

REGION

2



HOW SAMAJWADI PARTY AND CONGRESS TURNED INTO GAME CHANGERS IN UP

Excise Policy Case: Delhi court to hear CM Kejriwal's regular bail plea on June 14

NEW DELHI: A Delhi court on Friday adjourned, to June 14, the hearing of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's regular bail plea in a money laundering case related to the alleged excise policy scam.

Special Judge Kavari Baweja of the Rouse Avenue Court had recently dismissed his interim bail plea, seeking seven days bail on medical grounds.

On Friday, Kejriwal's counsel sought time to go through the ED's reply to his bail plea, since it was given to them only minutes before the hearing. The counsel urged the bench to list the matter before a vacation bench in the coming days as trial courts break for vacation from Saturday. The matter will now come up for a hearing on



June 14.

Earlier, while dismissing his interim bail, the court had indicated that directions had been issued for specific diagnostic tests for Kejr

al, who appeared via video conference from Tihar Jail. Judge Baweja had remanded Kejr

BANKING & FINANCE

6



RBI HOLDS REPO RATE STEADY, REVISES GDP PROJECTIONS MARGINALLY UPWARD

Solicitor General S.V. Raju, representing the Enforcement Directorate (ED) had last time argued that the bail plea was not maintainable as they criticised CM Kejriwal's conduct, citing "misuse" of interim bail for campaigning.

Kejriwal's defence, led by senior advocate N. Hariharan, had claimed that the interim bail plea was necessitated due to his aggravated diabetes and other health issues.

The ED had contended that Kejr

POTPOURRI

8



'TEMPLES ARE FOR OUTSIDERS; BJP HAS FORGOTTEN US', SAYS ANGRY PEOPLE IN AYODHYA

RBI raises GDP growth forecast for 2024-25 to 7.2 pc, sees CPI inflation at 4.5 pc



NEWDELHI: The RBI has raised India's GDP growth forecast from 7 per cent to 7.2 per cent for the current financial year (2024-25), as it expects the economy to continue on a high growth trajectory. However, it has decided to stick to its CPI inflation forecast for 4.5 per cent for the year.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said the GDP growth in the first quarter of 2024-25 is likely to be at 7.3 per cent, 7.2 per cent in Q2, 7.3 per cent in Q3, and 7.2 per cent in the last quarter. "The pattern of world crisis continues, but India is headed for a sustained high growth based on its demographics, productivity and the right government policies in place. However, at the same time, we need to be vigilant in the backdrop of an unsettled global environment," Das said.

The RBI left the key repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent in its monetary policy review on Friday as it continues to maintain a balance between economic growth and keeping inflation in check.

280 members are entering the Lok Sabha for the first time



MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

The number of members elected for the first time in this 18th Lok Sabha is 13 more than 2019. This is known in the report of a survey company. The organization also informs that this time 280 newly elected members are going to step into the Lok Sabha for the first time. The number was 267 five years ago in 17th Lok Sabha. According to survey report, 263 MPs have been elected to the Lok Sabha before. Another 16 members were previously in the Rajya Sabha and one MP was elected to the Lok Sabha for seven terms. The center of eight of the winning MPs has changed from last time. The survey revealed that 53 ministers contested the Lok Sabha elections, 35 of them have won.

President appoints Narendra Modi as PM-designate; oath on Sunday evening



NEW DELHI: Narendra Modi will take oath as the prime minister for a third consecutive term on Sunday evening as President Droupadi Murmu has invited him to form the government.

Murmu appointed Modi as the prime minister-designate on Friday after BJP chief JP Nadda handed her a letter on Modi's election as the leader of the BJP Parliamentary Party and NDA leaders submitted their letters of support.

The BJP won 240 seats in the just-concluded Lok Sabha polls, falling short of the half-way mark in the 543-member House, but the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) together won 293 seats, which is a comfortable majority.

"The President, having satisfied herself on the basis of the various letters of support received, that the BJP-led NDA alliance, which is also the largest pre-election alliance, is in a position to command majority support of the newly-constituted 18th Lok

Sabha and to form a stable government, appointed Shri Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister of India, exercising powers vested in her under Article 75(1) of the Constitution of India," according to a communique from the Rashtrapati Bhawan.

The President will administer the oath of office and secrecy to the prime minister and other members of the Union Council of Ministers at 7.15 pm on Sunday at the Rashtrapati Bhawan, the communique said.

Murmu handed over the letter of appointment to Modi, who called on her at the Rashtrapati Bhawan here on Friday evening.

"Hon'ble President Smt Droupadi Murmu offered cord to leader of NDA and PM designate Shri @narendramodi whilst inviting him to form the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre," the saffron party said in a post on X along with a photo of Murmu and Modi.

Sources said all major allies of the BJP, such as the

TDP, JD(U), Shiv Sena and the LJP(R), will be given representation in the government during its swearing-in ceremony.

"There will be at least one Cabinet berth for each of them and more representation can be given to them in the future reshuffle and expansion of the council of ministers," a source said, adding that talks are still on and nothing is finalised yet.

Earlier, leaders of the BJP-led NDA called on Murmu and handed their letters of support for Modi to her.

Addressing reporters in the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhawan, Modi said he had been appointed the prime minister-designate by the President.

"The President has asked me to work as the prime minister-designate and informed me about the oath ceremony," he said, adding that he had informed Murmu that they would be comfortable if the event is held on Sunday evening.

Modi said the Rashtrapati Bhawan will work out the details of the oath-taking ceremony on Sunday, by when he would hand over the list of the Council of Ministers to the president.

"This 18th Lok Sabha is an important milestone towards fulfilling those dreams when the country will celebrate 100 years of independence in 2047," he said.

The 18th Lok Sabha will be a House of new energy, youthful energy, and people have given the NDA government one more chance, Modi added.

Delhi HC seeks NTA's stand on plea concerning NEET answer key



NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court sought the National Testing Agency's (NTA) stand on Friday on a petition filed by a NEET-UG candidate raising grievance regarding a question that had two correct answers in the answer key.

A vacation bench of Justice DK Sharma asked the NTA's counsel to seek instructions on the petition, which has prayed that equal marks should be awarded to those who did not attempt the question as has been done for those who attempted either of the two correct answers.

The petition has said the principle of fairness in a competitive examination mandates that all candidates should be evaluated on an equal footing and alleged that the authorities compromised the fairness by awarding marks to two correct options when the instructions had clearly indicated that only one option was correct.

In order to avoid a negative impact on her score, the 17-year-old petitioner chose not to attempt the question and scored 633 out of 720 marks, with a total percentile of around 98 and an all-India rank close to 44,700 in the entrance examination, the plea has said.

Rahul Gandhi alleges 30 lakh crore Stock Market scam due to Exit Polls, demands JPC probe



Questions role of PM, HM, FM needs to be probed as they gave investment advice

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi today alleged a scam worth Rs 30 lakh crores on account of fake Exit Polls which prompted massive buying of shares followed by market crash once the actual poll results were declared. Gandhi demanded an inquiry by the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to probe the role of the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and the Finance Minister.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here today, Gandhi pointed out that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the union Home Minister Amit Shah and the union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman all advised people to buy stocks before June 4, the date of results. He alleged that fake Exit

Polls were peddled on June 1 at the end of the last phase of elections, which led to massive buying on June 3, a day before the actual counting. When the actual results were way off the mark from the Exit Poll claims, the market crashed leading to the retail investors, he pointed out.

The former Congress president observed that all this was deliberately and wilfully planned and executed. He claimed that the BJP knew that its seats were not going to be more than 220 from its internal survey and the feedback from the intelligence agencies. He said, despite that, the Exit Polls were made to show that the BJP was winning a large number of seats.

Besides, he pointed out, the interviews were carried out by the channels owned by Adani. He asked, why did the PM and the HM need to give investment advice which people are bound to take seriously, which they did, and suffered huge losses.

Engineer Rashid seeks interim bail from Delhi court to take oath as MP



Sheikh Abdul Rashid, also known as Er Rashid, has approached Delhi's Patiala House Court seeking interim bail to take his oath as a Member of Parliament. Rashid, an independent candidate, won the Baramulla Parliamentary seat in north Kashmir, defeating former J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah by over two lakh votes. Rashid is currently incarcerated in Delhi's Tihar Jail, facing charges under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) in an alleged terror-funding case. His lawyer, Vikhyat Oberoi, said they are requesting either interim bail or custody parole to allow Rashid to fulfill his parliamentary duties. Additional Sessions Judge Chander Jit Singh has requested a response from the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and scheduled the next hearing for Friday, according to the Bar & Bench.

Previously, Rashid served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, and his Lok Sabha campaign was managed by his sons, Abrar Rashid and Asrar Rashid.

40th anniversary of June 1984 Ghallughara marked at Sri Akal Takht Sahib

Instead of pleading to Delhi for Qaumi rights, need to flourish Khalsa's humility based rule's Sikh politics - Jathedar Akal Takht Giani Raghbir Singh

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

On June 6- The 40th anniversary of June 1984 Ghallughara (massacre) by the then Congress government of India on Sachkhand Sri Harmandir Sahib and Sri Akal Takht Sahib was marked at Sri Akal Takht Sahib today. After the bhog (concluding ceremony) of Sri Akhand Path Sahib (uninterrupted recitation of Guru Granth Sahib), the raagi jatha engaged the congregation with Gurbani Kirtan.

On this occasion, while giving a message to the Sikh community, Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib THE HIGHEST Sikh temporal seat Giani Raghbir Singh expressed Qaumi (community's) sentiment towards all the martyrs of June 1984 Ghallughara including Sant Giani Jarnail Singh Khalsa Bhindranwale, Bhai Amrik Singh, General Shabeg Singh, Bhai Thara

Singh and others and called the Sikh community to move forward by making the wounds of this Ghallughara a strength. He said that not releasing the Sikh prisoners and not punishing the perpetrators of the November 1984 Sikh genocide even after 40 years is an unfair treatment of the Indian government towards the Sikhs. Therefore, instead of repeatedly pleading to Delhi for the political, geographical and economic rights of Panth and Punjab, there is a need to flourish Khalsa's humility based rule's Sikh politics.

Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib, referring to Sikh history, said that Sikhs played a leading role in the country's freedom struggle against the British, but the promises made by the leaders of our own country were forgotten after independence. Even the government officials were issued orders to keep a suspicious eye on the Sikhs, terming them as a 'criminal tribe'.

Jathedar said that after a fierce struggle, the Sikhs got the Punjab state, but Punjab was deprived of the right-ful river waters, the capital Chandigarh and many Punjabi



PHOTO: PRABHJOT SINGH GILL

speaking areas. The Sikhs were forced to start the Dharam Yudh Morcha on these issues of Punjab and the Anandpur Sahib Resolution to strengthen the federal structure of state. The Jathedar said this effort of Sikhs was crushed by the policy of repression and to avenge the oppression of the Akali Dal during the Emergency, the egoistic and tyrannical Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made the military enter Sri Harmandir Sahib on June 1, 1984, on the occasion when the Sikh Sangat was observing martyrdom day of fifth Sikh master Sri Guru Arjan Dev and brutally killed Sikh men, women, children and elderly by firing bullets. He said that this attack of June 1984 is the third Ghallughara for the Sikh

community and its pain and wounds will never be erased from the Sikh subconscious. Giani Raghbir Singh also remembered the martyrs of June 1984 Ghallughara and the sacrifices of the Dharmi Faujis (Army soldiers who left barracks in protest against military action at Central Sikh shrine) who left the barracks. He said that the secret plan of Indira Gandhi to commit the genocide of Sikh youth under 'Operation Woodrose' could not succeed due to the rebellion of Dharmi Faujis.

Marking the current crises of the Sikh community, the Jathedar emphasized the need to set a community agenda based on the welfare-of-all philosophy of Sri Guru Nanak Dev. The Jathedar

said that collective efforts should be made to give a positive direction to the politics which is void of true values of righteousness and hard-working honest earning culture and to tackle the challenges like loss of Sikh values, environment, health, mother tongue and education from Punjab, the birthplace and homeland of Sikhs. He appealed to Sikhs to be bearers of high character taking guidance from proud Sikh history and said that serious efforts should be made to protect the future generations of the Sikh community from drugs.

On this occasion, family members of martyrs Bhai Is-har Singh, Bibi Satwant Kaur, Bhai Manjit Singh, Beant Singh, Bhupinder Singh Bhalwan and others were honoured by Akal Takht Sahib. The SGPC President Advocate Harjinder Singh Dhami, who attended the annual congregation of June 1984 Ghallughara, said that the oppression of the Sikh community by the Congress government in the month of June 1984 can never be forgotten. He said that Sikh history is a witness to the fact that the Sikh community has always responded to the oppression of opposing forces and tyrannical governments.

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Priyanka Gandhi alleges irregularities in NEET results, seeks probe

NEW DELHI: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday alleged irregularities in the NEET 2024 results and sought a probe to "resolve legitimate complaints".

Taking to her official X handle, Priyanka Gandhi stated, "First, the NEET exam paper was leaked, and now students are alleging a scam in the results. Serious questions are being raised over six students from the same centre scoring 720 out of 720 marks, and various irregularities are coming to light."

Highlighting the rising suicide rates among students after the result announcement, the Congress leader expressed her distress over the deaths.

She said, "There are reports of many children committing suicide across the country after the results were announced. This is very sad and shocking."

Priyanka also targeted the administration for not taking



appropriate action in the paper leak issue. "Why is the government ignoring the voices of lakhs of students? Students want answers to legitimate questions related to the rigging of the NEET exam results. Is it not the government's responsibility to investigate and resolve these legitimate complaints?" she questioned.

Following the announcement of the entrance exam results, several aspirants and

parents demanded an investigation, alleging irregularities and seeking clarification from the National Testing Agency (NTA) on how 67 candidates, including six from the same centre, secured the top rank.

In response, the NTA dismissed these allegations, attributing the high scores to changes in the NCERT textbooks and the provision of grace marks for lost time at examination centres.

Delhi court denies interim bail to CM Kejriwal

NEW DELHI: A Delhi court on June 5 dismissed a plea filed by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal seeking seven days interim bail on medical grounds, in connection with a money laundering case related to the alleged excise policy scam. Special Judge Kavari Baweja of the Rouse Avenue Court will now hear the matter on his regular bail plea on June 7. The court indicated that directions had been issued for specific diagnostic tests for Kejriwal, who appeared via video conference from Tihar Jail. Judge Baweja remanded Kejriwal to judicial custody till June 19. Solicitor General (SG), Tushar Mehta, and Additional Solicitor General (ASG), S.V. Raju, representing the Enforcement Directorate (ED)



had last time argued that the bail plea was not maintainable as they criticised CM Kejriwal's conduct, citing 'misuse' of interim bail for campaigning. Kejriwal's defence led by senior advocate N. Hariharan had claimed that the interim bail plea was necessitated due to his aggravated diabetes and other health issues.

