Washington and Moscow have been hit hard by expulsions of large numbers of diplomats, as well as other restrictions.

Rubio said on Tuesday that ending the war in Ukraine could "unlock the door" for "incredible opportunities" to partner with the Russians on issues of common interest "that hopefully will be good for the world and also improve our relations in the long term".

His comments were further evidence of the remarkable US reversal on Russia after years in which Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, led international efforts to isolate Moscow.

Tuesday's meeting was meant to pave the way for a summit between Trump and Putin. After the talks, Ushakov and Waltz said no date has been set yet for that summit.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Lavrov mentioned the same three goals as Rubio and said that Washington and Moscow agreed to appoint representatives to carry out "regular consultations" on Ukraine. The meeting marked the most extensive contact between the two countries since Moscow's February 24, 2022, invasion.

The recent US diplomatic blitz on the war has sent Ukraine and key allies scrambling to ensure a seat at the table amid concerns that Washington and Moscow would press ahead with a deal that won't be favourable to them.

Kyiv's absence at Tuesday's talks rankled many Ukrainians, and France called an emergency meeting of European Union countries and the UK on Monday to discuss the war. Kyiv's participation in such talks was a bedrock of US policy under Biden.

US State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said the talks were aimed at determining how serious the Russians are about achieving peace and whether detailed negotiations can start.

Rubio said Tuesday that there would be "engagement and consultation with Ukraine, with our partners in Europe and others. But ultimately, the Russian side will be indispensable to this effort".

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said last week that NATO membership for Ukraine was unrealistic and suggested Kyiv should abandon hopes of winning all its territory back from Russia — two key items on Putin's wish list.

French President Emmanuel

Macron on Tuesday said he spoke by phone to Trump and Zelenskyy following Monday's European meeting.

The meeting at the Diriyah Palace in the Saudi capital of Riyadh also highlighted de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's efforts to be a major diplomatic player.

Saudi state media described the talks as happening at the prince's direction. Like the neighbouring UAE, the prince has maintained close relations to Russia throughout its war on Ukraine, both through the OPEC+ oil cartel and diplomatically as well.

Saudi Arabia has also helped in prisoner negotiations and hosted Zelenskyy for an Arab League summit in 2023. But Zelenskyy postponed his own trip to Saudi Arabia scheduled for this week, suggesting that he wanted to avoid his visit being linked to the talks since Ukrainian officials weren't invited.

Meanwhile, Russia continued to pummel Ukraine with drones, according to Kyiv's military. The Ukrainian air force said Russian troops launched a barrage of 176 drones at Ukraine overnight, most of which were destroyed or disabled by jamming.

Zelenskyy: Trump living in Russian 'disinformation space'

PTI ■ KYIV

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Wednesday that US President Donald Trump is living in a Russian "disinformation space" regarding his previous day's comments about the Ukrainian leader's approval rating.

Trump said at Mar-a-Lago that Zelenskyy's rating stood at 4 per cent.

Zelenskyy replied in a news conference in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv that "we have seen this disinformation. We understand that it is coming from Russia."

He said that Trump "lives in this disinformation space."

Trump also suggested Ukraine ought to hold elections, which have been postponed due to the war and the consequent imposition of martial law, in accordance with the Ukrainian Constitution.

Public opinion polls and approval ratings haven't been reliable in Ukraine because of the fighting.

Zelenskyy made the comments shortly before he was expected to meet with Keith Kellogg, the US special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, who arrived in Kyiv on Wednesday.

Kellogg will meet Zelenskyy and military commanders as



the US shifts its policy away from years of efforts to isolate Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump suggested Tuesday that Kyiv was to blame for the war, which enters its fourth year next week, as talks between top American and Russian diplomats in Saudi Arabia sidelined Ukraine and its European supporters. Trump's comments are likely to vex Ukrainian officials, who have urged the world to help them fight Russia's full-scale invasion that began February 24, 2022.

The battlefield has also brought grim news for Ukraine in recent months. A relentless onslaught in eastern areas by Russia's bigger army is grinding down Ukrainian forces, which are slowly but steadily being pushed backward at some points on the 1,000-kilometre

front line.

Trump told reporters at his Florida residence Tuesday that Ukraine "should have never started" the war and "could have made a deal" to prevent it. Kellogg said his visit was "a chance to have some good, substantial talks." Zelenskyy cancelled his planned Wednesday trip to Saudi Arabia in what some analysts saw as an attempt to deny legitimacy to the US-Russia talks about the future of his country.

American officials have signalled that Ukraine's hopes of joining NATO in order to ward off Russian aggression after reaching a possible peace agreement won't happen. Zelenskyy says any settlement will require US security commitments to keep Russia at bay. "We understand the need for security guarantees," Kellogg said in comments carried by Ukrainian public broadcaster Suspilne Novyny on his arrival at Kyiv train station.

"It's very clear to us the importance of the sovereignty of this nation and the independence of this nation as well. ... Part of my mission is to sit and listen," the retired three-star general said. Kellogg said he would convey what he learns on his visit to Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio to "and ensure that we get this one right."

Federal judge won't immediately block Musk or DOGE from federal data or worker layoffs

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A federal judge refused on Tuesday to immediately block billionaire Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency from accessing government data systems or participating in worker layoffs. US District Judge Tanya Chutkan found that there are legitimate questions about Musk's authority but said there isn't evidence of the kind of grave legal harm that would justify a temporary restraining order.

The decision came in a lawsuit filed by 14 Democratic states challenging DOGE's authority to access sensitive government data. The attorneys general argued that Musk is wielding the kind of power that the Constitution says can only be held by those who are elected or confirmed by the Senate.

The Trump administration, for its part, has maintained that layoffs are coming from agency heads, and asserted that despite his public cheering of the effort Musk isn't directly running DOGE's day-to-day operations himself.

DOGE has tapped into computer systems across multiple agencies with the blessing of President Donald Trump, digging into budgets and searching for what he calls waste, fraud and abuse, even as a growing number of lawsuits allege DOGE is violating the law.

Chutkan recognised the concerns of the group of states, which include New Mexico and Arizona.

"DOGE's unpredictable actions have resulted in considerable uncertainty and confusion," she wrote. Their questions about Musk's apparent "unchecked authority" and lack of Congressional oversight for DOGE are legitimate and they may be able to successfully argue them later.

Still, at this point, it remains unclear exactly how DOGE's work will affect the states, and judges can only issue court orders to block specific, immediate harms, she found.

Chutkan, who was nominated by Democratic President Barack Obama, previously oversaw the now-dismissed criminal election interference case against Trump in Washington, DC.

Support to kids stopped

Washington (PTI): The Trump administration on Tuesday stopped support for legal representation in immigration court for children who enter the US alone, a setback for those fighting deportation who can't afford a lawyer.

The Acacia Center for Justice says it serves 26,000 migrant children under its federal contract. The Interior Department gave no explanation for the stop-work order, telling the group only that it was done for "causes outside of your control" and should not be interpreted as a judgment of poor performance.

The halt remains in effect until further notice.

White House says Elon Musk not in charge at DOGE but advising president

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The White House says billionaire Elon Musk is not technically part of the Department of Government Efficiency team that is sweeping through federal agencies but is rather a senior advisor to President Donald Trump.

Musk's exact role could be key in the legal fight over DOGE's access to government data as the Trump administration moves to lay off thousands of federal workers. Defining him as an advisor rather than the administrator in charge of day-to-day operations at DOGE could help the administration as it pushes back against a lawsuit arguing Musk has too much power for someone who isn't elected or Senate-confirmed.

The declaration was filed on

Monday as the Trump administration fends off the lawsuit from several Democratic states that want to block Musk and the DOGE team from accessing government systems. The litigants say Musk is wielding "virtually unchecked power" in violation of the Constitution.

The Trump administration, on the other hand, says Musk is not a DOGE employee and has "no actual authority to make government decisions himself". Joshua Fisher, director of the White House Office of Administration, said in court papers. The documents do not name the administrator of DOGE, whose work Musk has championed in posts on his social-media platform X and in a public appearance at the White House.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt declined on



Tuesday to tell reporters at the White House who the DOGE administrator is, though minutes before she said in an interview with Fox News Channel that Musk has been tasked with overseeing the effort on behalf of the president.