The ED had contended that Kejriwal's medical tests could be conducted in jail as it accused him of trying to evade surrender. Kejriwal surrendered before the Tihar Jail authorities on June 2 after his interim bail granted by the Supreme Court in view of the general elections expired on June 1.

How SP and Congress turned into game changers in UP

LUCKNOW: The almost spectacular resurgence of the Samajwadi Party and Congress in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh was a result of a conscious effort made by both, Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav, to make the alliance work. After their alliance turned out to be a fiasco in 2017, Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav worked afresh on their strategy and made sure that they emerged as political game-changers on BJP's turf in Uttar Pradesh. In 2017, there was a visible discomfort in their relationship which percolated down to their respective cadres and made the alliance come a cropper. After the initial hiccups over seat-sharing Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav made sure to campaign together and, more importantly, speak in one voice on all issues.



Both the leaders chose to ignore the barbs hurled at them by the BJP on issues like appeasement and nepotism. Not once during the campaign, did they respond to the allegations. They remained faithful to their narrative on unemployment, inflation and the Constitution. The camaraderie that the two leaders displayed in public, worked as an adhesive for their cadres who finally decided to work together in elections. Though SP changed candidates frequently at one point in time, Akhilesh Yadav made sure that it did not develop into a revolt of sorts. He also fortified his party in segments where his MLAs had crossed over to the BJP just ahead of the elections.

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Will think twice before giving tickets to Muslims: Mayawati



LUCKNOW: Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) President Mayawati has said that Muslims had failed to understand her party even though it had been giving the community adequate representation. In a statement, the BSP President said that in future she would think twice before giving tickets to Muslims so that her party does not have to suffer losses like it did this time. She said that Dalits had played a crucial role in ensuring better performance of the BSP in the polls. She thanked her community for their continued support. She pledged to continue working towards the mission of Dr B R Ambedkar and fulfilling his ideological goals. Mayawati further said that the inclement weather conditions and extreme heat had adversely impacted the voting percentage. "The Election Commission should ensure in future that these aspects are kept in mind while finalising dates for polls," she said. The BSP President stressed that the election process should not be stretched for long since it has an adverse impact on the voter's mindset.

Kejriwal Govt in Delhi Moves Supreme Court Seeking release of water from Haryana

SATISH HANDA
The Delhi government has approached the Supreme Court seeking directions to the Haryana government for immediate release of water to the crisis-hit national capital Delhi facing acute shortage of water during present third degree heat. Referring to the severe heat-wave conditions prevailing in Delhi the plea stated that there is excessive surge of water demand in the capital despite the government taking all possible administrative measures to meet demand for additional water supply till either the monsoon season arrives or temperature in the city goes down. In the petition, it is apprised that State of Himachal Pradesh has agreed to share its surplus water with Delhi, but it does not share a physical boundary with the Union Territory, as such the water is required to be routed through existing river

water systems in the State of Haryana to be released to Delhi at the Wazirabad barrage. The plea adds, Delhi government has made a request to Haryana state government, but the latter has not acceded to it yet, as such directions should be made to the Haryana government to extend its cooperation and releases water to Delhi, including the additional/surplus water agreed to be released by Himachal Pradesh to meet the demand of water during present hot season since the national capital is home to a large number of migrants from across the country, including from the neighboring states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, as such, there is reciprocal obligation on Haryana to assist Delhi in resolving its water and sanitation crisis at the earliest. Meanwhile, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal took to social media platform saying



that the quantity of water that used to be supplied to the capital by neighboring states has been limited, as such Kejriwal urged the Bhartiya Janata Party to ask its leaders in Haryana and U.P. having BJP government or so to supply additional water to Delhi for a month, keeping aside politics. The AAP government in Delhi accused the BJP-led government in Haryana of not releasing Delhi's share of water since May 1. Information re-

veals, amidst water crisis, Delhi minister Atishi Marlena issued an order last Wednesday stating that wastage of water by anyone shall be fined Rs.2000, apart from nearly 200 teams have been deployed to crackdown upon washing of cars with pipes, overflow of water tanks and use of domestic water supply for construction or commercial purposes. Meanwhile, while talking to media persons, former chief

Delhi court rejects Bibhav Kumar's bail plea in Swati Maliwal assault case



Bibhav Kumar has been accused of assaulting AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal at the chief minister's official residence on May 13
NEWDELHI: A Delhi sessions court on Friday dismissed the bail application of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar, saying there was an apprehension about the accused influencing witnesses, if released. Kumar has been accused of assaulting AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal at the chief minister's official residence on May 13. Kumar had moved the court for bail for a second time. Judge Ekta Gauba Mann said "The investigation is at initial stage and there is fear in the mind of the victim regarding her security as well as security of her family members as she is receiving continuous threats. There is also every apprehension that applicant or accused Bibhav Kumar would influence the witnesses, if at liberty." "So, I do not find any merit

I do not find any merit in the present bail application," the judge added while dismissing the plea. in the present bail application," the judge added while dismissing the plea. Kumar was sent to 14 days' judicial custody on May 31. Meanwhile, the Delhi High Court has reserved its order on the maintainability of a plea by Kumar challenging his arrest. Kumar's first bail plea was dismissed earlier by a sessions court, which said there appeared to be no "pre-meditation" by Maliwal in lodging the FIR and that her allegations could not be "swiped away". Kumar was arrested on May 18. He was sent to police custody for five days the same day by a magisterial court, which observed that his anticipatory bail plea had become infructuous because of his arrest.

BJP have no issue except creating differences between castes and religion: Bhupinder Hooda

PARVESH HANDA
Rohtak
Over the Congress's increase in number of seats and vote share in Haryana in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, former Chief Minister and Leader of the Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda while addressing a press conference at his residence asserted that Congress would form the next government in the State as the people were disenchanted with the ruling BJP government in the state. Hooda while addressing said, there had been a significant improvement in the electoral performance of

the Congress. The party's alliance in Haryana received the highest percentage of votes in the country at 47.61%. during present Lok Sabha polls having a remarkable increase in the Congress's vote share from 28% in 2019 to almost 48% in 2024, whereas the BJP saw a decline from 58% to 46% which indicates a strong anti-incumbency wave in Haryana. Hooda said, Congress alliance has witnessed 20% increase in votes, whereas BJP has suffered 12% drop and an anti-government wave going on in Haryana state indicates that BJP is likely to be wiped out of the state during coming



Vidhan Sabha polls likely to be held in October this year. Bhupinder Singh Hooda accused the ruling BJP government in Haryana of having no issue except creating differences be-

tween castes and religion, whereas Congress is a party to unite 36-Biradari in the state. He said, people are not interested in listening to 400 ke paar slogans but actual performance of a party which has been observed in present Lok Sabha polls. Hooda said that ruling BJP government in past about 10 years have not brought any power plant, a large university, a metro, new railway track or any prominent project in the state, but on the other hand has brought Haryana state under debt for amount worth Rs 4.5 lakh crore in this period for which people in the state would raise a question at the time of coming Vidhan Sabha polls after a couple of months in the state. Hooda said that people of Haryana state would neglect the candidates of 'Vote Kattu' political parties in the state as seen in present Lok Sabha polls.

BJP failed to tackle major issues like inflation, unemployment likely to be wiped out from Haryana, says Bhupinder Hooda

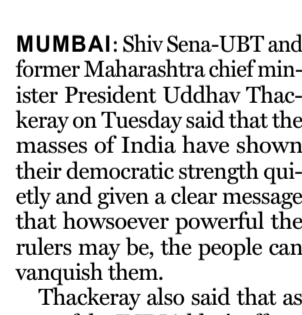


PARVESH HANDA
Former Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Tuesday while talking to media persons at Rohtak and Chandigarh said that farmers' plight, Agnipath, unemployment, bad law and order and inflation were key issues which the ruling BJP government in the state failed to provide to people in the state as such the party shrank to five Lok Sabha seats from 10 in Haryana, Hooda said that he had been saying that there is a wave blowing in favour of the Congress. "You asked me about exit polls predicting most seats for the BJP, to which I said wait for the actual poll results on June 4," Hooda said, Haryana is known for "jai jawan, jai kisan, jai pehalwan". He questioned what they had done while ruling in the state. "They brought Agniveer (Ag-

nipath scheme) which faced opposition from the youth. They did not redress farmers' issues and everyone knows the treatment that was meted out to our wrestler daughters, who had to protest at Delhi's Jantar Mantar," he said. Hooda said that unemployment increased in the state during the BJP rule while the law and order situation also deteriorated. He claimed that the Congress' performance in the Lok Sabha polls in the state will have an impact on the Vidhan Sabha elections, which are due in October. "This is clear indication that people of Haryana have made up their mind to bring the Congress to power in the Assembly polls," Hooda claimed. Referring to the Lok Sabha polls, Hooda said people have supported the Congress winning five Lok Sabha polls. The Congress leader said that he had

been maintaining that the BJP will be wiped out in the south, halved in north. On the BJP's claims that NDA will win 400 seats this time, Hooda said, "I had been saying that it was a mere slogan. In Haryana too, in the 2019 Assembly polls, the BJP had given the slogan of Abki baar 75 paar' claiming to win 75 of the 90 seats. Everyone knows they later won only 40 seats." Hooda said that he had repeatedly said that it will be a direct fight between the Congress and BJP in Haryana in the Lok Sabha polls and that has been proved. He added, the people have rejected the vote katu (vote cutters) outfits, referring to the JJP and INLD. Going by the trends available late afternoon, the Congress appeared on course to win Ambala, Hisar, Rohtak, Sirsa and Sonapat seats out of the total number of nine seats Congress candidates contested. Hooda said that 36 'Biradaris' in the state has supported Congress in Lok Sabha polls and as many as 50 Vidhan Sabha seats Congress has been winning, which will further increase in coming Vidhan Sabha polls since majority of the people in the state fed up with BJP policies now want to have a change in government in Haryana state.

Uddhav Thackeray says people 'showed their democratic power quietly'



MUMBAI: Shiv Sena-UBT and former Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Tuesday said that the masses of India have shown their democratic strength quietly and given a clear message that howsoever powerful the rulers may be, the people can vanquish them. Thackeray also said that as part of the INDIA bloc's efforts to form the next government at the Centre, he had spoken to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and will also speak with leaders of other parties soon. "The masses have

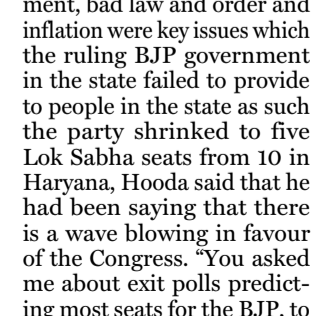
displayed their silent strength... The election results have shown that howsoever powerful the rulers may consider themselves, the people can trounce them," he said. On the Maha Vikas

scenario in the Mumbai North West Lok Sabha constituency where the results kept fluctuating in the final rounds, Thackeray said that the party would challenge it. "This is just the beginning of our struggle. Our party, name and symbol were snatched away... Yet they had to use my father's (the late Balasaheb Thackeray) photos in the elections," he said. To a question on the possibility of Janata Dal-U President and Bihar CM Nitish Kumar and Telugu Desam Party President Chandrababu Naidu joining the INDIA alliance, Thac-

keray said: "All possibilities are open." "Both Nitish Kumar and Naidu were harassed a lot by the BJP... I am optimistic about their stand. Even Mamata Banerjee has faced the BJP's dirty politics...but she is already with us," he said. After Nationalist Congress Party-SP President Sharad Pawar, and Congress' Nana Patole, this was the third important reaction from the MVA which has put up a spectacular performance with leads/victories in 29 out of 48 LS seats compared with 18 leads/wins besides the ruling MahaYuti, besides one independent in Sangli.

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People of Bengal, India have broken the backbone of BJP: Mamata Banerjee



"They have already committed enough excesses on us for which we will never forgive them. I think the other allies of the INDIA bloc will also not forgive them" CM Banerjee said. Referring to the defeat of state Congress President Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury from Baharampur, the Chief Minister said that under the camouflage of Congress, he was actually operating on behalf of the BJP. "The people of Baharampur have rejected him, just as the people of the state have rejected the BJP," she said.

The Chief Minister also ridiculed the Exit Poll projections that forecast a landslide victory for the BJP. "Those who made such projections intended to break the morale of the countrymen. I know the sources of these Exit Polls, they were all drafted at the BJP office," the Chief Minister claimed. She also launched a scathing attack against the Election Commission of India, saying, "They did everything to break the morale of the opposition leaders. Many legislators were offered money, while many others were threatened."

came, the INDIA bloc was leading on 234 seats, while the NDA was ahead of the majority mark with leads on 292 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha. According to the Chief Minister, had the BJP got majority without the help of its allies, the country would have ceased to exist. "The NDA is a lost case now. Some other parties might still be considering supporting the BJP, but I will request them not to do so. I think the Modi magic is finished, and he should resign," the Chief Minister said.

Speaking to mediapersons here, the Chief Minister said that since the BJP has not secured an absolute majority on its own, the coming days will be tough for the party.

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PM hails students, faculty on improved performance of Indian universities in world ranking

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has praised the education sector for the improved performance of Indian universities as reflected in the QS World University Rankings 2025 and said that in the new term, a boost will be given to research and innovation.

"Over the last decade, we have focused on qualitative changes in the education sector. This is reflected in the QS World University Rankings. Compliments to the students, faculty and institutions for their hard work and dedication. In this term, we want to do even more to boost re-



search and innovation," said PM Modi. The Prime Minister said this while reposting a post by the CEO and Managing Director of

QS Quacquarelli Symonds Ltd, Nunzio Quacquarelli.

In his post on X, Quacquarelli said, "Under Narendra Modi's

leadership, the last 10 years have seen continued improvement in the performance of Indian universities in QS World University Rankings. 46 institutions compared to 11 in 2015, a 318% increase in 10 years, the best amongst the G20. @PMOIndia"

The report said that over the past decade, India has increased its representation in the rankings by 318 per cent, the highest among the G20 nations. In 2015, there were only 11 institutions in the Rankings while in 2024 the number has risen to 46.

PM Modi plants Peepal sapling on World Environment Day



NEW DELHI: On the occasion of World Environment Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday planted a Peepal sapling in the national capital. Later in the day, PM Modi is scheduled to attend an event in Buddha Jayanti Park.

The theme of World Environment Day is 'Land Restoration, Desertification, and Drought Resilience'. With this theme, the children would be asked to plant saplings and also take care of them. Children in the household should be taught about global warming, sea pollution, ways to curb it and how the Earth can be saved. With this video, the Prime Minister wants to highlight the significance of plants and trees in our lives and give a message to the world about it. World Environment Day is celebrated every year on June 5. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) founded the World Environment Day in 1972 in a conference in Stockholm. The day has been celebrated since 1974.