Layoffs, she told reporters, are up to individual agency heads. "Elon Musk, just like everybody else across the federal

government, works at the direction of President Trump," Leavitt said.

The DOGE team has roamed from agency to agency, tapping into computer systems, digging into budgets and searching for waste, fraud and abuse, while lawsuits pile up claiming Trump and DOGE are violating the law. At least two are targeting Musk himself.

Last week, Musk called for the US to "delete entire agencies" from the federal government as part of the push to radically cut spending and restructure its priorities. US District Judge Tanya Chutkan seemed sceptical in a hearing on Monday when Justice Department lawyers asserted that Musk has no formal authority.

"I think you stretch too far. I disagree with you there," Chutkan said.

Trump administration gives schools deadline to end DEI programmes or risk losing funds

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The Trump administration is giving America's schools and universities two weeks to eliminate diversity initiatives or risk losing federal money, raising the stakes in the president's fight against "wokeness".

In a memo on Friday, the Education Department gave an ultimatum to stop using "racial preferences" as a factor in admissions, financial aid, hiring or other areas. Schools are being given 14 days to end any practice that treats students or workers differently because of their race.

Educators at colleges nationwide were rushing to evaluate their risk and decide whether to stand up for practices they believe are legal. The sweeping demand threatens to upend all aspects of campus operations, from essays on college applica-

tions to classroom lessons and campus clubs. It's meant to correct what the memo described as rampant discrimination in education, often against white and Asian students.

"Schools have been operating on the pretext that selecting students for diversity or similar euphemisms is not selecting them based on race," said Craig Trainor, acting assistant secretary for civil rights. "No longer. Students should be assessed according to merit, accomplishment and character."

The guidance drew sharp backlash from civil rights groups and university groups. Some believe its vague language is meant to have a chilling effect, pressuring schools to eliminate anything touching on the topic of race even if it may be defensible in court.

"Creating a sense of risk around doing work that might promote

diverse and welcoming campuses is much more of the goal than a clear statement of existing law," said Jonathan Fansmith, senior vice-president of government relations at the American Council on Education, an association of college presidents.

The memo is an extension of President Donald Trump's executive order banning diversity, equity and inclusion programmes. As legal justification, it cites the 2023 Supreme Court decision barring race as a factor in college admissions.

"Put simply, educational institutions may neither separate or segregate students based on race, nor distribute benefits or burdens based on race," it said. On Monday, the Education Department announced it also cut USD 600 million in grants for organisations that train teachers. The programmes pro-

moted "divisive" concepts like DEI, critical race theory and social justice activism, the department said.

Confusion around the implications of Trump's anti-DEI order was apparent at last week's confirmation hearing for education secretary nominee Linda McMahon. Asked whether classes on African American history would run afoul of the president's order, McMahon said she wasn't certain.

The California School Boards Association is awaiting legal guidance so it can advise schools on the Trump administration's deadline, spokesman Troy Flint said. "At this point there is not enough information for a step-by-step playbook that tells school districts if you were doing A then now you should do B, or perhaps eliminate the whole programme entirely," he said.



A photo of Pope Francis stands in front of Priest Nicolas Angelotti as he leads a Mass to pray for the pope's health in Buenos Aires, Argentina. AP/PTI

Nearly 300 deportees from US held in Panama hotel

PTI ■ PANAMA CITY (PANAMA)

Panama is detaining in a hotel nearly 300 people from various countries deported under US President Donald Trump, not allowing them to leave while waiting for international authorities to organise a return to their countries.

More than 40 per cent of the migrants, authorities say, won't voluntarily return to their homeland. Migrants in the hotel rooms held messages to the windows reading "Help" and "We are not save (sic) in our country".

The migrants hailed from 10 mostly Asian countries, including Iran, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and others. The US has

difficulty deporting directly to some of those countries so Panama is being used as a stopover. Costa Rica was expected to receive a similar flight of third-country deportees on Wednesday.

Panama's Security Minister Frank Abrego said Tuesday the migrants are receiving medical attention and food as part of a migration agreement between Panama and the US. The Panamanian government has now agreed to serve as a "bridge" or transit country for deportees, while the US bears all the costs of the operation.

The agreement was announced earlier this month after US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's visit. Panamanian President Jose

Raul Mulino, who faces political pressure over Trump's threats of retaking control of the Panama Canal, announced the arrival of the first of the deportation flights last Thursday. The confinement and legal limbo the deportees face has raised alarm in the Central American country, especially as images spread of migrants peaking through the windows of their rooms on high floors of the hotel and displaying the notes pleading for help. Abrego denied the foreigners are being detained even though they cannot leave the rooms of their hotel, which is being guarded by police.

Abrego said that 171 of the 299 deportees have agreed to return voluntarily to their respective

countries with help from the International Organisation for Migration and the UN Refugee Agency. UN agencies are talking with the other 128 migrants in an effort to find a destination for them in third countries.

Abrego said that one deported Irish citizen has already returned to her country. Those who do not agree to return to their countries will be temporarily held in a facility in the remote Darien province through which hundreds of thousands of migrants have crossed on their journey north in recent years, Abrego said.

The Panamanian Ombudsman's Office was scheduled to provide more details on the deportees' situation later Tuesday.

Border arrests plummet

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Arrests for illegal border crossings from Mexico plummeted 39 per cent in January from a month earlier, authorities said on Tuesday, an early gauge of President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown. The Border Patrol made 21,593 arrests during the month, down from 47,316 in December and the lowest mark since May 2020 near the peak of the COVID-19 epidemic, according to US Customs and Border Protection. "Call it the Trump effect," the White House said in a statement. Border arrests fell sharply well before Trump took office from an all-time high of 2,500,000 in December 2023. Mexican authorities increased enforcement within their own borders and then-president Joe Biden introduced severe asylum restrictions in June. Arrests sank even further after Trump was sworn in on January 20 and issued a slew of orders on immigration, including one to suspend asylum on grounds that the US is under "invasion" at the southern border.

Man who attacked Japan's ex-PM sentenced to 10 years

PTI ■ TOKYO

A Japanese court on Wednesday convicted a man who threw a homemade pipe bomb at Japan's former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at a 2023 campaign event, sentencing him to 10 years in prison, according to local media reports.

Ryuji Kimura, 25, was charged with attempted murder for the April 15, 2023 attack on Kishida at a small fishing port in the western city of Wakayama, as well as four other charges including violations of laws on explosives and other weapons.

In the ruling, the Wakayama District Court sentenced

Kimura to 10 years in prison, according to Japan's public television and other media, without specifying which of the five charges he was found guilty of. The court did not immediately confirm the ruling by phone. Kimura, at an opening session of the trial in early February, pleaded not guilty to attempted murder, saying he didn't intend to kill Kishida.

The then-prime minister was unhurt, but two people sustained minor injuries. Kimura was arrested on the spot.

The attack came about a year after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during a campaign speech in Nara, another city in western Japan.

Mysuru layoffs: Infosys denies force, intimidation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IT services company Infosys on Wednesday said it did not use force or intimidation tactics when it laid off trainees at Mysuru campus over performance-related issues, and that it was explaining the circumstances to the labour department authorities.

Shaji Mathew, Chief Human Resources Officer at Infosys, however, conceded that assessment failure percentages this time around have been "slightly higher" than in the past but dismissed charges that the tests had been designed for failure.

On whether the layoffs would severely dent Infosys' brand as the company goes out to campuses for FY26 hiring, he said that plans to hire 20,000 freshers for next fiscal are on track and they should have nothing to worry about as they will get one of the best corporate training.

Responding to allegations that testing parameters, assessment criteria and syllabus were altered and intimidation tactics

were resorted leading to the 300 plus terminations at Mysuru campus recently, Mathew said that given that the company invests money and effort to select and put trainees through the training program "it is in the interest of Infosys to see that all these people are successful, and that is when we are able to put them into our projects".

"There is training investment that goes in and we also pay them salary during the training. It is not in the interest of the company to let any of these people go...It is a loss to them of course, it is a loss to us as well," he said adding that the particular batch of trainees had not cleared internal assessments after three attempts.

On the Labour Ministry's direction to Karnataka state labour department to take action, and reports that the Labour Department officials had followed up with visits to Infosys campuses in Bengaluru and Mysuru, Mathew said the Labour Department is in touch with the company and Infosys

is cooperating with the authorities.

"Yes, the Labour Department has been in touch with us, they wanted to understand our training process and the assessment etc and we have taken (them) through the entire training process, the assessment, and how this is a critical part of developing the future talent, not just for Infosys, but even for the entire IT industry.

"They have been quite supportive, and I think they understand the entire process that we have been going through in terms of training and assessment, all of that. So we have cooperated with them so far. And there has been no further ask from their side," Mathew said.

Asked if Infosys will consider taking the trainees back and reinstating them, he added "There has been no further ask in terms of taking them back". Earlier this month, India's second largest IT services company faced a backlash after it laid off over 300 freshers who underwent foundational

training at its Mysuru campus but could not clear internal assessments.

The trainees after a two-year wait had been onboarded just a few months ago in October 2024.

IT employee union NITES had sought urgent intervention of Ministry of Labour and Employment urging authorities to take strict action against the company.

Nascent Information Technology Employees Senate (NITES) had, in fact, alleged that employees were summoned to meeting rooms at Infosys' Mysuru campus, and asked to sign "mutual separation" letters.

Mathew countered allegations claiming that at no point were 'bouncers' brought in, nor were intimidation tactics used.

This is not what Infosys stands for, he emphasised.

"I can't even imagine us thinking about 'bouncers' and so on so forth. These are our trainees, and we don't need to bring in bouncers. So that is absolutely not correct. There was also concern that we did

not allow people to stay on the campus. Again, there are people who wanted to stay on the campus, and we allowed them to stay on the campus," he said.

Infosys has now postponed, by a week, internal assessments scheduled for another set of trainees, reportedly 800 of them are slated to take their tests.

The company has, however, asserted that the deferment is aimed at giving them additional time for preparation.

"It is in our interest to see how we can help these set of trainees to get through the training program, and that they come out successful at the end of the training so we can continue with them as employees in the company. We have seen the failure rate, and therefore we wanted to give them an additional opportunity and time to prepare," he said.

The additional time will help them in the doubt-clearing, and subject matter experts will be made available so they can actually work with trainees to prepare them well.

US tariffs on India to have limited impact

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will be less impacted by the proposed United States (US) reciprocal tariff as the country's economy is mainly driven by domestic demand, and has substantial services exports, which is not going to be targeted by the Trump Administration, S and P Global Ratings said on Wednesday.

US President Donald Trump has announced he will impose reciprocal tariffs on its trading partners, including India.

S&P Global Ratings, Economist Asia-Pacific, Vishrut Rana said the reciprocal tariff will hurt countries like Vietnam, South Korea, Taiwan more as they have high trade surplus with the US.

The Indian economy has two mitigating factors - greater reliance on domestic economy and larger services trade with

the US, which is not likely to be tarified.

In Japan also, there are similar mitigating factors - greater reliance on services trade, and domestically-driven economy.

"Which means (US) trade measures might be less impactful there (India and Japan)," Rana said at the S&P Asia-Pacific Credit Focus webinar.

He also said that reciprocal tariffs may fuel inflationary expectations, thus leading to higher interest rates globally.

S and P Global Ratings, Director, Sovereigns (Asia-Pacific) YeeFarn Phua also said India's economy is largely still domestic-oriented and the nature of the exports to the US is more on the services side, which is less prone to tariffs.

"India's dependence on exports for growth is not that great. So, therefore, I think the impact (of US tariffs) will be more or less limited," he said, adding on the goods side the

sectors which could be exposed to higher tariffs are jewellery, pharmaceutical, textiles and chemicals.

Phua said the US may not impose higher tariffs on pharmaceuticals, which are basically generic drugs, from India as it would drive up healthcare costs in its own country.

However, textiles and to some extent chemicals are most at risk of higher tariffs.

"If we were to reimagine that scenario for the first Trump administration to unfold again, I think overall, the impact on India should be quite minimal," Phua added.

Earlier in 2018 under the Presidency of Donald Trump, Washington had imposed an additional 25 per cent import duty on steel products and 10 per cent on certain aluminium products. In retaliation, India in June 2019, imposed additional customs duties on 28 American products.

Efforts to serve complaint on Gautam Adani, Sagar Adani ongoing: SEC

PTI ■ NEW YORK

The United States (US) Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has told a federal judge here that its efforts to serve its complaint on Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani in the alleged bribery scheme are "ongoing", including through a request for assistance to the Indian authorities.

The SEC submitted a status update Tuesday to Judge Nicholas Garaufis at the United States District Court, Eastern District of New York regarding its efforts to serve its complaint on Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani.

The SEC said that both Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani "are located in India, and the SEC's efforts to serve them there are ongoing, including through a request for assistance to the Indian authorities to effect service under the Hague Service Convention for Service Abroad of Judicial and Extrajudicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Matters."

The SEC said that its complaint dated November 20 last year

alleges that Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani violated the antifraud provisions of the federal securities laws by "knowingly or recklessly making false and misleading representations concerning Adani Green Energy Ltd in connection with a September 2021 debt offering by Adani Green.

It said that because the "defendants are located in a foreign country, Rule 4(f) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (FRCP) governs service of the Summons and Complaint. FRCP 4(f) contains no set time limit for service, and the SEC may serve Defendants 'by any internationally agreed means of service that is reasonably calculated to give notice', such as the Hague Service Convention."

The SEC update, submitted by its Counsel Christopher Colorado, cited a case which notes that service via the Hague Service Convention is one permissible means of serving defendants located in India.

"Since the filing of its Complaint, SEC staff has been

working to serve Defendants in accordance with FRCP 4(f). SEC staff has contacted Defendants or their counsel (to the extent SEC staff is aware of such counsel) and has sent them Notices of Lawsuit and Requests for Waiver of Service of Summons, including copies of the Complaint.

"Additionally, under Article 5(a) of the Hague Service Convention, the SEC has requested assistance from India's Ministry of Law and Justice, the Central Authority for India under the Hague Service Convention."

"That process is ongoing, and the SEC will continue its efforts to serve Defendants in India by the methods prescribed by FRCP 4(f)-including under the Hague Service Convention-and will keep the Court apprised of its progress," the SEC said.

In November last year, the Securities and Exchange Commission had charged Gautam Adani, Sagar Adani and Cyril Cabanes, an executive of Azure Power Global Ltd., for conduct arising out of a massive bribery scheme.

Australia's Federation University acquires Employability.life

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Federation University Australia on Wednesday announced its expansion in India with the strategic acquisition of Employability.life, reaching 10 Million students in higher education to make them work-ready.

Federation University, which dates back to 1870 when the School of Mines in Ballarat was established, has evolved into Victoria's leading regional university, and established local and global partnerships, and produced over 123,000 graduates.

The university is ranked number 175 in the Times Higher Education World's Young Universities.

It is ranked number one in Victoria and number two in Australia for full-time postgraduate employment.

New Delhi headquartered Employability.life, a workplace readiness company, has partnerships with several colleges and universities across Maharashtra, Karnataka, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi,

and Punjab.

Through this acquisition, Employability.life will be integrated into Federation University's ecosystem, helping to bridge the gap between academic learning and workplace readiness.

Commenting on the acquisition, Professor Duncan Bentley, Vice Chancellor, Federation University Australia said, "Federation University Australia is thrilled to announce the acquisition of Employability.life as part of our mission to deliver a world-class education that combines academic excellence with practical, real-world experience.

Federation University's mission is to transform lives and enhancing communities, and the acquisition of Employability.life will help us deliver on that commitment on a global scale. It will also expand our presence in India where our expertise in supporting regional communities has helped us forge many valuable partnerships in education and research."

Coal ministry plans to offer extra incentives in mine auctions

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The Coal Ministry is planning additional incentives to boost underground (UG) commercial coal block auctions in India, a senior government official said on Wednesday.

The push for UG mining aligns with India's drive for sustainable coal production.