The average age of newly elected MPs is 56 years, says the survey

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

The average age of members elected to the 18th Lok Sabha is 56 years, last time it was 59 years. This is known in the report of a survey company. According to the survey company's report, 11 per cent of the total elected members are 40 years old or younger. 38 per cent are 41 to 55 years old. On the other hand, 52 per cent of newly elected MPs are above 55 years of age. The oldest MP is 82 years old. On the other hand, DMK's TR Balu is the senior most member of the 18th Lok Sabha.

PM Modi scores hat-trick from Varanasi, wins by 1,52,513 votes

VARANASI (UP): Prime Minister Narendra Modi has won the Varanasi Lok Sabha seat for a third time.

The Prime Minister defeated his rival — Ajay Rai of Congress with over 1.5 lakh votes.

PM Modi polled 6, 12, 970 votes, according to the Election Commission data.

Bahujan Samaj Party's Ather Jamal Lari, finished third and remained nearly 5.8 lakh votes behind the Prime Minister.

Ajay Rai — who has contested and lost each of the past three general elections from Varanasi, claimed that his victory lay in the results.

In 2019, there were a total of six candidates in the fray against PM Modi from Varanasi, which was his launchpad to the na-



tional political scene in 2014. PM Modi bagged 63.6 per cent of the votes, and after him, the second-highest vote-getter was Shalini Yadav of the Samajwadi Party.

In 2014, PM Modi got 56.37 per cent of the votes and his winning margin was 3.72 lakh. He had defeated Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal, who was his main rival.

Moral, political defeat for Modi says Congress



KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress described the 2024 General Election verdict as a moral and political defeat for the Prime Minister Narendra Modi who sought votes in his own name.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and former party president Rahul Gandhi held a press conference in the presence of Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Smt. Sonia Gandhi at AICC headquarters in New Delhi today evening. AICC General Secretary Smt Priyanka Gandhi, Mr Jairam Ramesh, Mr Mukul Wasnik and Mr Avinash Pande were also present on the occasion.

The Congress president observed that the people of the country had not given absolute majority to any one party, par-

ticularly the BJP, which sought votes in the name of a single person.

He said, this was a mandate against Modi and the defeat of a person who was seeking votes only in his own name.

Kharge pointed out, the Congress and the INDIA bloc campaigned with a positive agenda, raising the issues concerning the people of the country like inflation, unemployment, farmers' distress and misuse of the central agencies. He pointed out how the Congress party's accounts were frozen, Opposition leaders intimidated and political parties broken.

The Congress president specially mentioned the Bharat Jodo Yatra and the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra led by Rahul Gandhi, which galvanized the public opinion.

He said, today's achievement

was also because of the united efforts by the INDIA partners and close coordination between them.

He said, the fight was not finished as yet as the Congress party will keep on fighting for protecting the Constitution and also ensure the proper functioning of the Parliament.

Speaking on the occasion, Rahul Gandhi said, the Congress party during the elections was not only fighting against a political party, but also against the institutions, which had been captured by the BJP and were being used against the political opponents.

Displaying a copy of the Constitution, Gandhi said, the fight was to save it. He said, he had realized long back that people of India will definitely rise and stand up against the way the BJP abused power, like freezing Congress party's bank accounts and sending Chief Ministers to prison.

He said, the people of India have given a clear message that they do not want people like Narendra Modi and Amit Shah.

Gandhi specially thanked the poor people of the country for saving the Constitution.

Replying to a question whether the Congress will try to form the government, Gandhi said, they will be holding a meeting with the INDIA alliance partners on Wednesday.

Election results a resounding mandate against hate and divisive politics: JIH President

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

"The President of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, Syed Sadatullah Husaini, has extended his congratulations to the people of India for actively participating in the electoral process and sending a powerful message to politicians through their votes. He characterized the election results as a 'resounding mandate against hate and divisive politics.'

In a statement to the media, the JIH President said, "We congratulate and appreciate the voters of our country who voted with great wisdom despite the deliberate disinformation campaign by certain politicians. The election campaign raised significant concerns due to clear instances of fake propaganda, hate politics, the use of communal slang, and various unfair tactics aimed at capturing votes and influencing voters. Many of the highly publicized election speeches were completely polarizing and divisive, disregarding morals and probity. Against all these odds, the people of the country exercised their franchise wisely and conveyed their message loud and clear."

He further stated, "The decisive vote for change in states like Uttar Pradesh is a clear message that the people



of India are not interested in politically motivated fake communal controversies or religious and caste-based divides. They seek inclusive development and social justice. The new era of coalition politics also shows that the people of India still prefer the constitutional values of federalism, decentralization, separation of power, and the politics of consensus and inclusiveness. It is widely believed that the main change-makers in these elections were peasants, farmers, backward classes, and religious minorities, proving they cannot be overlooked by any political party. Every political formation must include all sections of society and avoid becoming a sectarian and divisive force representing only a section of the population."

Syed Sadatullah said, "We expect the new government to address real issues such as the economic slowdown, inflation, unemployment, and adopt an inclusive approach toward all sections of society

and communities, regardless of religious and caste considerations. The government's approach should be inclusive and pro-people. The credibility of our autonomous democratic institutions must be restored, as their image has been severely dented by accusations of being influenced by the executive and becoming pawns in the hands of political masters. Law-making should not be unilateral and one-sided. There should be wide consultation, and the opinions of all stakeholders should be considered. The federal nature of our polity has also taken a beating and should be restored."

The President of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH), Syed Sadatullah Husaini, emphasized that the Constitution of India envisions a welfare state committed to the well-being of all citizens. It places paramount importance on complete social justice and fostering strong fraternity among the populace as its fundamental goals and primary drivers of state policy. "We demand that the new government respects this constitutional vision, which has been reinforced by the recent mandate of the people of India, and works towards the development and well-being of every citizen, particularly those who have remained marginalized."

Modi did not inaugurate Ram temple according to rules: Shankaracharya



MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi should not have inaugurated the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. That is why the people of Ayodhya gave him the right answer. Those who fought with me are finished", Puri's Shankaracharya Nishchalananda Saraswati made such explosive comments when he visited to give a lecture in Bolpur, West Bengal on Wednesday. He also accused the same with the Prime Minister and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Shankaracharya of Puri reached Bolpur for three days from Wednesday to Friday to attend a religious ceremony. He has various programs including speeches, initiations, pujas and question and answer sessions with the devotees there.

It is to be noted that Puri Shankaracharya was invited during the inauguration of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. But he did not attend the ceremony saying that the temple was not being inaugurated according to the proper rules. Shankaracharya made an explosive comment when he was asked about Ram Mandir and BJP's defeat. He said, if the impact of Ram Mandir inauguration was good, then BJP would have won there. But the people of Ayodhya responded by defeating the BJP's candidate. Democracy does not exist if secular rituals are not followed.

If the Prime Minister was a Brahmin, he should not have inaugurated the Ram Mandir because he is a politician. The people of Ayodhya have made it clear to the BJP that they do not agree with Modi. On this day, he also said that the BJP thought that the Ram Mandir would be removed when the Congress rule came. In this fear, the temple was inaugurated in a hurry. He said that at first Modi considered Congress week, now after elections he will not do so. Jyoti Bose also fought with me in West Bengal and party is finished here. He mentioned that Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav are also fought with me and now they all are finished. Modiji should not clash with me. Does ever punching kills the sky? We are in that place. Yogi Adityanath was touring a scaremonger as Shankaracharya to belittle me, showed down me. But remember, whoever fights with me will be crushed, finished.

As the seats decreases, RSS 'authority' is angry and disgruntled inside party on Modi-Shah



MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

As soon as the results of the polls were announced, the infighting was seen within the BJP. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's slogan of 'Ab ki baar chaarsho paar' has fallen flat, and BJP's number of seats has come down to around 240 from last time's 300. According to sources, BJP's ideological guardian Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has also expressed displeasure over BJP's results.

The Sangh Parivar (RSS) feels that the party is suffering as a result of Modi-Shah taking over the party's lead by sending behind the leaders like Nitin Gadkari, Rajnath Singh, who are favorites of the Sangh Parivar, to the back row. Many BJP leaders feel that if leaders like Gadkari and Rajnath were more involved in the work of the party, the number of seats of the party in important states like Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh respectively would not have fallen like this. Not only the cornering of the old leaders of the party, but during Narendra Modi's tenure individuals have been prioritized more than the party. A BJP leader is also unhappy about that.

BJP sweeps both LS and assly in Odisha

ARABINDA MOHAPATRA
Bhubaneswar

Chief minister and Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president Naveen Patnaik is set to bow out of power after holding the reins of the state for 24 years with BJP sweeping both Lok Sabha and assembly polls in the state.

At the time of reporting the saffron party had won 32 seats in the 147-strong assembly and was leading on 47, thus heading for a clear majority. In contrast, the BJD had won 27 and was leading on 23 with chief minister trailing in Kantabanji, the second seat he is contesting from besides his traditional seat of Hinjili. The Congress improved its performance of 2019 and won six seats and established a lead on nine other seats as counting reached the final stages.

The BJD suffered a humiliating defeat in the Lok Sabha with the party ahead on the sole seat of Jajpur which has been its stronghold since 1999. While Congress seems likely to retain the Koraput seat, BJP candidates had established firm leads on all other 19 Lok Sabha seats



in the state. Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan had won the Sambalpur seat with only an official announcement awaited. The party was likely to win all the 19 seats.

Some of the BJD heavyweights who fell by the wayside included Pranab Prakash Das aka Bobby who lost to Dharmendra Pradhan from Sambalpur Lok Sabha constituency. In the state assembly minister Ashok Panda lost from Bhubaneswar Ekamra constituency. Reports said that senior minister Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak had also lost from Mahakalpada. Former union minister and BJP candidate from Rourkela Dilip Ray also lost.

The saffron sweep in the Lok Sabha constituencies was not

unexpected considering that the party had concentrated its entire energy on increasing its Lok Sabha tally in a bid to compensate the losses that it anticipated in some of the heartland states. It was even supposed to increase its 2019 assembly tally of 23 but an outright victory for the party has boosted its morale.

The credit for BJP's spectacular performance in the state should go to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's aggressive campaigning in the state. He took a gamble by targeting chief minister Naveen Patnaik and also his Man Friday bureaucrat-turned-politician VK Pandian. The high voltage campaign often turned acrimonious with Prime Minister not shying away from making per-

sonal attacks against Patnaik who was forced to respond. Pandian, too, trained his guns at the Prime Minister and his party colleague if only to defend his boss.

It seems ironical that the elections began with an attempt at reviving the old alliance between BJP and BJD which collapsed in 2009 after serving both sides well for nearly 11 years. However, efforts in this direction failed despite prolonged parleys between the top leaders of the two parties and their in-house discussions. Leaders on both sides finally gave up as cadres, unwilling to accept a patch-up bid, showed signs of rebellion.

However, the failed bid to revive the alliance did more damage to BJD than BJP. The Prime Minister also kept issues of Odia pride and state's underdevelopment at the centre of his campaign in the state. To this he added the alleged anxiety over 77-year-old chief minister's failing health and promised to constitute a committee to look into the issue if BJP came to power in the state. Pandian was accused of practically taking Patnaik hostage and deliberately suppressing facts about his health.

Top 2 wealthy members of 18th Lok Sabha are from Bengal



MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

Among the 3 candidates who won this year's Lok Sabha elections with the least assets (combined of immovable and immovable assets), the first 2 are from West Bengal. This information was found in the detailed report released by the Association for Democratic Reform (ADR) on Thursday about the newly elected Lok Sabha members. The two newly elected MPs with the least wealth are BJP's Jortimoy Singh Mahato of Purulia (total wealth of Tk 5 lakh 95 thousand) and Trinamool Congress's Mithali Bagh of Arambagh (total wealth of Tk 7 lakh 85 thousand).

According to the ADR report, out of 543 candidates who won this year's Lok Sabha elections, 251 have cases related to criminal offences. Most of them belong to BJP. Out of 240 newly elected BJP MPs, 94 have criminal cases against them.

Member of Parliament at the age of 25!

***3 WOMEN AND 1 MAN OUT OF 4 YOUNGEST MPS**



MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

Age only 25 years old, at that age, 4 newly elected women MPs are going to enter the temple of democracy. They are listed as the youngest MP in the country. These candidates are from different parties and from different parts of the country also, but the only similarity is their age. These four MPs are - Pushpendra Saroj, Priya Saroj, Shambhavi Chowdhury and Sanjana Jatav. Three young people are going to take oath as the youngest members in the newly elected parliament. Three of them are women. All of them are 25 years old. Among them, Pushpendra Saroj and Priya Saroj fought on Samajwadi Party ticket. On the other hand, Shambhavi Chowdhury and Sanjana Jatav contested for Lok Jan Shakti Party (LJP) and Congress respectively. Shambavi is the daughter of Ashok Chowdhury, a member

of Nitish Kumar's cabinet in Bihar. Shambhavi Chowdhury defeated Sunny Hazari of Congress by a big margin in Samstipur Lok Sabha constituency in Bihar. This Sunny is the son of former JDU minister Maheshwar Hazari. Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised Shambhavi Chowdhury as the youngest NDA candidate during the her election campaign.

Another youngest woman member of parliament, Sanjana Jatav, won from Rajasthan's Bharatpur Lok Sabha constituency. She defeated BJP's Ramswaroop Koli by a margin of 51 thousand 983 votes. Sanjana, wife of a Rajasthan police constable Kaptan Singh, contested the assembly polls last year. But, she lost to BJP's Ramesh Kheri by just 409 votes. This time she is going to step in parliament.

On the other hand, Priya Saroj won from Machlishahar constituency in Uttar Pradesh by a margin of 35 thousand 850 votes.

Congress seeks SC-monitored probe in NEET bungling

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress has demanded a Supreme Court monitored probe into the irregularities in the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) conducted by the National Testing Authority.

Addressing a press conference, senior Congress leader and in-charge of the National Students' Union of India Kanhaiya Kumar and NSUI president Varun Choudhary stressed upon the government to address the concerns and complaints of the aspirants.

Kanhaiya Kumar said, now irregularities have become the routine in these exams. He said, it is a vicious cycle that first the exams are not being conducted on time and once exams are held, irregularities are reported which eventually leads to the cancellation of the exams, thus wasting precious time of the students besides pushing them into frustration and state of helplessness.

The senior Congress leader rejected the clarification issued by the NTA, asking how it was possible that 67 students topped



the test with all of them scoring 100 percent marks. Besides, he added, out of these 67 toppers, 12 students had taken the NEET exam sitting in the same centre.

He clarified that he did not raise any questions on the ability of the students, but the ability of the examining authority, the NTA, had come under questions. Kumar pointed out that the NEET result was scheduled to be declared on June 14 and it was surprisingly advanced to June 4, when the whole country was busy watching the General Election results. He asked what was the urgency in advancing the results by ten days and announcing these on the same day when the votes were being counted.