The proposed incentives are in an advanced stage of discussions and are expected to be announced soon, Coal Secretary Vikram Dev Dutt said at a roadshow for commercial coal mine auctions in the city.

Additional Secretary and nominated authority Rupinder Brar clarified that any new incentives and policy relaxations are expected to be applicable prospectively.

The coal ministry's policy evolution has involved multiple stakeholders, including industry players.

"We have consistently refined the auction framework based

on industry feedback, ensuring an investor-friendly environment," Dutt said.

The ministry was discussing demands for reclassification, as underground mining faces inherent challenges.

Of the 113 commercial mines successfully auctioned, 37 are underground, officials said.

The ministry is also working to secure environmental concessions with the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change.

The ministry believes the next two-three years are crucial for commercial mines to rapidly begin production.

Currently, production from auctioned commercial mines is 20 million tonnes, but combined with captive production, it totals 157 Million Tonnes and is expected to reach 170 Million Tonnes by the end of the fiscal year, an official said.

In 2025-26, this production is projected to rise to 210 Million Tonnes.

MREI facilitates cultural exchange for UK students

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Manav Rachna Educational Institutions (MREI) facilitated an enriching sport, cultural and academic exchange for over 50 students and faculty members from Havant and South Downs College (HSDC) and Park Community School (PCS) under the UK Government's Turing Scheme, a prestigious international mobility grants programme initiated by the UK government.

The exchange featured a thoughtfully designed academic schedule incorporating interactive sessions, hands-on projects, and industry-relevant learning experiences.

Participants engaged in discussions with subject matter experts, attended specialised workshops, and explored innovative solutions in these fields, ensuring a well-rounded and immersive educational experience.

The program focused on providing domain-specific insights into sports, sustainability, environmental science, and culinary arts and a deeper appreciation of diverse cultural perspectives.

"Such initiatives play a vital role in expanding students' academic horizons and preparing them for a globally connected world.

Through this journey, we hope to broaden their perspectives, enhance their skills, and build lasting friendships," said Dr. Amit Bhalla, Vice President, MREI.

"At Manav Rachna, we are committed to creating transformative learning experiences that empower students with knowledge beyond textbooks," he added.

Julio Carrillo, Turing Coordinator and Team Leader, HSDC said, "I am delighted to be a part of this enriching exchange program between MREI and our institution in the UK. The opportunity for our students and faculty to engage with the vibrant academic and cultural landscape of India is truly invaluable."

India-Qatar trade agreement must be approached with caution: GTRI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India should tread cautiously on a potential free trade agreement (FTA) with Qatar, particularly in the petrochemical sector as both countries are strong in this segment, economic think tank GTRI said on Wednesday.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) added that India should ensure that tariff concessions on petrochemicals and energy-related imports do not undermine domestic industries. According to a joint statement issued after the meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, the two sides agreed to explore the possibility of entering into a bilateral comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) with an aim to double bilateral trade to \$28 Billion by 2030.

Normally in a CEPA, a kind of free trade agreement (FTA), two trading partners either eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties on the maximum number of goods (90-95 per cent) traded between them.

Besides, they ease norms to promote trade in services and boost investments.

Given the trade structure between the two nations, a trade agreement "must be approached with caution," the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

India has a well-developed domestic petrochemical industry that could face challenges if tariff reductions lead to an influx of cheaper Qatari imports, he said, adding that India already has a significant trade deficit with Qatar, which could widen further post-trade pact if market access benefits are

not balanced.

"A careful evaluation of sectoral impacts, particularly in energy and manufacturing, will be essential before proceeding with such an agreement," he said.

India's trade with Qatar is marked by a significant imbalance.

In 2023-24, the country's imports from Qatar stood at \$12.34 Billion, while its exports were only \$1.7 Billion.

A large portion (85 per cent) of India's imports from Qatar comprises LNG (\$6.3 Billion), butane, propane mostly for LPG production (\$3.1 Billion), and petroleum crude (\$1.1 Billion).

Meanwhile, India's primary exports to Qatar include Basmati rice (\$124 Million), articles of iron and steel (\$200 Million), and machinery (\$106 Million).

According to the GTRI, as of 2024, Qatar has a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$221.4 Billion, and a population of about 3.1 Million. India has a GDP of \$4 Trillion and a population of 1400 Million. The bilateral trade has declined to \$14 Billion in 2023-24 from \$18.77 Billion in 2022-23.

India received \$1.5 Billion of foreign direct investments from that country between April 2000 and September 2024.

Qatar's key exports to India include LNG, LPG, chemicals and petrochemicals, plastics, and aluminium articles, while India's key exports include cereals, copper articles, iron and steel articles, vegetables, fruits, spices, processed food products, electrical and other machinery, plastic products, construction material, textiles and garments, chemicals, precious stones and rubber.

Markets end marginally lower in volatile trade

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower in a volatile trade on Wednesday dragged by blue-chip IT stocks.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex dipped 28.21 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 75,939.18. Intraday, it hit a high of 76,338.58 and a low of 75,581.38, gyrating 757.2 points.

The NSE Nifty skidded 12.40 points or 0.05 per cent to 22,932.90.

From the Sensex pack, Tata Consultancy Services and Infosys fell over 2 per cent each. Hindustan Unilever, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Tech, Mahindra & Mahindra, and Tech Mahindra were also among the laggards.

Among the gainers, Zomato jumped nearly 5 per cent. Larsen & Toubro, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, IndusInd Bank

and Kotak Mahindra Bank were also among the gainers.

"The national benchmarks exhibited a range-bound performance with a slight downward bias, though selective buying in the broader market was evident, driven by bargain hunting in beaten-down stocks.

"A reversal in FII flows also influenced market dynamics; however, the durability of this trend remains uncertain.

Despite concerns over potential US tariff impositions and delays in anticipated interest rate cuts, market sentiment remains optimistic about a rebound in India's Q3 GDP growth," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Shanghai settled in the positive territory while Tokyo and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading mostly lower.

US markets ended in positive territory on Tuesday.

"While markets ended flat with a slightly negative bias due to selling in IT stocks, broader markets witnessed a lot of optimism as mid and smallcap stocks rallied after the recent sell-off.

"Despite the uncertainty over rising FII selling, falling rupee, and the ongoing tariff war, the recently beaten sectoral stocks from banking, automobile, telecom, metals attracted significant buying interest," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Tuesday after unabated selling. They bought equities worth ₹4,786.56 Crore, according to exchange data.

The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 2.41 per cent and midcap index climbed 1.30 per cent.

Ola Electric renegotiates registration agency contracts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ola Electric on Wednesday said it is renegotiating contracts with its vehicle registration agencies, which will temporarily affect registrations on government's VAHAN portal but not the actual sales, while adding that consumer rights protection authority CCPA has sought additional documents related to over 10,000 consumer complaints against the company.

In a stock exchange filing, Ola said it is discussing revising existing agreements with Rosmerta Digital Services Private Ltd and Shimmit India Private Ltd as part of a sales overhaul.

This will "temporarily affect" registration numbers reflecting on the VAHAN portal in February.

"We are renegotiating the terms of agreement with our agencies,

namely Rosmerta Digital Services Private Ltd and Shimmit India Private Ltd, to reduce cost and enhance registration process efficiencies. Due to ongoing negotiations and optimisation of the registration process, our registration numbers for the month of February 2025 (on VAHAN portal) will be temporarily impacted.

Our sales continue to be strong through February 2025 and the dip in registration will be streamlined in the next few weeks," it said.

According to the company's exchange filing, the negotiations aim to reduce costs and modify the registration process. Ola Electric works with the registration agencies as it does not operate through automobile dealerships but only through company-owned stores as part of a direct-to-consumer strategy.

How Tesla's investment will strengthen economy



BINOD ANAND ■ NEW DELHI

As India embraces sustainability and innovation, a cooperative economic framework becomes essential to address G-local challenges through responsible Business. This ensures shared growth by fostering collaboration between multinational corporations, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and government bodies.

Establishing a Cooperative Economic Zone (CEZ) for green manufacturing will create an ecosystem where industries like Tesla thrive while benefiting local businesses and workers in India's transition to a net-zero emissions economy. A CEZ dedicated to electric vehicles (EVs) and clean energy will integrate research, development, and production under a single umbrella, facilitating knowledge sharing and resource optimization.

With streamlined policies, incentives, and sustainable infrastructure, India can accelerate its ambitions to become a global hub for EV manufacturing, battery technology, and renewable energy solutions.

For years, Indian consumers have awaited a future where

advanced technology, affordability, and sustainability coexist. The dream of cleaner air, reduced fuel dependency, and premium EV accessibility seemed distant-untill now.

With Tesla coming to India and in future can be explored as investing in India under the 'Make in India' initiative, the nation may undergo a transformative shift. This is not merely a business expansion; it is a revolution redefining mobility, generating employment, and positioning India as a global leader in EV manufacturing.

A major advantage for Indian buyers will be cost-effective Tesla vehicles. High import duties have kept EV prices elevated, making them inaccessible to many. Local manufacturing eliminates these costs, allowing Tesla to offer

premium EVs at competitive prices, promoting mass adoption. Additionally, Tesla's advancements in battery technology will reduce operational costs for consumers.

The expansion of Tesla's energy storage solutions in India could also lead to more affordable home and business energy solutions, reducing reliance on conventional power sources and promoting sustainability.

Eastern India presents a unique opportunity for Tesla to establish a world-class manufacturing hub like those in Germany.

With Elon Musk's capability to invest through a cooperative economic framework, this region, rich in natural resources and labor availability, can provide Tesla with economies of scale.

IN BRIEF

RECPDCL HANDOVERS TWO NUMBER OF SPVS OF TRANSMISSION PROJECTS TO PGCIL



NEW DELHI: REC Power Development and Consultancy Limited (RECPDCL) handed over two number of project specific Special Purpose Vehicles (SPV) of ISTS Transmission Projects to Power Grid Corporation of India Limited

CLW TURNED OUT 581 ELECTRIC LOCOMOTIVES OF THE FY 2024-25



NEW DELHI : Chittaranjan Locomotive Works (CLW) turned out the 581st Electric Locomotive for the financial year 2024-25, surpassing its highest ever production of 580 locomotives achieved in the financial year 2023-24. This is the highest ever production in any financial year.

Feyenoord knocks AC Milan out of Champions League

PTI ■ MILAN
Seldom has a player's sending off had such an influence on a game. AC Milan was left rue Theo Hernandez's second yellow card — for diving — as Feyenoord advanced to the Champions League last 16 at the former European champion's expense with a 1-1 draw in the second leg of their playoff on Tuesday, giving the Dutch team a 2-1 win on aggregate.

Hernandez was sent off for a dive in the 51st when Milan was dominating after Giménez's opener had leveled the tie. Feyenoord had won the first leg of the playoff 1-0 last week. But Milan's defense looked anything but assured after referee Szymon Marciniak showed Hernandez another yellow card for his dive. The France defender had earned his first before the break for lashing out at a Feyenoord player after a foul on teammate João Félix. Hugo Bueno crossed for Julián Carranza to head Feyenoord level on the night in the 73rd, enough to put the Dutch team into the next phase. "We're very disappointed. We started well and scored straight away. It seemed like Feyenoord couldn't hurt us," Giménez said of the game's pivotal moment. "Today it happened to Theo but it can



happen to anyone, this is soccer. We have the utmost respect for Theo. We will give him all our support." Feyenoord's Givairo Read was shown a red card following another melee after the final whistle. Feyenoord will play either Inter Milan or Arsenal in the round of 16. **Davies to Bayern's rescue** Alphonso Davies scored in the fourth minute of stoppage time for Bayern to reach the last 16 with a 1-1 draw against Celtic. Davies, a substitute, bundled the ball over the line after Leon Goretzka's effort was kept out, saving Bayern the ordeal of extra time after German player Nicolas Kühn had scored against his former club to draw Celtic level on aggregate. Davies' goal gave Bayern a 3-2 win over two legs. Next for the Bavarian powerhouse is either Bundesliga rival Bayer

Leverkusen or Atlético Madrid. **Atalanta's efforts in vain** Club Brugge eliminated Atalanta with a 3-1 win in Bergamo for a 5-2 win on aggregate. The 19-year-old forward Chemsidine Talbi scored twice as the visitors gave Gian Piero Gasperini's team a lesson in efficiency. Atalanta had 29 efforts at goal, compared to seven from the visitors, and tried 89 attacks compared to 16 from Brugge. Halftime substitute Ademola Lookman scored seconds after the restart to unleash hopes of a miracle — Atalanta just needed three more goals to level the tie — but Simon Mignolet saved Lookman's penalty in the 61st as those hopes gradually faded. Benfica reached the last 16 with a 3-3 draw against Monaco in Lisbon, giving the Portuguese team a 4-3 win on aggregate.

Indian women's football team begins Pink Ladies Cup campaign

PTI ■ SHARJAH
A new-look Indian senior women's football team will be eager to take on Jordan in the opening match of the Pink Ladies Cup, in its first game under new head coach Crispin Chettri, here on Thursday. The tournament, which is being held during the FIFA International window, also has Russia and Korea Republic as other teams. Notably, the Indian team does not have senior players Ashalata Devi and Bala Devi, while a few young players have been pencilled in. India are ranked 13th in Asia (69th in the world), while Jordan are 14th in the world. The two sides have played three matches against each other, having won one each, and drawing one. Chettri, who was appointed as head coach earlier this month, feels it is imperative for India to win matches in order to progress as a team at the continental level. "Jordan have progressed in a



good way over the last few years, but I think these are matches that we have to win if we want to progress," said Chettri. "We have a good mix of young and experienced players, so it will be a competitive game," said the 50-year-old who has played for the Indian youth team. The Blue Tigresses had a 10-day camp in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, before travelling to Sharjah, where they will have two training sessions, before their first match. Chettri brushed aside talks of

Gujarat's Priyank plays solid knock against Kerala Ranji Trophy semifinal

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD
Gujarat's seasoned batter Priyank Panchal played a solid knock, remaining unbeaten on 117, as the former champions reached 222 for 1 at stumps on Day 3 of their Ranji Trophy semifinal against Kerala, here on Wednesday. Trailing by just 235 runs with two full days remaining, Gujarat's batting unit showed resilience and intent on a placid Motera surface, where it seemed Kerala found themselves 100 runs short, having scored at snail's pace. Resuming their first innings at 418/7, Kerala added 39 more runs before being bowled out for 457 just 10 overs into the morning session. Mohammed Azharuddeen remained stranded on a magnificent 177 off 341 balls, his career-best knock featuring 20 fours and a solitary six. His innings provided the backbone to Kerala's total as wickets tumbled around him. Gujarat skipper Chintan Gaja provided the first breakthrough of the day, dismissing Aditya Sarwate with a delivery that



straightened from middle stump to clip the off-stump. Sarwate managed just one run before becoming Gaja's 200th first-class victim in his 59th match. Sensing the urgency to add quick runs, Azharuddeen took Kerala past 450 with a boundary off Arzan Nagwaswalla. However, with wickets falling at the other end, the Kerala wicketkeeper-batter was left stranded as Nidheesh MD (run out) and Nedumankuzhy Basil (bowled by Gaja) perished in quick succession. In response, Gujarat began their innings with a positive intent as openers Panchal and Aarya

Desai put together a solid 131-run stand in 36.4 overs. Desai, aggressive yet composed, scored 73 off 118 balls, striking 11 boundaries and one six. He looked assured before losing control and dragged a wide delivery from Basil onto his stumps. Despite that breakthrough, Kerala's bowlers struggled to make further inroads. Panchal, a veteran of the domestic circuit, anchored the innings with a mix of caution and aggression. Panchal reached his 29th first-class century — his second of the season — off just 155 balls, bringing up the milestone in style with a six over long-on against Sarwate. The 34-year-old, once on the fringes of the Indian team after Gujarat's maiden Ranji Trophy triumph in 2016-17, has had an ordinary season with only one century (against Rajasthan) and a half-century (against Vidarbha) prior to this match. However, he delivered when his team needed him the most. Hingraja provided solid support at the other end with a patient, unbeaten 30 off 108 balls, hitting three boundaries. For Kerala, veteran spinner Jalaj posed some questions and induced a few edges, but the lack of support from the field meant Gujarat kept consolidating. **Brief Scores:** Kerala 457; 187 overs (Mohammed Azharuddeen 177 not out, Sachin Baby 69, Salman Nizar 52; Arzan Nagwaswalla 3/81, Chintan Gaja 2/75). Gujarat 222/1; 71 overs (Priyank Panchal 117 batting, Aarya Desai 73, Manan Hingraja 30 batting; Nedumankuzhy Basil 1/40). Gujarat trail by 235 runs.