Expressing serious concern over the credibility of the examinations in the country, he

expressed strong apprehensions that the day may not be far when even the UPSC examinations come under question.

He asked the government to take the matter seriously and fix the responsibility by ordering a SC-monitored probe into the allegations of irregularities. He said, such things lead to frustration and desperation among the students, pointing out how one girl in a tragic development committed suicide after the NEET results were declared.

The Congress leader referred to the party's manifesto saying it had promised stringent law against paper leaks, besides setting up a regular exam and recruitment calendar. He asked, when the elections could take place on time, why not the exams and recruitments.



JAYATI GHOSH SAYS MODI GOVT IGNORED UNEMPLOYMENT, LOW WAGES AND RISING PRICES

Economic justice needs spotlight



A fundamental transformation

The focus on justice for youth, women, farmers, and workers, as well as dignity through social justice, which was strongly highlighted in the Congress manifesto for example, necessarily implies a major shift in economic policy. In fact, what is required is nothing short of a fundamental transformation. The most important shift is to move back to a framework of human rights, especially social and economic rights, rather than seeing public goods and services delivery as “gifts” from the state or a supreme leader.

This requires two immediate changes in the economic policy framework. The first is ensuring basic social and economic rights for everyone by expanding the right to work (through a better funded and more flexible MGNREGA as well as the introduction of an urban employment guarantee scheme); the right to food, which is still inadequate and denied to at least 100 million Indians; the right to education, based on public delivery rather than expensive and exclusionary private education;

the right to social security, especially through universal pensions provided at half the minimum wage to the elderly and those unable to work for other reasons; and the right to health, once again through public delivery.

The second is to create jobs to address the frustrated aspirations of hundreds of millions of young people. This must become the primary economic goal. This requires expansion of public employment. First, vacancies need to be filled and all public workers, including “scheme” workers, need to be regularised. The needs of micro, small and medium enterprises, which have been truly battered by the policy mistakes of the past decade, need to be delivered through a comprehensive package covering credit, access to new technologies and training, infrastructure provision, and marketing assistance. Farming continues to be in crisis. The valid demands of the farmers’ movement need to be taken on board, ideally after a special session of Parliament devoted to discussing them in detail. Special attention needs to be paid to the ongoing impact of climate change and higher temperatures.

Much has been made of the “new welfarism” of the Modi government. But it is more accurately described as “the new branding around welfarism”, with not much change in level or content. Successive

governments at the Centre and State have been oriented to the provision of welfare schemes, which are obviously necessary given continuing poverty and poor human development indicators across much of the country. The Modi government advertised its interventions as completely new when they are, in fact, merely continuations or expansions of old schemes; or as gifts from the Prime Minister. Instead, they need to be advertised as ways of fulfilling citizens’ rights. For example, the free food ration has been touted as a major gift to around 800 million people. But in effect, the food being offered under the Public Distribution System under the National Food Security Act brought in by the previous United Progressive Alliance government was already heavily subsidised – at only Rs 2 per kg of wheat and Rs 3 per kg of rice. So, this was not such a big difference. We need a shift from promises of welfare as “gifts” to a reaffirmation of the discourse on rights.

Revival of federalism

An important shift that is likely to result from this election is the revival of genuine federalism, away from the undemocratic centralisation evident over the past decade. State governments are responsible for most of the public service delivery that affects ordinary people: it is critical for them to be able to provide these without interference, control and partisanship from the Centre.

Jayati Ghosh is currently Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She taught the subject at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for nearly 35 years. Views are personal.



DR. K. MADAN GOPAL SAYS ACCESS, INNOVATION, AFFORDABILITY CRUCIAL FOR EQUITABLE HEALTH POLICIES

Refine strategies to manage health-care costs



As we navigate the dynamic landscape of Indian health care, cost considerations are increasingly influencing every aspect of service delivery and patient care. With rising health disparities and uneven access to medical services, the need for equitable and sustainable health-care policies has never been more urgent than now. Ongoing discussions about setting rates for medical services are not just bureaucratic exercises. They fundamentally shape how we perceive, access, and deliver health care across India. In this globalised era, we see a variety of responses to similar challenges worldwide, shaped by differing cultural, economic, and systemic factors. By learning from these international examples, we can refine our strategies to manage health-care costs more effectively.

Private hospitals are not only centres of specialised care but also innovation hubs. Take the examples of the Joint Commission International (JCI) and NABH (National Accreditation Board for Hospitals)-accredited big hospital groups, which have embraced cutting-edge technologies to significantly enhance patient outcomes, especially in complex procedures. These institutions invest heavily in top-tier infrastructure and advanced technologies, enabling them to seamlessly integrate telemedicine and remote care, thus broadening access and building patient trust.

As the Supreme Court deliberates on standardising medical procedure rates across government and private sectors, we must consider the allure of affordability. Yet, imposing one-size-fits-all price caps could severely undermine health-care quality. A Health Care Management Review study shows that hospitals under financial pressure from price caps report a 15% increase in patient dissatisfaction. Moreover, such caps

and economic conditions can support rate standardisation and high-quality care. States such as Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu have already pointed out gaps in rate fixation provisions, advocating for robust legal frameworks to navigate these issues successfully.

Technology is revolutionising health care, making diagnostics faster and more accurate with artificial intelligence and improving care coordination through electronic health records. For example, telemedicine initiatives in Karnataka have slashed hospital visits by 40%, demonstrating how technology not only makes medical care more accessible, especially in remote areas, but also more cost-effective. This integration reduces pressure on health-care facilities while delivering timely care directly to patients’ homes.

Moreover, innovations such as mobile health apps and wearable devices are crucial in managing chronic conditions outside hospitals, significantly cutting costs and enhancing patient outcomes. As we push these technologies forward, ensuring that they reach all population segments is key. Investing in infrastructure for broader Internet access and improving digital literacy will empower more people to benefit from these advancements, setting the stage for India to lead globally in health-care innovation.

Recent surveys with health-care professionals across India show a consensus on the need for flexible pricing strategies that mirror the complexities of medical procedures and patient-care requirements. Engaging all stakeholders, including private health-care providers, is essential in order to grasp the nuanced dynamics and craft

effective, sustainable policies.

Role of data in shaping policies

In today’s big data era, health-care policy decisions should increasingly rely on data-driven insights. Data analytics can shed light on patient outcomes, treatment efficacy, and cost-efficiency, informing more nuanced rate-setting frameworks. Moreover, predictive analytics could foresee the long-term impacts of rate fixation on health-care innovations, helping policymakers adjust regulations to encourage innovation and accessibility.

Balancing access, innovation, and affordability in health care is delicate but imperative. We recommend implementing pilot projects in select districts to gauge the impact of rate caps on health-care quality and innovation, allocating government subsidies to support research and development in private hospitals, and establishing public-private partnerships to integrate cutting-edge technologies in public hospitals, ensuring widespread access to advanced health-care solutions.

As India aspires to be a global health-care leader, fostering an environment conducive to innovation while ensuring equitable access to quality health care is crucial. It is time to prioritise the well-being of every individual, as echoed by Dr. Vinod K. Paul, Member, NITI Aayog. “Affordable healthcare is not just a necessity but a priority for our nation, and we are committed to innovating and leveraging technology to bring down healthcare costs for every citizen.”

Dr. K. Madan Gopal is Adviser, Public Health Administration, National Health Systems Resource Centre, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Views are personal.

2024 poll results offer lessons to BJP and Congress

The outcome of India’s 18th general election reaffirms the principle that democracy centers around the will of the people. The verdict on June 4 saw the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fall short of an absolute majority, a stark contrast to its campaign assertions. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), however, secured a majority with over 290 seats. The BJP’s tally of 240 seats marks a significant drop from its 2019 strength of 303, underscoring a shift in the political landscape. This election outcome sends a clear message: the electorate desires a more conciliatory and inclusive BJP, reflecting the limitations of communal polarization as a viable electoral strategy. The BJP is now held accountable to be more constructive, embracing the resurgence of coalition politics after a decade of dominance. The Congress, with nearly double its 2019 seats at 99, has reestablished itself as a key player in Indian politics. Yet, it must respect the pre-poll alliances and avoid post-poll coalition attempts. The Congress-led INDIA coalition fell short of a majority, demanding steadfast adherence to the pre-poll mandate. The BJP’s overreliance on Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s charisma exposed organizational weaknesses, and anti-incumbency sentiments further eroded its standing. Despite this, the BJP’s ideological roots in its strongholds enabled it to retain significant influence, even winning a seat in Kerala and making inroads in Odisha. The Congress’s focus on livelihood issues and equity resonated in direct contests with the BJP in Karnataka and Rajasthan, highlighting the need for both parties to learn from this verdict. The election also emphasized India’s diversity and the importance of genuine coalitions over transactional alliances. India’s vibrant democracy has once again showcased its resilience and the critical role of voter expectations. The new government must rise to this challenge, respecting the electorate’s diverse aspirations.

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The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.
Winston Churchill

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BOOKS: REVIEW

Design deception: How tech firms control your choices

Imagine planning a holiday for your family. You book affordable plane tickets, arrive at the airport early, check in your luggage, and board the flight. Then you realize your toddler is seated in front of the toilet, you’re ten rows away, and your family is scattered throughout the flight. When you complain, the airline says you should have paid extra to ensure your seats were together. You recall seeing that option on the website but skipped it due to the high cost. Your frustration comes from a deceptive user interface known as a “dark pattern.”

User experience (UX) designer Harry Brignull coined the term “dark pattern” in 2010. It’s used today to describe unethical practices where companies manipulate their user interfaces. These designs trick users into spending more money, making unfavorable

decisions, or giving up on actions that don’t benefit the company.

Deceptive Patterns: Exposing the Tricks Tech Companies Use to Control You by Harry Brignull is a guide to recognizing and tackling these deceptive practices. It’s for everyone, from casual internet users to antitrust lawyers. Brignull has spent over a decade naming and shaming companies that use these tricky design practices, based on complaints and screenshots shared with him.

Some common offenders include Google, Microsoft, Meta, Adobe, and Quora. In India, IndiGo and Amazon India have been named.

Researching and writing this self-published 2023 book was a monumental task, considering the internet’s evolution and the increasing use of automated tools by businesses. Brignull skillfully

covers Big Tech’s misdemeanors and regulations against deceptive patterns, using solid examples and case studies.

Brignull explains many common deceptive patterns you might have encountered. “Confirm Shaming” forces you to click negative statements like “I don’t want to be healthy” to avoid subscribing to newsletters. Urgency messages like “Only 1 left in stock!” use your own urgency against you. “Visual Interference” makes it hard to turn off trackers and cookies. Fake testimonials feature praise from faceless users with generic names.

The “Hidden Costs” pattern lures you with a low price, only to add extra fees at the last minute, pressuring you to complete the purchase.

“Design today is less about decoration and more about persuading people to do things,” Bri-



Deceptive Patterns
By Harry Brignull
Testimonium Ltd.
326 pages; Rs 1,893.
Kindle version: Rs 831

gnull writes. “It’s about tracking, testing, psychology, behavioral economics, and statistics. It’s all about achieving business goals and making money.”

Brignull shows how these patterns exploit people with busy lives or vulnerable users like children or seniors. He also exposes countdown timers on e-commerce sites, which often reset and start again without affecting the product price.

Brignull explains how deceptive practices harm the marketplace, making it harder for honest businesses to build a customer base. Users get trapped in toxic ecosystems where they struggle to delete accounts, end subscriptions, or

recover lost payments.

While rich in information, Deceptive Patterns can be uneven and sometimes hard to finish. Brignull’s narrative shifts between conversational and informative styles, which can disrupt the flow. The sections on legislation are dense and packed with summaries of various legal articles, which might feel overwhelming.

However, Brignull’s effort to make U.S. and EU digital regulations accessible to global readers is commendable. He encourages readers to draw parallels with their own countries’ laws and start conversations about deceptive patterns.

Despite the technical subject matter, Brignull writes with compassion. He urges action against deceptive patterns without being alarmist. He considers the impact on non-native English speakers, low-income users, and people with disabilities. He also advocates for using the term “deceptive patterns” over “dark patterns” to be more inclusive.

Industry Bodies Urge New Govt to Prioritise Economic Growth, MSME Reforms

NEW DELHI: As Narendra Modi is poised to embark on his third term as Prime Minister of India, leading industry associations are eagerly anticipating policies aimed at bolstering economic expansion, sustainability initiatives, and fostering a culture of innovation across the nation.

The national MSME body Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME) seems sanguine of the third term of NDA. "While FISME is quite confident that there would be continuity in economic policy and focus on entrepreneurship, start-ups and MSMEs would continue, it is less confident of NDA-3 pushing for deep reforms in judicial and administrative systems which continue to deter private investors", says Anil Bhardwaj, Secretary General of



FISME. The Madras Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) has expressed optimism that the incoming administration will collaborate closely with stakeholders to drive accelerated development for both India and the state of Tamil Nadu.

"The industry is eagerly anticipating the new administration's policies aimed at fostering

economic growth, sustainability, and innovation," remarked TR Kesavan, President, MCCI.

He expressed, "We are optimistic about collaborative efforts that will drive progress and improve the business environment of the country further."

A key priority highlighted by industry representatives is the implementation of reforms benefiting Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which form the backbone of India's economy.

CK Mohan, President, Tamil Nadu Small and Tiny Industries Association (TANSTIA), urged the government to permit MSMEs to file Goods and Services Tax (GST) returns monthly while remitting payments quarterly.

This move, he argues, would alleviate financial burdens caused by delayed payments from corporate buyers and public sector undertakings.

Suraksha Group takes control of bankrupt Jaypee Infratech



NEW DELHI: In a big relief to over 20,000 homebuyers, Suraksha Group has taken control of the debt-ridden realty firm Jaypee Infratech by constituting a three-member board and will soon infuse Rs 125 crore equity fund to start construction of stalled housing projects across Delhi-NCR.

The takeover follows insolvency appellate tribunal NCLAT decision on May 24, upholding Suraksha Realty's bid to acquire Jaypee Infratech while directing

it to pay an additional Rs 1,334 crore as farmers' compensation.

According to a regulatory filing by Jaypee Infratech on Wednesday, Suraksha Group informed the ILC (Implementation and Monitoring Committee) that May 24, 2024, i.e., the date of the NCLAT order should be treated as the 'Approval Date' as defined in the approved resolution plan.

The ILC, in its meeting held on Tuesday, approved the appointment of Sudhir V Valia, who is promoter of Suraksha

Group, as a Non-Executive Director. It approved the appointment of Aalok Champak Dave as Executive Director and Usha Anil Kadam as independent director. Dave has also been appointed as Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer.