Gopi T, Ashwini return to Apollo Tyres New Delhi Marathon

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Defending men's and women's champions Gopi Thonakal and Ashwini Madan Jadhav will headline in the 10th edition of Apollo Tyres New Delhi Marathon scheduled to take place here on February 23. Recognised by Athletics Federation of India (AFI) as a national event, the marathon will also see participation from the country's top runners including Anish Thapa, Belliyappa, Man Singh, Akshay Saini and Vikram Bangriya the men's section. The likes of Laxmi KM, Nirmaben Thakor Bharatjee and Disket Dolma will feature in the women's field. The event, which is also recognised by World Athletics, is a qualifying race for International Amateur races. Runners will compete across four categories — full marathon, half marathon, 10k and 5k. Former Indian cricket team captain Ajinkya Rahane and head badminton coach Pullela Gopichand will flag off the marathon. "The Apollo Tyres New Delhi Marathon is not just a race; it's a celebration of human spirit, perseverance, and unity. As the organisers, we are thrilled to see the incredible participation from athletes across the world, and we are proud to continue fostering an inclusive, inspiring event," said Nagaraj Adiga, Race Director and CMD - NEB Sports. "Our goal is to create a platform where every runner, from elite athletes to first-timers, can push their limits and be part of something much larger than themselves," he added. The event is supported by Delhi Metro, offering free rides to and from JLN Stadium for participants with bibs.

Jamshedpur FC look to cut down gap with FC Goa

PTI ■ KOLKATA
Jamshedpur FC will get a chance to cut down the gap with FC Goa for the second spot if they beat bottom-placed Mohammedan Sporting in their Indian Super League (ISL) match here on Thursday. Jamshedpur are third in the table with 34 points from 20 matches. However, they have ended up losing thrice in their previous five encounters. Their away form has been concerning, having faced six defeats on the road, but Mohammedan Sporting have not really optimised their home advantage either. In fact, the Kolkata-based side is presently on a four-game-long losing streak and have garnered just 11 points from their 20 games until now, with both of their wins coming



away from home. In the reverse fixture, the Khalid Jamil-coached Red Miners had clinched a convincing 3-1 win, and they will have to iron out their offensive concerns, having gone scoreless in their previous two outings, to repeat that feat. Mohammedan, on the other hand, will eye their first win in

11 attempts at home -- having drawn thrice and lost seven times in their backyard this season. Jamshedpur are realistically chasing a second-placed finish, but they trail FC Goa (39) by five points. Ending up in the second spot will see them qualify directly for the semifinals and not participate in the one-legged knockout, but they cannot afford to drop any more points hereon for that. Jamshedpur FC have won the only game played between these two teams this season. Jamshedpur head coach Khalid Jamil assured that his team is committed to registering a win from this away game. "It's an away game. We need to get a positive result. Everyone is working hard and the team needs to continue doing that moving forward," he said. Mohammedan SC's Indian assistant coach Mehrajuddin Wadoo praised Jamshedpur FC and the season they had had so far. "We know Jamshedpur FC have performed well this season. It's not going to be an easy game for us, but we are going to try our best to put our best foot forward," he said.

Fonseca loses in first round in Rio Open

PTI ■ RIO DE JANEIRO
Teenage tennis sensation João Fonseca frustrated his home fans at the Rio Open in a first-round loss, two days after winning his first ATP title. Fonseca lost 6-1, 7-6 (4) to No. 60-ranked Alexandre Muller of France, making 34 unforced errors and appearing to be exhausted during the match. The 18-year-old Brazilian won his career first title at the elite level with victory in the Argentina Open final on Sunday. Muller will meet Argentina's Tomás Martín Etcheverry in the next round. "It was tough to play against such a great player and perhaps 5,000 (fans), but I'm very happy to get the victory today," Muller said. "I was



feeling calm in half of the match. I didn't take my chances to take the break in the second set and then he was playing better and better. I played a great tiebreak to finish." On the weekend, Fonseca became the first man born in 2006 or later to win a top-level ATP singles title, the

10th youngest champion in ATP Tour history and the youngest South American player to win a title in the ATP Tour era (since 1990). Last year, the rising star reached the quarterfinals of the tournament in Rio, an ATP 500, and finished off 2024 by winning the Next Gen ATP Finals in December.

Athletes deserve a future beyond 'saluting bureaucrats', says Gopichand

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India's chief badminton coach Pullela Gopichand on Wednesday called for respect for sportspersons after retirement, saying athletes deserve more than "saluting bureaucrats" after dedicating everything to the country during their playing days. The 51-year-old from Hyderabad also emphasised the need for better post-career opportunities, stressing that financial stability is crucial for athletes to transition into meaningful roles after calling time on their careers. While sport is now seen as a viable career path in India, Gopichand highlighted a pressing issue: What happens to athletes who dedicate their lives to sports but don't reach the top? "Many years ago, this question wouldn't have come up because sport was not big enough. The mass of people

taking up sport as a profession was not significant. But today, we have players who are completely dedicated to sport, who do not pursue education. "My challenge is, how do I put them in meaningful roles that offer respect and financial stability, like every other profession?" Gopichand said. Gopichand said that while elite athletes who achieve national and international glory are well taken care of, the concern lies with those who fall just short. "If you make it to the top, the government takes care of you very well. They give jobs, land, money. Fantastic, no complaints," he acknowledged. "Say, for example, you continue playing the sport and reach age 24 or 25, but haven't made it to the Indian team. You're next to Manu Bhaker, Nikhat Zareen, or Aman Sehrawat — you're



second, third, or fourth in the field. What happens to them? There are many of them. Their life is gone because they have nothing else." Even for those who win Olympic medals, their careers after sport are often frustratingly limited. "You take Sakshi Malik, Aman Sehrawat, or Vijay Kumar. They have won an Olympic medal, the pinnacle of sport, but will go to his office every day and salute a junior-level IRS officer... Why should I still salute you?" Gopichand questioned. The former All England champion said that athletes must be given the opportunity to transition into meaningful roles. "Send us to Mussoorie Institute, teach us administration. Send us to ISB, teach us business. And if we fail, that's different. But you didn't even try. We have given our whole life to sport, to the country, and then we get nothing," Gopichand said.

He also stressed that society must change its perspective on athletes and their post-sport careers. "Sportspersons need respect. We don't want to just salute bureaucrats for 30 years. We have given our all to the sport and the country, and we deserve better opportunities." Gopichand acknowledged cricket is an exception where money flows easily, but for most sports, even making it to the top doesn't guarantee a financially secure life. He pointed to global models where universities integrate sport and education seamlessly. "If you get 25 medals in Stanford, 17 medals in Loughborough, sport is so big in those universities that they are studying and competing. Eighty percent of Fortune 500 companies have professional sportspersons in leadership roles," said the Dronacharya awardee. "Education is important for sport, and sport is important

for education. This doesn't happen by doing it separately." Despite initiatives like Khelo India and private sponsorships, the system remains incomplete, he said. "You're giving them (athletes) a turbo scholarship to swim in the sea. You turbo-charge them for 2 km, then they look back and there's no one, and if they go ahead, there's nothing," Gopichand explained. Highlighting the issue of affordability, Gopichand said: "If you are middle-class and earning, say, two lakhs a month, you would want your child to earn more. But if there's so much uncertainty in sports, why would a parent push their child into it? "If you are very rich, no problem. But for the others, it's an issue." According to Gopichand, middle-class families need to recognize that not every young athlete will become a Sachin Tendulkar or a PV Sindhu.