According to the filing, Valia was an Executive Director in Sun Pharmaceuticals Industries Ltd. He is a co-founder of Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, one of the leading pharmaceutical companies and world's fifth largest generic pharmaceutical company.

Valia is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India and has more than three decades of experience in taxation and finance. He has experience of more than a decade in managing the real estate development activity and infrastructure business through Suraksha Realty and other associates having activity in real estate.

New inventive technology developed for those unable to speak by 'LOQU' device



SATISH HANDA

There is a ray of hope for those unable to speak, since a researcher Dr L.N. Sharma Head of Department in Electronics and Electrical Engineering, Indian Institute of Engineering, Guwahati has created an inventive echnology developing a device "LOQU" for human speech production using 3-dimensional acceleration signals due to folds vibration without using acoustic microphone. While talking to The Financial World Dr Sharma said that a non-invasive technology MEMS sensor is placed on larynx (voice box) surface to get the 3-dimensional source signals and with a unique pprocess generates human speech, for which a patent has been obtained (Indian Patent No. 510923, Grant Date: 15/02/2024).

Dr. Sharma said that "LOQU" is derived from from the Latin word "To speak or talk - this technology is non-invasive procedures, utilising sensors placed over the throat, which runs on a 9V volt rechargeable battery and total estimated cost of the model is approx Rs 2500. He said that in this invention due to movement of different laryngeal muscles, cartilages and connective tissues during phonation 3-dimensional glottal vibration signals are captured, processed, and created a technology "LOQU" to create human speech signals.

Dr. Sharma briefed, Human Speech production is a complex process that consists of respiration, phonation and articulation. The highly complex structures with Laryngeal functions enables the sound production. The larynx couples phonation, articulation and resonance for speech production. The lungs initiate speech through trachea with pulmonary egressive ongressive airflow, the glottis involving vocal folds in larynx crates phonation and the vocal tract along with lips, teeth, root of the mouth, tongue, oral cavity, nasal cavity helps in articulation for speech production and during phonation the vocal folds are moved together and produce the voice.

Shareholders approve demerger of ITC Hotels



NEW DELHI: Diversified entity ITC on Thursday said that it had received shareholders' approval to demerge ITC Hotels into a separate entity.

In a virtual meeting on Thursday, shareholders approved the resolution for the scheme of arrangement between ITC Ltd and ITC Hotels Ltd, it said in a regulatory filing. The meeting was called pursuant to the directions of the Kolkata Bench of the National Company Law Tribunal dated April 22.

In July 2023, the ITC had announced it was demerging its hotel business by incorporating as a wholly-owned subsidiary ITC Hotels Ltd. The scheme was approved in August, which will create ITC Hotels Ltd, to handle its hospitality business.

Volvo Group Collaborates with Top Indian Universities to Enhance Engineering Education and Industry Readiness

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

In a strategic move to strengthen industry-academia collaboration and enhance the industry readiness of engineering students, Volvo Group India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with three prestigious Indian universities: Manipal University, KIIT University, and SRM University. The signing ceremony featured Kamal Bali, President and Managing Director of Volvo Group India Private Limited, alongside distinguished representatives from the universities.

These partnerships aim to



introduce comprehensive programs that include mentorship for postgraduate students in mechanical, electrical, electronics, and computer science streams. Students will benefit from internship opportunities and pre-placement offers, providing a significant boost to

their early careers in automotive engineering.

A key element of this collaboration is a two-semester credit program focused on industry-specific subjects, delivered by the partnered universities. Volvo Group will actively support this initiative by training

faculty members, facilitating sessions with industry experts, presenting real-world use cases and problem statements, and conducting guest lectures. Additionally, Volvo Group will offer scholarships to female students, promoting diversity and inclusion within the automotive sector.

Kamal Bali, President and Managing Director of Volvo Group India, expressed his enthusiasm: "We firmly believe in the strength of collaboration. Our partnership with these esteemed institutions marks a significant step towards empowering the next generation of engineers."

GPL Elevates Network Performance with GenieATM

NEW DELHI: Genie Networks has set a new milestone in its expansion across the Indian market with a recent success achieved by GPL, India's largest Multiple System Operator (MSO). GPL has significantly transformed the digital landscape within India through its expansive Digital Cable TV and Wireline Broadband services, extending its reach to more than 12 million households across 23 states. The collaboration with Genie underscores GPL's commitment to delivering innovative solutions and enhancing connectivity for millions of customers nationwide.

As GPL continued to expand its network footprint and enhanced their service offerings, they required a robust solution to analyze and optimize network traffic while maintaining service quality and reliability. The GenieATM deployment allows GPL to gain unparalleled visibility and real-time insights into their network traffic behavior. By leveraging the advanced traffic analysis capabilities of GenieATM, GPL is revolutionizing their network traffic with optimized resource allocation, efficient bandwidth utilization, and enhanced network performance.

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ISRO Chairman S.Somnath, Inaugurates Advanced HAL Facilities to Enhance LVM3 Rocket Production

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

S. Somanath, Chairman of ISRO, inaugurated state-of-the-art Propellant Tank Production and CNC Machining facilities at HAL's Aerospace Division today, with Mr. C.B. Ananthakrishnan, CMD (Additional Charge) of HAL, and

senior officers from ISRO and HAL in attendance, Press statement from HAL said.

These new facilities will significantly enhance ISRO's production capabilities, particularly for the Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM3), India's most powerful rocket. Currently, ISRO can only conduct two LVM3 launches per



year, while the demand is for six launches annually. The upgraded facilities will enable HAL to manufacture the critical components necessary to support the production of six LVM3 rockets per year, closing this gap.

Commending HAL's efforts, Somanath noted that HAL possesses enormous

capacities that should be fully explored to benefit both organizations. He emphasized that HAL will play an increasingly significant role in ISRO's future missions and should focus on emerging technologies, design challenges, and end-to-end tasks to alleviate pressure on ISRO.

ESG Frameworks and Pharmaceutical Industry in India



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH



KANIKA SHARMA

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) factors have become important pillars which shape the perception of companies among stakeholders especially investors. ESG has become an important metric in addition to traditional metrics of any company's financial performance. ESG encompasses multiple non-financial parameters which support decision-making for issuers and investors. Investors are able to measure and monitor ESG risks in their portfolio. Additionally, investors can identify investment opportunities by taking into account the long-term sustainability of businesses. The term, 'ESG' has become popular now but it was coined in 2004 by the United Nations Global Compact. The term, 'ESG' appeared in a report titled, "Who Cares Wins: Connecting Financial Markets to a Changing World". Much earlier than that, Socially Responsible Investing (SRI) gained momentum in the 1970s. By 1990s, ESG considerations started becoming an integral part of mainstream investment strategies. John Elkington made significant impact in this domain through his popular work - "Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business" (1997) in which he cited the 3P Program, i.e., "Pollution Prevention Pays" of 3M that he read in the work of Michael Royston with the same title - Pollution Prevention Pays. But later on, John Elkington became known for his own 3Ps, i.e., People, Planet and Profit.

Multiple standards and

frameworks exist for corporate entities to adopt in crafting their sustainability reports. Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) which was established in 1997 offers a comprehensive set of reporting standards. The GRI Standards have been organized into three universal categories namely economic, environmental and social. Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), established in the year 2000, operates globally as an international 'non-profit' entity. CDP comprises CDP Worldwide Group, CDP North America, Inc., and CDP Europe AISBP which are overseen by their respective boards of trustees and directors. It claims to possess the world's largest environmental database. Scoring System evolved by the CDP reflects the journey which companies undertake towards 'environmental stewardship', traversing through stages of disclosure, awareness, management, and ultimately, leadership. Further, each level signifies a progression towards 'deeper engagement' and 'responsibility' in addressing environmental challenges.

Equator Principles (formulated in June 2003) which are ten in number, intend to serve as a common baseline and risk management framework for financial institutions to identify, assess, and manage environmental and social risks when financing projects. In early 2005, on the initiative of Kofi Annan, the then United Nations Secretary General, a consortium of the world's foremost institutions investors, was convened with the stated objective of formulation of the 'Principles for Responsible Investment' (PRI). PRI initially comprised a 20-member investor cohort from institutions from 12 nations. Later on, it comprised experts from investment sector, civil society and inter-governmental bodies. The PRI has been endorsed by the United Nations, and it encourages investors to integrate ESG

considerations into investment strategies. ISO 26000 was launched in 2010 after a comprehensive five-year negotiation process involving stakeholders worldwide, and it is globally recognized standard crafted to guide organizations in effectively evaluating and fulfilling their social responsibilities pertinent to their core mission and vision, operational frameworks, diverse stakeholders, and environmental impacts. Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB), established in 2011, as a non-profit entity, serves the purpose of fostering a mutual understanding between businesses and investors concerning the financial implications of sustainability. The SASB standards comprise a set of 77 industry-specific sustainability accounting standards. Entities are expected to divulge information regarding sustainability-related risks and opportunities. These disclosures are aimed

Table 1:- ESG Frameworks explicitly cited by Top 10 Pharmaceutical Companies in India in their Annual Reports (2022-23)

Name of the Company	Number of ESG Frameworks followed (Out of 8)
Sun Pharma	5
Cipla	3
Dr. Reddy's Labs	5
Zydus Lifesciences	4
Divi's Labs	3
Mankind Pharma	1
Torrent Pharma	4
Lupin	5
Alkem Labs	4
Abbott India	5

Source: Compiled from Annual Reports of listed pharmaceutical companies



at potentially impacting the entity's 'cash flows, 'access to finance', or 'the cost of capital' across short, medium, or long-term horizons. The SASB Standards cover 'Sustainability Disclosure Topics & Metrics for Biotechnology Industry' thereby emphasizing on 'Safety of Clinical Trial Participants', 'Access to medicines', 'Affordability and Pricing', 'Drug Safety', 'Counterfeit medicines', 'Ethical Marketing', 'Employee Recruitment, Development and Retention', 'Supply Chain Management' and 'Business Ethics'. These are real concerns of any pharmaceutical business entity.

In 2015, the United Nations introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are commonly referred to as the Global Goals, and aim at mobilizing global efforts towards eradicating poverty, safeguarding the environment, and fostering universal prosperity by 2030. SDGs owe their origin to the Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs), i.e., eight international development goals which were to be achieved by 2015, as established guiding principles at the Millennium Summit hosted (in New York) in the year 2000 by the United Nations. Certain SDGs have direct implications for pharmaceutical sector which include 'Good Health and Well-being', 'Quality Education', 'Gender Equality', 'Clean Water and Sanitation', 'Affordable and Clean Energy', 'Decent Work and Economic Growth', 'Reduced Inequalities', 'Responsible Consumption and Production', 'Climate Action', and 'Partnerships for the goals'.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) as the regulator for equity markets took proactive steps to enhance ESG disclosures within the corporate sector, and introduced a novel reporting framework - the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR). In the fiscal year 2021-22, it was implemented on a voluntary basis. From 2022-23 onwards, it was made mandatory by the SEBI for the top 1,000 listed entities (based on market capitalization). The BRSR fosters transparency and accountability among listed companies.

All top listed pharmaceutical companies provided the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR), as it is mandatory for the top 1,000 listed companies. Except Mankind Pharma, other top

Table 1:- S&P Global Scores of top Pharmaceutical Companies and Ranking (2023)

Company	S&P Global ESG Score	Ranking (based on ESG Score)
Dr. Reddy's Labs	78	1
Cipla	70	2
Lupin	69	3
Sun Pharma	68	4
Zydus Lifesciences	62	5
Torrent Pharma	33	6
Divi's Labs	29	7
Alkem Labs	26	8

Source: Compiled from the S&P Global

nine pharmaceutical companies explicitly mentioned the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as ESG framework applied. Eight pharmaceutical companies except Divi's Labs and Mankind Pharma, followed the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) framework. Fourth most popular ESG framework for pharmaceutical companies is Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) as it has been followed by seven pharmaceutical companies except Cipla, Divi's Labs, and Mankind Pharma. Fifth most popular framework followed by top ten pharmaceutical companies in India is Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) which is followed by Sun Pharma, Dr. Reddy's Labs, Divi's Labs, Lupin and Abbott India.

As observed from annual reports for the year 2022-23, these top pharmaceutical companies are providing the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR). Over and above the mandatory requirement, these companies are also following globally accepted ESG frameworks such as UN SDG, GRI, SASB and CDP. Reporting by these pharmaceutical companies on these standards in their Annual Reports is reflected in the ranking of these companies by the S&P Global ESG Score that has been given in the Table 2.

S&P Global ESG Score breakdown has three compo-

ponents - Environmental, Social and Governance & Economic, and ESG Score as given in Table 2 can be seen in the light of the fact that Industry Mean and Industry Max was 23 and 90 respectively for the component - Environmental for which DRL had the score of 76. For Social, DRL had the score of 77 whereas Industry Mean and Industry Max stood at 31 and 87 respectively. And on Governance & Economic, DRL had 79 Score for which Industry Mean and Industry Max stood at 33 and 82 respectively. In the Methodology Year 2003, the S&P Global ESG Score has incorporated question-level scores based on modelling approaches in the absence of disclosure.

In Indian context, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) amended existing Securities and Exchange Board of India (Credit Rating Agencies) Regulations, 1999 in July 2023. Through these amendments, it introduced Chapter IV A on ESG Rating Providers (ERPs). It defined 'ESG Ratings' as the rating products that are marketed as opinions about an issuer or a security, regarding the ESG profile or characteristics or exposure to ESG risk, governance risk, social risk, climate or environmental risks, or impact on society, climate and the environment, that are issued using a defined ranking system of rating categories, whether or not these are explicitly labelled as "ESG ratings".

Credit rating agencies in India recognized the potential of ESG ratings, and launched ESG rating services. Prominent rating agency - ICRA Limited had announced in September 2023 about its application in the name of Pragati Development Consulting Services Limited (PDSCSL), and statutory approvals were sought for the change in the name to ICRA ESG Ratings Limited. PDSCSL, wholly-owned subsidiary of ICRA Limited received the SEBI registration

under the SEBI (Credit Rating Agencies) Regulations in April 2024. Most recently, the SEBI approved CRISIL ESG Ratings & Analytics Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of CRISIL Ratings Limited as a Category 1 provider of ESG Ratings in April 2024. It is not that CRISIL ESG Ratings was not doing ESG related work earlier. In 2021, CRISIL launched ESG 'scoring' business, and over a period, it expanded the coverage to 1,000 companies across 65 sectors. Approval to CRISIL ESG Ratings & Analytics acknowledged the necessity of financial markets for independent ESG ratings.

With more ESG Rating Providers catering to requirements of companies from different sectors, ESG reporting by pharmaceutical companies is likely to improve in future. Complexity of the value chain in case of a pharmaceutical company is likely to put intense pressure on Indian pharmaceutical companies. In near future, it is going to be tough for those pharmaceutical companies from India which operate in Europe and the United States. In the EU, non-EU companies doing business there, have to make disclosures under the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) as the European Commission adopted the CSRD in November 2022. In Indian context too, the SEBI has become proactive through introduction of ESG Reporting through BRSR and approvals to ESG Rating Providers.

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DISCLAIMER: Views are personal and do not represent the views of the Institute.

SBI Expects Reserve Bank Rate Cut in Q3 FY25

NEW DELHI: The State Bank of India (SBI), in a research report published ahead of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) June 5-7 monetary policy committee meeting, stated that the central bank is expected to implement its first rate cut in the third quarter of the current fiscal year 2024-25. However, the report noted that any potential rate reduction cycle is likely to be shallow, with measures focused on augmenting liquidity.



According to the SBI analysis, while emerging economy central banks often follow the lead of advanced economy counterparts in rate actions, India represents an exception to this pattern.

The report highlighted that the RBI's stance in the upcoming policy meeting should continue to prioritize the withdrawal of accommodative measures. This projection comes amid

expectations that the European Central Bank will embrace a 25 basis point rate cut during its June 6 meeting, as inflation in the region nears its target levels.

The SBI attributed this potential move by the ECB to uneven balancing of growth forecasts and technological leadership between the United

States and the European Union. On the domestic front, the SBI report noted that India's economy grew by 8.2 percent in the fiscal year 2023-24, compared to 7 percent in the previous year.

With a three-year moving average of 8.3 percent, the highest since the fiscal year 2014-15,

and a historical Incremental Capital Output Ratio (ICOR) of 4.3 alongside a gross investment rate of 33.3 percent, the report expressed confidence in achieving a 7.5 percent growth rate for the current fiscal year 2024-25.

Regarding inflation, the report stated that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation for April stood at 4.83 percent, while core inflation was recorded at 3.22 percent.

RBI Holds Repo Rate Steady, Revises GDP Projections Marginally Upward

NEW DELHI: In its latest monetary policy review meeting, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) maintained the repo rate at 6.5 per cent for the eighth consecutive time.

This decision marks the first MPC gathering since the recently concluded general elections.

During the post-meeting press conference, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das announced an upward revision of the gross domestic product (GDP) growth projection for the fiscal year 2024-25 to 7.2 per cent, an increase from the earlier estimate of 7 per cent.

The RBI operates under a statutory mandate to maintain consumer price index (CPI) inflation at 4 per cent.

In April, the central bank had kept the repo rate un-



changed at 6.5 per cent and maintained its <withdrawal of accommodation> policy stance.

The decisions were taken by a majority vote of 5:1 within the six-member MPC, chaired by Governor Das.

The unchanged repo rate translates to no increase in external benchmark lending rates linked to the repo rate,

providing relief to borrowers as their equated monthly instalments (EMIs) will remain unaffected.

Explaining the rationale behind the rate pause in April, Governor Das had cited persistent uncertainties in food prices as an upside risk to inflation, requiring vigilance to ensure a sustained disinflation path.

ASSOCHAM welcomes RBI focus on price stability for sustainable growth



NEW DELHI: RBI's unwavering focus on price stability for a sustainable economic growth would further cement foundation for a long and robust run for the Indian economy, ASSOCHAM Secretary General Deepak Sood said, reacting to the decision of the Monetary Policy Committee to keep the policy REPO rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent.

"While the policy stance of the RBI-MPC is on the expected lines, the GDP forecasts of 7.2 per cent for the FY'2024-25 along with its resolve to further moderate inflation are reassuring macro indications which can be leveraged for India remaining in the top league of economic growth amongst the major economies," Sood said.

He said RBI's preview of the unfolding supply side metrics also look promising, especially with regard to food inflation and reviving rural demand, a key catalyst for sustainable growth. Stability in INR on the back of comfortable foreign exchange reserves and improved prospects for global trade provide another positive to the economy. However, as well articulated by RBI Governor Mr Shaktikanta Das, there is a need to keep a watch on the challenging geo-political situation, having an impact on the global supply chain.

The ASSOCHAM lauded the RBI assurance in the policy statement about staying nimble and flexible in its liquidity management for preserving financial stability in the system.

Additionally, proposed guidelines for rationalising FEMA would lead to ease of doing business for global trade.

Finance Ministry Proposes New Central Excise Law, Seeks Public Feedback



NEW DELHI: The Union Finance Ministry on Tuesday announced its intention to replace the eight-decade-old Central Excise Act with a new central excise law.

The ministry has released a draft Central Excise Bill, 2024 and is seeking public comments on the proposed legislation until June 26th as part of a pre-legislative consultative process. After the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, only a few products like crude oil, petrol, diesel, natural gas, and aviation turbine fuel remain under the purview of the Central Excise Act. However, these products yield substantial tax revenues for both the Union government, which collected over Rs 3 trillion from central excise duties in the fiscal year 2023-24, and state governments, which levy value-added tax (VAT) on these items instead of state GST. According to the Finance Ministry, the draft Bill aims to enact a comprehensive, modern central excise law that emphasises promoting ease of doing business while repealing outdated and redundant provisions. The proposed legislation comprises twelve chapters, 114 sections, and two schedules.

Although the industry has advocated for including crude oil and petroleum products under the GST regime, a lack of consensus among states, which are reluctant to relinquish their taxation powers over these items in favour of the GST Council, has hindered such a move.

Unlike the excise law, GST avoids anomalies like 'tax on tax' by levying the tax at each successive stage of the supply chain only on the value added at that stage, thereby reducing the cost of doing business and the overall tax burden on the end consumer.

Vistaar Finance Secures USD 50 Mn DFC Loan to Fund Women Owned MSMEs

NEW DELHI: Vistaar Finance, a prominent lender to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in India, has announced securing a USD 50 million loan commitment from the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), a US government development finance institution.

According to a press release issued on yesterday, an initial tranche of USD 25 million has already been received from the DFC as part of this broader loan commitment.

This financing comes on the heels of a recent USD 36 million equity investment in Vistaar Finance by the leading global private equity firm Warburg



Pincus, underscoring the company's strong growth prospects.

The DFC's investment in Vistaar Finance is aimed at addressing the significant MSME financing gap in India, estimated at over USD 230 billion annually, or 11 per cent of the country's GDP.

Women-owned and -led enterprises, as well as rural MSMEs, face disproportionate challenges in accessing capital,

Vistaar Finance to support increased access to financing for innovative enterprises in India."

Avijit Saha, CEO, Vistaar Finance, expressed gratitude for the DFC's facility, stating, "We are extremely thankful to the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) for this facility, which comes to us at the right time and helps us in our goal of strengthening women's lead entrepreneurship, further deepening our presence in rural markets, and reaching out to more unserved and underserved customers." Established in 2010, Vistaar Finance has been a pioneer in providing long-term loans to the underserved MSME segment in India.

The company has given no information about the size of the deal. However, some reports suggest that the deal is

worth less than \$100 million. MX Player had raised \$111 million in 2019 at a valuation of \$500 million. Since then, there has been a big decline in the company's valuation. According to the reports, the acquisition of MX Player will boost Mini TV.

RBI Tightens KYC norms for Asset Reconstruction Firms

NEW DELHI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is increasing oversight on asset reconstruction companies (ARCs) that purchase bad loans from banks and non-bank financial institutions.

The central bank has mandated that ARCs classify borrowers by risk profile and regularly verify KYC (know your customer) details after acquiring non-performing assets.

This move aims to enhance fraud detection and anti-money laundering measures within the ARC industry, subjecting these firms to the same rigorous standards applied to banks.

ARCs will now be required to follow the central bank's 2016 KYC guidelines, which mandate obtaining customer proof of identity and address, and periodically updating this information based on risk categorisation. According to ARC industry executives, the RBI has instructed these firms to verify KYC data even for bad loans acquired from lenders that have existing KYC details on file.

Auditors have emphasised that merely purchasing KYC-compliant assets is insufficient,



necessitating regular verification by ARCs.

Implementing these enhanced KYC norms will increase compliance costs for ARCs, particularly given the shift towards purchasing retail bad loans amid reduced corporate stress.

ARCs will need to compel defaulting retail borrowers to share updated KYC information, which could prove challenging.

The Association of Asset Reconstruction Companies in India is engaging with the RBI and its members to facilitate compliance with the changing regulatory landscape.

The association plans to conduct training sessions to sensitise ARCs to the KYC requirements.

This scrutiny on ARCs aligns with the RBI's broader efforts to strengthen governance and compliance in the financial sector.

Sensex, Nifty open 2 per cent down on counting day

MUMBAI: Sensex went down over 1,500 points on June 4 as the Nifty dropped more than 500 points amid early trends on Lok Sabha elections counting day.

The Sensex opened 1,544.14 points, or 2.02 per cent, down at 74,924.64, while the Nifty opened 491.10 points, or 2.11 per cent, down at 22,772.80.

Nearly 891 shares advanced, 1,572 shares declined while 121 shares remained unchanged.

Market experts advised that investors need not rush in to buy even if the results confirm the Exit Poll findings. "Remain invested in large-

caps and do some profit booking in smallcaps," they said. On Monday, stock markets gained over Rs 12 lakh crore, or 3.25 per cent.



Exit polls predicting the NDA government retaining power with a thumping majority pushed Sensex and Nifty to new highs on Monday.

Byju's US subsidiary lenders drag more entities into bankruptcy

NEW YORK: A group of lenders on Wednesday petitioned against new entities, tied to embattled edtech company Byju's US subsidiary, into bankruptcy in a US court, alleging that these entities are not paying their debts.

The group of lenders, which gave Byju's Alpha \$1.4 billion term-loan, petitioned against Neuron Fuel Inc., Epic! Creations Inc. and Tangible Play Inc. to Chapter 11 of the US Bankruptcy Code to initiate involuntary proceedings against them, in the Delaware court.

The lenders said in a statement that since Byju's began to default (on \$1.2 billion of debt) on its term-loan obligations, "we have made every effort possible to work productively and col-



laboratively to help Byju's cure its multiple defaults".

"However, it is clear that Byju's management has no intention or ability to honour its obligations under the Term Loans. Indeed, BYJU's founders, who also serve as the three directors of the overall enterprise - Byju Raveendran, Riju Ravindran, and Divya Gokulnath - unlawfully diverted \$533 million in loan proceeds, the whereabouts of which are still unknown," the creditors al-

leged. The edtech company had earlier claimed that no funds have been siphoned off and around \$533 million are "currently in a 100 per cent non-US subsidiary of the company".

The lenders further said that as a result of Byju's failed leadership and mismanagement, significant harm has been done to the company's businesses and the value of the company's assets. "Shareholders and lenders to

the company have seen the value of their investment deteriorate, employees and vendors have not been paid in a timely manner, and customers have suffered," the lenders said.

Once valued at \$22 billion, the edtech company's valuation has plummeted around 95 per cent after investors cut their stakes in several rounds.

The group of lenders said with their action, "Epic!, Neuron Fuel, and Tangible Play will benefit from much-needed oversight while a plan is developed to maximise the value of these assets for the benefit of all stakeholders."

In 2021, Byju's Alpha was established as a US subsidiary to receive proceeds of the Term Loans.

Muthoot FinCorp launches 'Book My Gold Loan' campaign with Shah Rukh Khan

NEW DELHI: Muthoot FinCorp Limited (MFL), the flagship company of the 137-year-old Muthoot Pappachan Group (Muthoot Blue), on Friday launched its 'Book My Gold Loan' campaign featuring Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan. The campaign introduces a first-of-its-kind service in India: 'Book a Gold Loan instantly, anytime, from anywhere'.



The newly-launched feature allows customers to initiate loans with a simple missed call, integrating advanced technology with exceptional customer service.

"Partnering with Shah Rukh Khan, the 'Book My Gold Loan' campaign represents a major leap for us. With the 'Book My Gold Loan' service, we aim to make life easier for all our consumers with gold loans that can be taken at any of our branches or from their homes. Our loans

empower our customers to fulfil their aspirations daily," said Shaji Varghese, CEO, Muthoot FinCorp.

This unique service makes gold loans more accessible and convenient for consumers and is powered by the robust 'phygital' presence of Muthoot FinCorp across the country with over 3,700 branches and Gold Loan from Home in more than 50 cities.

Khan to tell the world about it. And as always, he gave it a unique twist," said Anupama Ramaswamy, Joint MD and Chief Creative Officer, Havas Worldwide India.

The TVC whisks viewers through a sequence of aspirations - starting businesses, studying abroad, and buying a new car. As each scene unfolds, Shah Rukh Khan subtly incorporates the 'call me' gesture, hinting at a simple solution.

In the end, Khan reveals the answer behind his 'call me' gesture - Muthoot FinCorp's 'Book My Gold Loan' service.

This first-in-India service makes getting a gold loan as easy as a missed call to 80869 80869 to turn 'your dreams into reality'.

Additionally, Muthoot FinCorp has also released a musical video promoting the new initiative with SRK.

Reserve Bank Plans to Introduce UPI Globally in 20 Countries by 2029

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and NPCI International Payments Ltd. (NIPL) have unveiled ambitious plans to take India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) to 20 countries by the fiscal year 2028-29.

According to the RBI's annual report, initiatives will be undertaken over the next few years to significantly increase the global reach and adoption of UPI and RuPay cards as part of the "Viksit Bharat 2047" vision.

"The Reserve Bank, along with NIPL, will work towards taking UPI to 20 countries with an initiation timeline of 2024-25 and completion timeline of 2028-29," the report stated.

Currently, UPI QR code-based merchant payments are accepted in just two countries



- France and Nepal. However, India has payment agreements enabling UPI use in seven other nations as well.

The report outlined plans to explore collaboration on fast payment systems with groups like the European Union, SAA-RC countries, and establish multilateral linkages.

RBI is also in discussions with various central banks on

cooperative payment arrangements.

The global rollout of UPI and RuPay cards is a key objective in the RBI's Payments Vision 2025 document.

Recent months have seen UPI connectivity launched between India and Mauritius as well as Sri Lanka to facilitate QR payments for travellers.

"The Reserve Bank, along with NIPL, will work towards taking UPI to 20 countries with an initiation timeline of 2024-25 and completion timeline of 2028-29"

As digital payments grow, the RBI is evaluating new authentication solutions beyond SMS-based OTPs to enhance security and reduce friction.

INTERNATIONAL

Joe Biden signs executive order to curb unlawful border crossings by immigrants

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden has signed an executive order that would immediately turn down requests for entry into the country by asylum-seekers crossing the southern border illegally, in the event that officials deem the border is overwhelmed.

The long-awaited measure, which Biden has been contemplating for months, would kick in once the seven-day average for illegal crossings between ports of entry along the US-Mexico border hits 2,500 per day, effectively shutting down the border, Xinhua news agency reported, citing senior administration officials.

Given that the daily encounters are already above the threshold now, the order could take effect right after being signed, empowering border officers to repatriate migrants within "days, if not hours," the officials told reporters during



a press call.