Murray to continue as Djokovic's coach

PTI ■ DOHA
Andy Murray looks set to remain as Novak Djokovic's coach likely through the French Open. The 24-time Grand Slam champion told the ATP Tour's in-house media channel on Tuesday that Murray has agreed to stay on as coach. Djokovic and Murray joined forces ahead of the Australian Open in what initially was seen as an unlikely pairing.

After Murray retired last year, Djokovic reached out with the coaching proposition. The 37-year-old Serb reached the semifinals at Melbourne Park but retired from the last-four match against Alexander Zverev because of a hamstring injury. "I expressed my desire to continue the collaboration with him, so I am really glad he did accept," said Djokovic, who was facing Matteo Berrettini in the opening round of the Qatar Open later Tuesday.

Shubman Gill becomes No 1 ODI batsman

PTI ■ DUBAI
India vice-captain Shubman Gill on Wednesday dethroned Babar Azam of Pakistan from the Number one spot in the ICC ODI Rankings for batters on the back of his strong show against England in the recent home series. The ICC issued the latest rankings just ahead of the start of the eight-team Champions Trophy (CT) in Karachi with the match between Pakistan and New Zealand. "India right-hander Shubman Gill overtakes former Pakistan captain Babar Azam to become the top ranked ODI batter in the world," the ICC said. Gill, who scored two fifties and a century in the recent three-match ODI series against England at home which India won 3-0, jumped one place to the No. 1 spot. He now has 796 rating points compared to Babar's 773. India skipper Rohit Sharma is placed at the third spot with 761 points followed by South Africa's Heinrich Klaasen and New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell at fourth and fifth respectively. "It's a major shake-up at the top of the rankings just prior to the start of the Champions Trophy and leaves an interesting sub-plot to what will transpire over the coming



weeks during the eight-team tournament in Pakistan and Dubai," the ICC said. "This is the second time Gill has held the No.1 ranking in ODI cricket, with the India batter having also gone past Babar to claim top spot midway through the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup in 2023. "Gill has been in excellent form of late, with his century against England in Ahmedabad during the third ODI of the recently concluded series enough to catapult the 25-year-old to the top of the rankings," the global governing body added. Sri Lanka's Maheesh Theekshana, meanwhile, has taken the first position in the ODI rankings for bowlers as he replaced Afghanistan

captain Rashid Khan. "While Sri Lanka won't be featuring at the Champions Trophy, Theekshana earned the top spot following his exploits against the Aussies that included an excellent four-wicket haul in the opening match of that series in Colombo," the ICC said. Sri Lanka had recently handed a 2-0 whitewash to Australia with Theekshana taking four wickets. The Sri Lankan spinner has 680 rating points, followed by Rashid at second, Namibia's Bernard Scholtz at third, India's Kuldeep Yadav at fourth and Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi at fifth. "Meanwhile, Afghan spin wizard Rashid drops to second and will be keen to regain the No.1 spot as he trails his Sri Lankan counterpart by just 11 rating points," the ICC said. "While a trio of spinners in India's squad Kuldeep Yadav (up one place to fourth), South Africa's Keshav Maharaj (re-enters the rankings in sixth) and New Zealand's Mitchell Santner (up four rungs to seventh) are all inside the top 10 after making ground this week." Afghanistan veteran Mohammad Nabi remains the top ranked all-rounder in ODIs, followed by Sikandar Raza, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mehidy Hasan Miraz and Rashid.



Ex-Mumbai captain, selector Milind Rege passes away at 76

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Former Mumbai captain and selector Milind Rege, a highly respected figure in domestic cricket, died after suffering a heart attack on Wednesday, just days after turning 76. Rege, who turned 76 last Sunday, was admitted in the intensive care unit of the Breach Candy Hospital here and passed away around 6am on Wednesday morning. He is survived by his wife and two sons. The all-rounder had suffered a heart attack at the age of 26 but returned to the cricket field and even captained Mumbai in the Ranji Trophy. He played 52 First-Class matches between 1966-67 and 1977-78, taking 126 wickets with his right-arm off-break bowling. He also contributed with the bat, scoring 1,532 runs at an average of 23.56. Legendary batter Sachin Tendulkar recalled Rege's contribution in the early days of his career. "Sad to hear about Milind Rege Sir's passing. He was a true Mumbai cricketer with immense contributions to the city's cricket. He and other CCI members saw potential in me and asked me to play for CCI, which, as I look back now, was a landmark moment in my career," Tendulkar wrote on 'X' in a tribute. "He could pick out a talented player from a sea of hardworking hopefuls. He had a special sixth sense to pick talent at all levels, but especially at junior levels. "He leaves behind a void, one that's tough to fill. He may not be around, but his imprint on people's lives will always live on. He made a difference to so many lives and definitely made a difference to mine. Thank you, Sir, for everything. Heartfelt condolences to his friends and family," Tendulkar added. The Indian cricket board also conveyed its condolence message. "The BCCI mourns the passing of Milind Rege, former Mumbai captain and selector. A pillar of Mumbai cricket, he played a key role in its growth and legacy. His keen eye for talent and contributions as a commentator earned admiration across the cricketing fraternity," it said. "The Board extends its heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, and the @MumbaiCricAssoc," the BCCI added. Former India all-rounder and coach Ravi Shastri described Rege as a "true champion". "Really sad to hear about the demise of a dear friend Milind Rege. A true Champion in his contribution to Mumbai and Tata's cricket all-round. A Mentor Par Excellence. Heartfelt condolences to Raj and family. God bless his soul," he said. A childhood friend of former India captain Sunil Gavaskar, Rege attended the same school and college as Gavaskar and played alongside him at the Dadar Union Sporting Club. As one of the most revered figures in Mumbai as well as domestic cricket, Rege held several roles through his career and was also associated with the Mumbai Cricket Association as a cricket advisor. The Mumbai cricket team, which is currently playing their Ranji Trophy semifinal against Vidarbha in Nagpur, took the field on the third day wearing black armbands to honour Rege.



Raducanu loses to Muchova in Dubai Championships

PTI ■ DUBAI
Emma Raducanu lost to Karolina Muchova after an emotional first set in which a spectator was ejected at the Dubai Championships. The 2021 US Open champion appeared to be in tears as she went to the umpire's chair after the second game Tuesday and her second-round match was briefly paused on Court 2. After speaking to the umpire, who immediately called tournament organizers, Raducanu stood in a small space between the official's chair and court-side screening before Muchova moved over to console her. Raducanu then picked up a towel, wiped her face, nodded and continued the match. The British player rallied from 4-0 down to force a tiebreaker but eventually lost 7-6 (6), 6-4 to Muchova. Organizers of the women's tour issued a statement later saying Raducanu was approached in a public space Monday "by a man who exhibited fixated behavior" and "this same individual was identified in the first few rows during Emma's match on Tuesday... And subsequently ejected." "He will be banned from all WTA events pending a threat assessment. The WTA said it was working with Raducanu and her team "to ensure her well-being and provide any necessary support." A man who stalked Raducanu while she was still a teenager was sentenced to an 18-month community service order and given a five-year restraining order after appearing in a British court in 2022. Amrit Magar, a former delivery driver from London, went to Raducanu's home on three separate dates, loitered outside, left unwanted gifts and cards, and stole property. Raducanu rose to fame in 2021 by winning the US Open as a qualifier, one of the most unlikely achievements in tennis. She hasn't been past the third round at a major since then and has spent long stints recovering from injuries. The 14th-seeded Muchova advanced to a meeting against No. 53-ranked McCartney Kessler, who upset 2023 U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff 6-4, 7-5. Third-ranked Gauff hadn't fallen to an opponent ranked outside the top 50 since a loss to Sofia Kenin (128th) at Wimbledon in 2023. Earlier, second-seeded Iga Swiatek beat Victoria Azarenka 6-0, 6-2 and will next face Dayana Yastremska for a spot into the quarterfinals. Top-seeded Aryna Sabalenka eliminated Veronika Kudermetova 6-3, 6-4, and defending champion Jasmine Paolini defeated Eva Lys 6-2, 7-5.