Prior to Tuesday's order, an illegal immigrant seeking asylum in the US would typically be allowed to temporarily enter the country, where the individual would wait for a court appearance to present a compelling case for the request.

Under the new guidance, the border will reopen to those seeking asylum in the US two weeks after

the daily crossings stay at or below 1,500 for seven consecutive days.

Unaccompanied children and victims of human trafficking are exempt from the newly announced restrictions — a key part of the executive order which Biden boasted as out of humanitarian considerations. Immigration advocates, however, worry that such an exemption would

potentially lead to a drastic increase of children who make the dangerous journey to the border on their own.

In remarks at the White House announcing the executive order, Biden on Tuesday said his measure, the product of weeks of negotiations between Democrats and Republicans, was opposed by some GOP members of Congress because the former president and his election rival, Donald Trump, "told them to".

"He didn't want to fix the issue" of illegal immigration, Biden said of Trump. "He wanted to use it to attack me," the president said, lashing out at his political foe by claiming that Trump was engaging in an "extremely cynical political move" that amounted to "a complete disservice" to Americans aspiring their leaders to not weaponize but fix the border.

Pak elected as UNSC non-permanent member



UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan, Somalia, Denmark, Greece and Panama on Thursday were elected as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council for a two-year term, starting January 1, 2025.

They were elected by a secret ballot in the UN General Assembly. In the two seats for African and Asia-Pacific States, Somalia got 179 votes and Pakistan received 182 votes. Among the Latin American and Caribbean States, Panama got 183 votes, while in the Western European and other States, Denmark got 184 votes and Greece got 182 votes.

Pakistani PM Sharif in Beijing for talks with President Xi to seek more investments, elevate ties



BEIJING: Visiting Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has reached Beijing for talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping and other leaders to elevate all-weather bilateral ties and prospects of more aid and investments to bail out his cash-strapped country from the current economic crisis.

Sharif, on a five-day official visit to China since June 4, toured the southern high-tech city of Shenzhen on Wednesday and addressed the investors meeting. During his stay here, Sharif will meet Xi, Premier Li Qiang and other leaders, Pakistan's state-run APP news agency reported. He will also attend a Pakistan-China Friendship and Business event and have meetings with the CEOs of leading Chinese companies working on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects.

Several MoUs between the two countries on cooperation in various fields are likely to be signed, the report said. Cash-strapped Pakistan's economy is facing severe headwinds, and it has formally requested the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the next bailout package between USD 6 billion and USD 8 billion with the possibility of augmentation through climate financing. In his address to the investors meeting in Shenzhen, Sharif assured full security to the Chinese personnel from the recurring terrorist attacks targeting them.

The 72-year-old leader embarked on his first visit to China after he took over as

prime minister for the second term after his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party-led coalition government assumed power in March. Addressing the Pakistan-China Business Forum, Sharif assured all-out facilitation to Chinese investors and security of Chinese individuals, projects, and investments in Pakistan. He said his government had taken various measures to ensure fool-proof security to protect the lives of Chinese workers in Pakistan.

"I will spare no effort to protect the lives of Chinese workers and assure and guarantee that we will provide them security more than our children. This will never happen again," he said. Referring to the March terrorist attack in Besham in Pakistan, in which five Chinese personnel and their Pakistani driver were killed, he said it was one of the saddest days of his life when the whole nation felt saddened. The latest was the March suicide attack in Dasu in which five Chinese nationals and a Pakistani driver were killed. Pakistan paid USD 2.58 million as compensation to the families of those killed in the attack.

The CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is the flagship project of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI is seen as an attempt by China to further its influence abroad with infrastructure projects funded by Chinese investments across the world.

Benjamin Netanyahu to defend Gaza war in address to US Congress on July 24



WASHINGTON: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is set to address lawmakers from both chambers of the US Congress in a rare joint meeting on July 24.

Netanyahu's speech, which will defend his war in Gaza, is controversial in Washington, as President Joe Biden struggles to seal a lasting ceasefire deal in Gaza and his Democratic party grows more divided over the conflict. Even before the date of the speech was announced, several left-wing Democrats had vowed to boycott it over Netanyahu's handling of his war with Hamas. The invitation to Netanyahu was issued last week from the leaders of both parties in the US Congress, including Democrat Chuck Schumer, the Senate majority leader who has been highly critical of Netanyahu. Schumer, who is the highest-ranking Jewish elected official in the US government, recently called for new elections to be held in Israel. Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, a Republican, announced the July 24 date late Thursday. "We look forward to hearing the Israeli government's vision for defending democracy, combatting terror, and establishing a just and lasting peace in the region," Johnson wrote on social media.

Austria's first female chancellor dies at 74



VIENNA: Austria's former chancellor Brigitte Bierlein, who led a caretaker government from June 2019 to January 2020, died on Monday. Bierlein, Austria's first female chancellor, died "a few days before her 75th birthday, after a short but serious illness", the Constitutional Court of Austria said in a statement. Bierlein served as the court's vice president from 2003 to 2018 and its president from February 2018 until she was appointed the federal chancellor in June 2019. Xinhua news agency reported. She led an interim government for seven months after her predecessor Sebastian Kurz's government collapsed due to a corruption scandal.

India, Qatar Reaffirm Commitment to Bolster Economic Ties



NEWDELHI: India and Qatar reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral economic relations during the first meeting of their Joint Task Force on Investment (JTFI) held on Thursday, according to an official statement.

The meeting, co-chaired by Ajay Seth, Secretary of India's Department of Economic Affairs, and Mohamed bin Hassan Al-Malki, Undersecretary of Qatar's Ministry of Commerce and Industry, underscored the robust economic partnership between the two nations.

"The Joint Task Force has reiterated both countries' resolve to leverage their collaborative potential for accelerated growth, investment prospects and synergistic cooperation across diverse sectors encompassing infrastructure, energy, technology and innovation," the statement said.

It added that the initiative is rooted in shared values, common goals and a shared vision for inclusive development.

The JTFI was formed to foster mutual growth and prosperity by facilitating bilateral investment and economic engagement between India and Qatar, two nations with historically amicable ties.

Thursday's discussions pave the way for deeper coordination on priority areas identified by both sides. Officials did not disclose specific investment targets or deals discussed during the meeting. However, India is keen to attract greater Qatari investment in its infrastructure projects, while Qatar remains a key energy partner supplying liquefied natural gas to meet India's growing energy needs.

Biden apologises to Ukraine's Zelenskyy for months-long holdup to weapons that let Russia make gains



PARIS: President Joe Biden on Friday for the first time publicly apologised to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for a months-long holdup in American military assistance that let Russia make gains on the battlefield.

Speaking in Paris, where they both attended ceremonies marking the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings, Biden told Zelenskyy that, he apologised to the Ukrainian people for the weeks of not knowing if more assistance would come while Congress waited six months before sending Biden a USD 61 billion military aid package for Ukraine.

Still, Biden insisted that the American people were standing by Ukraine for the long-haul. "We're still in. Completely. Thoroughly," he said.

40 killed in Israel's 'targeted' strike on UN school in Gaza

Israel hit a Gaza school on Thursday with what it described as a targeted airstrike on up to 30 Hamas fighters inside. A Hamas official said 40 people, including women and children, were killed as they were taking shelter in the UN site.

Video footage showed Palestinians hauling away bodies after the attack, which took place at a sensitive moment in mediated talks on a ceasefire that would involve releasing hostages held by Hamas and some of the Palestinians held in Israeli jails.

The United States issued a joint statement with other countries on Thursday calling on Israel and Hamas to make whatever compromises were necessary to finalise a deal after eight months of war in the Gaza Strip.

Ismail Al-Thawabta, the director of the Hamas-run gov-



ernment media office, rejected Israel's assertion that the UN school in Nuseirat, in central Gaza, had hidden a Hamas command post.

"The occupation uses ... false fabricated stories to justify the brutal crime it conducted against dozens of displaced people," Thawabta said.

Israel's military said its fighter jets had carried out a

"precise strike" and circulated satellite photos highlighting two parts of a building where it said the fighters were based. "We're very confident in the intelligence," military spokesperson Lt Col Peter Lerner said, accusing Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters of deliberately using UN facilities as operational bases.

Meanwhile, the Israeli

military has warned the government its policy of cutting off funds to the Palestinian Authority could push the occupied West Bank into a third "intifada", public broadcaster Kan Radio reported on Thursday.

The warning underlined the increasingly dire state of the West Bank economy where thousands of workers have lost their jobs in Israel and public servants have been unpaid or on partial pay for months. — Reuters

US imposes sanctions on Palestinian militant group
The US State Department imposed sanctions on Thursday on the Palestinian militant group, Lion's Den, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, the department said. Department spokesperson Matthew Miller cited attacks by the group on Israelis as well as Palestinians in the West Bank since 2022.

US to send NSA Jake Sullivan to engage with Modi 3.0 govt

WASHINGTON: US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan is scheduled to visit India to engage with the new government in New Delhi as Narendra Modi is set to take oath as the Prime Minister for a record third consecutive term, the White House said.

Sullivan's visit was discussed when US President Joe Biden spoke to Prime Minister Modi on Wednesday to congratulate him on his re-election.

"President Joseph Biden Jr spoke with Prime Minister

Narendra Modi of India to congratulate him and the National Democratic Alliance on their historic victory in India's general election," the White House said in a statement.

The two leaders stressed their commitment to strengthening the US-India Comprehensive and Global Strategic Partnership and to advancing their common vision of a free, open and prosperous India-Pacific region, the White House added.

President Biden praised the



"friendship" between the US and India on X. This was followed by similar congratulatory messages by other senior members of his Biden administration, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

PM Modi responded to President Biden's post, saying he was happy to receive the call from his "friend".

Though Sullivan's visit has been announced, his travel dates to India are yet to be finalised. However, it is expected to be within days of PM Modi taking oath, which

is likely to take on June 8.

Besides President Biden, Senator Ben Cardin, Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, also congratulated the Modi administration for conducting the massive elections which saw a turnout of millions in only a few weeks.

"The people of India have again demonstrated their commitment to the democratic process, casting their votes in spite of this year's intense heatwaves," the White House said.

Italy marks Republic Day with calls for unity



ROME: Italy celebrated the 78th anniversary of its founding as a republic, with President Sergio Mattarella calling for unity in Italy and across Europe.

In his remarks, Mattarella said on Sunday that the creation of the Italian Republic created "an Italy open to Europe" and he called for unity in Italy and across Europe.

He also cited the importance of Italian multilateral cooperation, including within the UN and NATO, Xinhua news agency reported.

The Italian President's remarks come with an increase in violence across the world as well as increasing political divisions between European Union states.

It also comes days before citizens in 27 European Union states, including Italy, go to the polls to select new members of the European Parliament.

Mattarella laid a wreath at the country's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Rome followed by a parade and the famed jet fly-over with smoke trailing the colours of the Italian flag.

Mattarella was joined by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, the Presidents of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, multiple government ministers, and Mayors from some 300 cities and towns. Dozens of members of the Italy-based diplomatic corps were also on hand.

In her remarks, Meloni said Italy should return to the "first idea of Europe" — saying that it called for the autonomy of states, a reference to a balance between multi-state cooperation and national autonomy.

It also comes as Italy holds the rotating presidency of the G7 club of large industrialised countries.

Sunita Williams, Butch Wilmore test unique Starliner manual piloting capability on orbit

HOUSTON: On the way to the International Space Station aboard Boeing's Starliner spacecraft, Indian-origin astronaut Sunita Williams and her colleague Butch Wilmore tested out a unique capability of the spacecraft on orbit — manual piloting.

Williams flew to space for the third time on Wednesday along with Wilmore, scripting history as the first members aboard Boeing's Starliner spacecraft on a 25-hour flight to the International Space Station (ISS).

Williams, 58, is the pilot for the flight test while Wilmore, 61, is the commander of the mission.

Although the spacecraft is usually autonomous, the crew used the hand controller to point and aim the spacecraft during about two hours of free-flight demonstrations.

During a far-field demo, they pointed Starliner's nose toward the Earth so that its communications antenna on the back of the Service Module was pointed at the Tracking and Data Relay satellites. They then moved the Starliner so that its solar array pointed at the sun to show they could charge the internal batteries if ever needed, Boeing said in a statement.

Next, they swung Starliner



around and pointed the nose away from Earth to look at the stars. This was to show they could manually use the star trackers in the VESTA system to establish their attitude in space in case all three flight computers were to ever go out or be turned off at the same time.

Then, they manually sped Starliner up and then slowed it down, which slightly raised and then lowered their orbit. This was to show that the crew could manually break away from the space station orbit during rendezvous, if necessary.

Finally, the crew manually

pointed Starliner in the orientation needed for entry into the Earth's atmosphere, just in case they had to do that manually. During that manoeuvre, they again pointed the solar array at the sun to try a different method of confirming they could manually charge the batteries.

There is more manual piloting to come for this "pilot's spacecraft" with Wilmore and Williams on docking day, June 6. The Starliner spacecraft, dubbed Calypso, has been developed by Boeing, under a contract from NASA. It has run into several delays and glitches in its developmental

process.

Moments before lift-off, Commander Wilmore called out to thank all those who had worked to make the mission possible. Alluding to past difficulties, he said: "When the going gets tough - and it often does - the tough get going, and you have." Starliner's pilot Sunita Williams chimed in: "Go 'Calypso!' (the name of the capsule). Take us to space and back." This mission is a critical venture for manufacturer Boeing, which has been under pressure after a series of safety incidents on its aeroplanes.

Starliner, likewise, has encountered numerous techni-

cal issues that have delayed its planned crewed debut by almost a decade.

The most dramatic of these problems occurred on the capsule's first uncrewed test flight in 2019 when software errors forced the vehicle to abort its trip to the ISS. NASA requested a second dummy run be conducted in 2022 to be sure the errors had been corrected.

Starliner was developed in response to NASA's request for commercial options to get its astronauts into space.

Following the retirement of the famous shuttles in 2011, the agency wanted to move away from owning and operating vehicles to an arrangement where it could simply purchase the service - just like a company might outsource its IT needs or payroll.

The new approach was designed to save NASA money it could then spend on ambitious plans to return people to the Moon.

The agency gave contracts to Boeing and SpaceX to help bring their capsules into service and then pay them for six operational missions. Whereas SpaceX was able to fly its crew flight test in 2020 and then complete six operational missions by March of this year, Boeing is still at the stage of the initial crew flight test.

'Temples are for outsiders; BJP has forgotten us', says angry people in Ayodhya

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Ram Mandir just four months ago. The temple construction in Ayodhya was the BJP's ideological project and certainly the biggest 'trump card' in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, and 400 slogans were raised. But Alas! Even single magic figure did not come. Not only that, Faizabad seat gave the biggest surprise. This is where the Ram Mandir of Ayodhya is situated, What is the reason for BJP's drastic loss?

At Ayodhya, some government college, where was the counting center of Faizabad Lok Sabha constituency. BJP office is about one kilometer away from there. BJP candidate from Faizabad, Lalu Singh, has



announced defeated few hours ago. Almost everyone along with Party candidate has left the party office except only one BJP's counting agent who was still sitting in the empty office. His face was full of disappointment and fatigue. After seeing me with his a very close known person, (don't want to mention his name), he said with watery eyes, "We had to fight a lot to build the Ram Mandir, everyone

here had hard work. But despite this, the inauguration of Ram Mandir was not converted into a vote".
Samajwadi Party's candidate and nine-time MLA Avdhesh Prasad defeated BJP's two-time MP Lalu Singh more than 54 thousand votes. We asked him, what is the reason for BJP's loss? The party's counting agent said, "Local issues have gained more importance, poor peo-

ple, even hindus were angry in many villages of Ayodhya. B'coz, desparately the acquisition of land surrounding the temple and airport and allotted to those rich outsider. The poor villagers lost their home and roti-ruzi". He further said, "such as, a plot allotted to Foreign Brand KFC who only sells non-veg but what they will sell here in Ayodhya where non-veg is not allowed within 2 kilometers. Moreover, all big business houses from gujrat were allotted the plot for business here but not to locals. They have not paid or well settled whose homes were taken over".
As Avdhesh Prasad is a Dalit leader, the votes of BSP also went to the Samajwadi Party. Avdhesh's initial reaction after the win was, "This win is historic. Even though I am a

Dalit, our national president Akhilesh Yadav nominated me on an unreserved seat. People have voted for me, forgetting their religion and caste. The local leadership of the BJP also feels that despite the construction of the temple, people's anger over unemployment, price hike, land acquisition is behind this result in Faizabad and of course the exercise of fear of changing the constitution also. During the campaign, even BJP candidate Lalu Singh stood on the stage and said, "We need 400 seats to change the constitution".
Standing outside the counting center was 27-year-old young boy, his Local house is in Mitransenpur village. He said, "It was not right for the outgoing MP of BJP to say that about amending the constitution.

Apoorva Arora to spend birthday shooting in Delhi, plans solo trip after that



Apoorva Arora, who is known for her work in Hindi, Gujarati, Punjabi, and Kannada films, is set to celebrate her birthday on Wednesday. However, the actress will be spending her special day working on a film. Sharing her birthday plans with media, the actress shared that she will be working on a film, the title of which she chose not to disclose, on

Wednesday. "It's going to be a working birthday this year, but I'm definitely taking a solo trip right after the shoot gets done. I like to do small things every day 4-5 days before my birthday." Apoorva said that she likes to meet different sets of friends and sometimes chill and relax all alone. She also likes sleepovers, going to the beach and going out for dinner. "This year, I'm traveling to Delhi on June 5 for a shoot. Post that, I'll take a short trip and relax by myself somewhere in North India," she added. Recently, the actress attended the Adishakti workshop at Auroville. She spoke about her routine at the workshop and said that it has given her a deeper understanding of herself as an artist.

'Bailgadi Shariat' steals racing limelight in Maharashtra



DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Maharashtra

Move over horses, the ox is stealing the limelight in the running for sport and money. Ox racing, which is called "Jallikattu" in the southern states of India, is also very popular in Maharashtra where majority of villagers own an ox used in racing held in fields after the crop harvest. Sopan Godkar (28), farmer/technocrat, turned out to be third-time lucky when he bagged a beautiful trophy and cash prize through his prize-winning oxen - Bullet (6 years) and Malhar (4 years) - emerging winners in the "Bailgadi Shariat 2024" ox-carriage racing held in Kudal village of Maharashtra recently. The race is held during a "Zatra" (Fair) in different parts of Maharashtra, where sponsorship is provided by politicians, industrialists etc and prize amounts vary upto lakhs of rupees.

"We had oxen in our home where we kept them for farming and racing, which is a sport much patronised by all amidst much fun and frolic," Sopan said, adding that the winning ox is taken to a temple for puja and then home for sweet treats like "puran poli" "at my mother's hands." "While my Kolhapur partner owns Bullet who has won as many as 15 racing competitions, I bought Malhar in Kolhapur for Rs 85 -- at a time when ox-racing was banned -- and participated in three annual races before emerging third time lucky." The jockey stands with the reins atop a light two-wheel carriage to which the two oxen are hitched before the race begins. Fed on a peanut-pulsesugarcane-corn-watermelon, carrots, beets, green grass and yellowhay diet, the bovines can be seen chomping at their reins at the starting line of the ten paired-oxen race that measures a thousand feet running distance for 20-25 seconds.

On Sunil Dutt's birth anniversary, son Sanjay pledges to follow 'all that you have taught me'



MUMBAI: Bollywood star Sanjay Dutt, who will next be seen in the Kannada film 'KD-The Devil', is remembering his father Sunil Dutt on his birth anniversary on Thursday.

The actor took to his Instagram on Thursday and shared throwback pictures of his father. The first picture shows Sunil Dutt with his kids reading a book. The second picture is of the late actor reading a letter.

Sanjay wrote in the caption: "Happy birthday dad, I miss you and love you, I have and will follow all that you have taught me, the values, and most of all to be a humble and a good human being who helps the needy, love you dad." Sunil Dutt, who hailed from the Jhelum District of the Punjab Province of British India (now in Punjab, Pakistan), made his debut in Hindi cinema in 1955 with 'Railway Platform'. He rose to prominence with acclaimed films like 'Ek Hi Raasta' and 'Mother India'. He was honoured with Padma Shri in 1968 for his contribution to Indian cinema.

He married actress Nargis. They have three children: Sanjay Dutt, Namrata Dutt, and Priya Dutt. He passed away in May 2005. In Sanjay's biopic 'Sanju' Sunil Dutt's character was essayed by veteran actor Paresh Rawal, with Ranbir Kapoor portraying Sanjay Dutt.

Ektaa Kapoor seeks blessings at Venkateswara Temple on her 49th birthday

MUMBAI: Content czarina Ektaa Kapoor, who is celebrating her 49th birthday on Friday, visited the Venkateswara Temple in Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh and sought blessings of Lord Venkateswara.

Ektaa, who is the managing director and creative head of Balaji Telefilms Ltd, took to Instagram, and shared a video, which showcases glimpses of her posing in a white suit at the temple. There is also a snippet of the birthday girl cutting a chocolate cake. The post is captioned, 'Venkatramana Govinda! will



msg everyone back soonest!! thanku for d love'.
Actress Kareena Kapoor

Khan took to her Instagram and shared a monochrome picture with Ektaa and penned a note, 'Happy birthday Boss... Solid, loving and fearless... Tons of love always'. Ridhi Dogra shared a video with Ektaa and said, 'Wish you smiles and joy. Good health and peace. Abundance and light. Happy birthday to you... You're special just as you are... May you live your days always knowing that!'

Mouni Roy took to her Instagram account and shared a love-filled picture with Ektaa.

She wrote, 'Happiest birthday to the woman I have always looked up to and loved. May god bless you with all that you want in abundance. Love, light & all the birthday brights my dearest Ekta ma'am... love you.'

Ektaa is known for producing cult shows like 'Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi', 'Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii', 'Kkusum', 'Kabhi Sautan Kabhi Saheli', 'Kya Hadsaa Kya Haqeeqat', 'Kis Desh Mein Hai Meraa Dil', 'Bade Achhe Lagte Hain', among numerous others.

How Raghavendra Rathore designed Diljit Dosanjh's look for North America tour

MUMBAI: Couturier Raghavendra Rathore, who has collaborated with Punjabi singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh for his ongoing 'Dil-luminati North America' tour, has shared how the latter struck a chord with the AI-Gen-Z audience who crave for authentic experiences that pay homage to their traditions while pushing creative boundaries.

The lifestyle designer has showcased Indian heritage and craftsmanship on a global platform through Diljit's powerful connection with audiences worldwide.

Talking about the same, the founder of the bespoke brand 'Raghavendra Rathore Jodhpur' said: "Diljit is an unstoppable force, not just as one of India's biggest musical sensations, but also as a proud ambassador of our rich cultural heritage."

For the Vancouver opener, Dosanjh donned Rathore's signature black Jodhpur bandhgala kurta, featuring intricate tonal thread work.

The black handcrafted kurta was paired with a lustrous pure silk chadra (traditional Punjabi outfit, thoughtfully crafted to complement the ensemble).

The look was completed with a turle wali pagri (Punjabi turban) styled by turban



artiste Gurpartap Singh Kang. "By seamlessly blending his Punjabi roots with a modern sensibility, Diljit has struck a chord with the AI-Gen-Z audience who crave authentic experiences that pay homage to their traditions while pushing creative boundaries. Our collaboration for the Dil-luminati tour is a celebration of this very spirit -- fusing timeless Indian craftsmanship with contemporary global appeal," he shared.

Rathore added: "As Diljit takes the stage in my bespoke ensembles, we are showcasing to the world the unparalleled artistry of Indian haute couture on prestigious international platforms."

Prega News brand ambassador Kajal Agarwal launches 'Expert Pregnancy Care Solution Partner' in South

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Prega News, India's leading pregnancy detection brand with an 85% market share from Mankind Pharma, has launched its expert pregnancy care solution range, endorsed by renowned celebrity Kajal Agarwal, for the Southern market. The brand aims to expand its presence in the region, enhancing its proposition of providing essential products during pregnancy. Over the past three years, Prega News has focused intensely on the South Market, achieving significant growth in areas like Karnataka, where market share increased from 65% in March 2022 to 85% in March 2024.

During the launch event, Kajal Agarwal emphasized the importance of early pregnancy detection for ensuring the health and well-being of both mother and baby. Prega News is recognized for its highly



accurate results and, with its production expansion, now offers a comprehensive range of reproductive health products. Kajal Agarwal also addressed the audience about the prevalence of unbranded products that often deliver inaccurate and unreliable results.

The brand's holistic pregnancy care solution covers the pre-pregnancy, pregnancy, and post-pregnancy phases, with six meticulously developed products based on extensive research. The event was attended by other South Indian renowned film actor moms like Sanjanaa Galrani, along side other 70 mom influencers such as Meghana Raj, Lasya Manjunath, Anjali

Thota, Nisha Agarwal, Sujatha Shivakumar, and Keerthi Jai Dhanush. These influencers, prominent in key regional markets such as Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Karnataka, significantly amplified the event's reach and visibility.

Joy Chatterjee, Associate Vice President of Sales & Marketing at Mankind Pharma, remarked, "Since the launch of our comprehensive Pregnancy Care range as the Expert Pregnancy Care Solution Partner last year in the North, East, and West markets, endorsed by renowned Bollywood celebrity Sonam Kapoor and supported by 55 popular mom influencers like Smriti Khanna, Anita Hassanandani, Mahi Vij, Pooja Banerjee, and Kishwer Merchant, we have received tremendous support and love from our target audience. We are proud to have carved out a niche in this segment by offering essential products for the different stages of pregnancy.

Varun Dhawan takes home baby daughter, wife Natasha Dalal from hospital



MUMBAI: New daddy and actor Varun Dhawan on Friday took his newborn daughter and wife Natasha Dalal home from the Hinduja hospital in Mumbai. Varun, who is dressed in a mustard coloured T-shirt paired with brown pants, cradled his baby girl as he made way from the hospital. Natasha was seen walking behind. On June 3, Varun and Natasha welcomed their first baby.

Steelcase inaugurates 'Work Better Conference' to celebrate its Glorious 25 years in India



ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Steelcase, a global leader in office furniture, proudly celebrates over 25 years of innovation and leadership in transforming workspaces across India. Since its initial joint venture, Steelcase has steadily expanded its presence, offering tailored solutions that cater to local needs and investing significantly in local manufacturing. This commitment has fostered the creation of inspiring, people-centered environments that boost productivity and enhance employee engagement in Indian workplaces.

To commemorate this significant milestone, Steelcase hosted its inaugural Work Better Conference in Asia, held in Bengaluru, India. This premier event brought together top industry professionals, providing a platform to discuss the latest trends and innovative solutions in office design and functionality.

During the conference, Steelcase unveiled its latest in-

novation - the Karman® Executive High-Back Chair. This cutting-edge product epitomizes Steelcase's commitment to combining ergonomic excellence with aesthetic sophistication, designed to meet the highest standards of comfort and functionality for modern executives. Tirthankar Basu, India Managing Director of Steelcase, expressed his enthusiasm about the new product, stating, "We are excited to introduce the Karman® High Back chair to our customers in India. This latest innovation embodies our dedication to creating ergonomic and stylish solutions that meet the evolving needs of modern workplaces. With its unique patented hybrid seat and advanced comfort delivered by the proprietary new mesh material Intermix®, the Karman® chair combines comfort with aesthetic design, ensuring that all professionals can work comfortably throughout their day."

The year 2024 marks a turning point for Steelcase as

it pledges to serve as both a partner and a catalyst in the advancement of design professionals and design thinking practices in India. As part of its key initiatives, Steelcase is intensifying its local collaboration efforts, significantly broadening its array of partner brands to incorporate Indian-made enhancements. This includes artisanal rugs, plush sofas, and accent pieces procured from premium companies like Stanley Lifestyles. A standout new addition to the Steelcase SimplyIndia collection will be accent pieces from Stanley Lifestyles, renowned for its refined craftsmanship and designs inspired by Indian culture. These meticulously selected items blend seamlessly with the existing product range, enriching the overall design portfolio and offering customers an eclectic mix of high-quality, locally influenced options.

Samantha Giam, Vice President of Marketing for Asia Pacific, announced during the conference a special collaboration with CEPT University, set to offer unique opportunities for emerging talents in India. This collaboration aims to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and industry requirements, equipping students with the skills and experiences needed to excel in the field of design and architecture. Additionally, this initiative leverages Indian design talent, enabling them to create products for their own market using local insights.

Rajinikanth congratulates PM Modi, MK Stalin, Chandrababu Naidu on poll results



Superstar Rajinikanth on Wednesday congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his third term in office as the Prime Minister of India after the announcement of Lok Sabha election results on Tuesday.

He also congratulated Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin for the DMK's performance in the elections, besides congratulating Chandrababu Naidu for the TDP sweeping the Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh.

Rajinikanth, who will be next seen in 'Vettaian', said in a post on X: "My Hearty Congratulations to my dear friends .. Honourable Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu M.K Stalin @mkstalin ...and Shri Chandrababu Naidu Garu @ncbn I extend my hearty congratulations to NDA #nda and most respected dear Narendra Modiji @narendramodi."

While Naidu's Telugu Desam Party (TDP) won 135 seats to storm to power in the 175-member Andhra Pradesh Assembly, Stalin's DMK won 22 out of the 39 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu.

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