Ranji Trophy semifinal: Vidarbha lead by 260 runs against Mumbai

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Yash Rathod and Akshay Wadkar shared an unbroken 91-run partnership as Vidarbha recovered from a mini collapse to lead by 260 runs against Mumbai at stumps on day three of their Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Wednesday. After Vidarbha dismissed Mumbai for 270 to take a first-innings lead of 113 runs, the hosts found themselves in trouble after being reduced to 56 for four, thanks to Shams Mulani's (2/50) two-wicket burst. However, Rathod (59) and Wadkar (31) steadied the ship, guiding Vidarbha to 147 for four in 53 overs. At stumps, the duo, who train at the same academy in Nagpur, remained at the crease, but with Mulani and the spinners making the ball talk, Vidarbha are aware that the job is far from over, with



two full days of play remaining. With a 113-run first innings lead in hand, the hosts had a solid foundation, but Mumbai all-rounder Shardul Thakur (1/14) gave them a glimmer of hope with an early breakthrough in the second over. Thakur, who is set to join Essex for the County Championship, removed Atharva Taide for a duck, trapping him in front with an inswinger. Danish Malewar (29), who scored a vital 79 in the first innings, looked in good touch, hitting five boundaries before Mulani dismissed him off his own bowling with a sharp caught-and-bowl effort, leaving Vidarbha at 40 for two. Karun Nair (6), in scintillating form, joined opener Dhruv Shorey (13) at the crease, but Tanush Kotian (1/33) made an impact, dismissing Shorey LBW after he missed a classic off-break delivery. Much was expected of Nair,

but he too fell, sent back by Mulani, as Vidarbha slumped to 56 for four. Nair was rapped on the pads while trying to defend and although he challenged the on-field umpire's decision, he lost the appeal. Wadkar and Rathod then regrouped, building a steady partnership to bring Vidarbha back on track. Earlier, Akash Anand completed his second first-class century and shared a 69-run stand with Tanush Kotian (33) to lead Mumbai's recovery after they ended the second day at 188 for seven. Anand, who resumed his innings on 67, played a gritty knock, facing 256 balls and hitting 11 fours. His partnership with Kotian took Mumbai close to the 250-mark before left-arm spinner Parth Rekhade broke the stand, removing Kotian with a delivery that drifted in from around the stumps to bowl him out.

Djokovic loses to Berrettini in Doha

PTI ■ DOHA

Novak Djokovic was upset by Matteo Berrettini 7-6 (4), 6-2 on Tuesday at the Qatar Open in the Serb's first match since exiting the Australian Open with a hamstring injury. Djokovic said he didn't have "any pain or discomfort." "I was outplayed by just a better player today," he said. "I wasn't at my desired level, and it could be that I'm still not moving the way I want to move, but ... I played without pain, so there is no excuse in that." Berrettini won for the 10th time in his career against a top-10 player and will face Tallon Griekspoor in the second round.

Australian Open semifinals but retired from the last-four match against Alexander Zverev because of a hamstring injury. Djokovic said he didn't have "any pain or discomfort." "I was outplayed by just a better player today," he said. "I wasn't at my desired level, and it could be that I'm still not moving the way I want to move, but ... I played without pain, so there is no excuse in that." Berrettini won for the 10th time in his career against a top-10 player and will face Tallon Griekspoor in the second round.

Always liked Champions Trophy as tournament: Virat

PTI ■ DUBAI

Indian superstar Virat Kohli has always liked the format of Champions Trophy (CT) as it demands the eight participating teams to be at their best from the get go. The Champions Trophy is taking place for the first time since 2017 when India lost the final to Pakistan. India open their campaign against Bangladesh here on Thursday. "The tournament is happening after a long time. I have always liked this tournament. It represents consistency as you have to be in the top 8 of the rankings (to qualify). The level of competition is



always good," Kohli told Star Sports. Kohli, who has played three editions of the 50-over event in 2009, 2013 (when India won) and 2017, likened the tournament to the fast-

paced T20 World Cup. "In ODI format, it creates the pressure of a T20 World Cup. There also you have three or four games in the league stage. If you don't start well, you are under pressure. The pressure is from the first game itself and that is why I like it, you have to be at your best from game one," said the former India captain. India will play their remaining league games against Pakistan on February 23 and New Zealand on March 2. While the tournament host is Pakistan, India will be playing all the games in Dubai as part of the event's hybrid model. Kohli will be aiming for a bagful of runs in the tournament after a tough Test tour of Australia. He was back amongst the runs in the preceding ODI series against England, scoring a half-century in the final game in Ahmedabad.

Bangladesh can beat any team in Champions Trophy: Shanto

PTI ■ DUBAI

Heading into their Champions Trophy (CT) opener against formidable neighbours India, Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto was filled with optimism. He was particularly emboldened by the rise of pace sensation Nahid Rana, who has added a new dimension to their bowling attack. The 22-year-old Rana holds the record for the fastest ball (152kph) bowled by a Bangladesh cricketer, hits 150kph on occasion, and averages 145kph for most of his spells. Besides the presence of Rana and experienced pace colleague like Taskin Ahmed, the team also has few useful all-rounders and spinners, and some good

batters. "Obviously, all-rounders always balance the team and we have got some good all-rounders. I hope they will perform tomorrow," Shanto said in the pre-match press conference here on Wednesday. "If you look in this format, our team is quite balanced and we believe we can beat any team in this tournament. All teams are capable of winning this trophy but I am someone who is not thinking about the opponents much. If we execute our plan properly we can beat any team in any day," Shanto said. After years of struggle, Bangladesh are now in a position to boast a good pace-bowling attack, feels Shanto. "Yes, obviously. I think we always struggle with our seam attack, but last couple of years we have got some quality fast

bowlers. Now we have got Nahid Rana, Taskin the way they are bowling. I think it helps a lot. "As a captain, we love to see them bowling fast. So, I'm really happy that we have got a good fast bowling unit and under lights the ball might swing. So, if they bowl in the good areas, it will help our team." Rana has done well in his nascent career, having taken 20 wickets in six Tests and two scalps in three ODIs. Bangladesh are in a group in which the spotlight is on traditional rivals India and Pakistan, and Shanto was asked if this is a favourable position to be in before a big tournament. "Yeah, obviously. I think if you look at all eight teams - they are quality teams. And against India, Pakistan, New Zealand,



we have good memories. We won a couple of matches in recent times. "Last year, when we played India in Bangladesh, we have some good memories from then. But that is past, I think if we play well tomorrow and execute our plan, we will have a good match tomorrow," he said. Shanto refused to read much into the absence of India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah and Bangladesh's star all-rounder Shakib al Hasan. The conditions in the UAE are

familiar to both the teams but for Bangladesh to have any chance against India, Shanto knows that they will have to have one of the best days in all departments. "We have to play well in all departments - batting, bowling, fielding - because I think the way we played the last few years in this format, I think we have a good side and as you mentioned the conditions are quite similar. I'm really confident that we will prepare ourselves well." When asked about Rana, Shanto said he was looking to leading the pace attack on Thursday and that his emergence has motivated the whole bowling unit. "I think last few matches he bowled really well and bowled fast. And when we see in the ground bowling like this, it

helps our whole bowling unit. And it's motivated us. "He needs to be fit and he can continue his bowling form. We have got another two-three fast bowlers as well," he said. After their opener in Dubai, Bangladesh will be playing their last two group games in Pakistan, and the conditions there are going to be different. "Yes, here I think we need to adjust, because if you look at this wicket, probably it's not that high scoring if you compare to Pakistan. So, we have to adjust. "Recently we played against Pakistan in a Test match in Rawalpindi. We have that experience how the wicket will behave. But as a cricketer, I think we all understand when we need to adjust and how to play the game. I don't think it will be difficult."

Talks around fast-bowling unit With Rana linking up with the likes of Taskin, a lot of people have started talking about Bangladesh's fast bowling department, and Shanto said factors such as switching to Duke balls and arrival of experts from overseas have contributed to the improvement in the country's pace attack. "I think the important thing is the wicket and the ball has been changed in first class cricket. We play with the Duke ball, so the fast bowlers wanted to bowl a lot of overs and we get a little bit charged. "And obviously there is a lot of local coaches and obviously overseas coaches there, so they helped and they motivated the fast bowlers, how they can compete in the international arena."