

REGION **2**



PUNJAB CONG STAGED A STRONG PROTEST AGAINST THE BJP GOVT OVER THE NEET SCAM

CORPORATES & INDUSTRY **5**



INDIA BECOMES THIRD-LARGEST DOMESTIC AIRLINE MARKET

POTPOURRI **8**



KHUSHI KAPOOR REVEALS HER 'OPENING MOVE' TO APPROACH SOMEONE FOR A DATE

CM assesses ongoing flood protection works along with river Ghaggar

SANGRUR: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann visited the flood prone areas along with the Ghaggar river to take stock of the preparations to check flood at the ground level.

The Chief Minister accompanied by the top officers of the state government visited the areas along with Ghaggar river to check the arrangements being made to avert floods. He said that it was a deviation from the earlier times when the head of the state visited the areas once they were flooded. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the earlier leaders also used these opportunities shamelessly for photo ops thereby hardly giving any relief to the people.

However, the Chief Minister said that in sharp contrast to it he has visited the flood



prone areas to assess the ongoing work to avert floods. He said that this will ensure that the work for protection from floods is done effectively and the no loss of life and property is caused to people. Bhagwant

Singh Mann said that his government has been given whopping mandate by the people of the state to serve them and he is leaving no stone unturned for it. Interacting with the people

Chief Minister also said that in order to avert floods in the state the Punjab government has taken historic initiative to design the discharge of Choers/Torrents/Rivers as per 100 years flood discharge and accordingly notifying the flood plains of the Rivers and drains/choes under The

Northern India Canal and Drainage Act. He said that likewise Strengthening of main Embankments of rivers and Restriction of works on advance bundh has also been ensured. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that for emergency response system data base of people such as bag suppliers, wire binders, earth moving equipment's, tractor trolley owners, divers and local volunteers has been compiled for tackling emergency situation.

India's net direct tax collections surge by 21 pc in FY25



NEWDELHI: India's net direct tax collections have shot up by a robust 20.99 per cent for the financial year 2024-25 as of June 17 to Rs 4, 62, 664 crore, compared to Rs 3, 82, 414 crore in the same period of the preceding fiscal, according to the provisional figures released by the Finance Ministry on Tuesday.

The net direct tax collec-

tion includes Corporation Tax (CIT) at Rs 1, 80, 949 crore (net of refund) and Personal Income Tax (PIT), including Securities Transaction Tax (STT), at Rs 2, 81, 013 crore (net of refund).

The provisional figures of gross collection of direct taxes (before adjusting for refunds) for the Financial Year 2024-25 stand at Rs 5, 15, 986 crore compared to Rs 4, 22, 295

crore in the corresponding period of the preceding financial year, showing a growth of 22.19 per cent over the collections of FY 2023-24.

Total advance tax collections for the financial year 2024-25, as of June 17, stand at Rs 1, 48, 823 crore, compared to the corresponding figures of Rs 1, 16, 875 crore for the same period of the preceding fiscal, showing a growth of 27.34 per cent.

The Advance Tax collection comprises Corporation Tax at Rs 1, 14, 353 crore and Personal Income Tax at Rs 34, 470 crore.

Refunds amounting to Rs 53, 322 crore have also been issued in the FY 2024-25 till June 17, which are 33.70 per cent higher than refunds issued during the same period in the preceding year, according to the figures released by the Finance Ministry.

Action slowed unsecured loan growth: RBI chief



MUMBAI: RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on June 20 said not acting on unsecured lending could have created a "bigger problem", and RBI's actions on such practices have had the desired impact of slowing down growth in the riskier segment.

Addressing an international conference on financial resilience at the RBI's College of Supervisors here, Das said restrictions on unsecured lending were the result of a view that there could be a potential problem in the credit market because of growth in unsecured lending.

SGPC President strongly condemns extension of NSA on Bhai Amritpal Singh



JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) President Harjinder Singh Dhani has condemned the one year extension of National Security Act (NSA) imposed on Amritpal Singh elected as Member Parliament (MP) from Khadoor Sahib constituency and other Sikhs, detained in Assam's Dibrugarh Central Jail.

Dhani said that after the recent Lok Sabha elections, Bhai Amritpal Singh was elected as MP from Khadoor Sahib Parliamentary Constituency

by the people of Punjab by casting a large number of votes to him. But the state government led by the Aam Aadmi Party and the Centre government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party have taken this extremely reprehensible action of extending NSA on Amritpal Singh, which is not appropriate in view of human rights and it disregards the sentiments of the people of Punjab.

The SGPC President said that no such crime has been committed by these youths, that they should be locked up in jails thousands of kilometers away from the state after being termed as anti-national. He asked Punjab and Centre Governments to revoke the NSA imposed on the youths as detained in Dibrugarh Jail and release them.

PM Modi's choice of Kashmir as Yoga Day venue is symbolic & assertive

SRINAGAR: The decision by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to hold the 10th International Day of Yoga in J&K's Srinagar city is both symbolic and assertive.

PM Modi chose to join the Yoga participants in Srinagar in the aftermath of a series of terror attacks in the Jammu division, including the one on innocent pilgrims in the Reasi district. Nine pilgrims were killed and 44 injured in the Reasi terror attack on June 9 when terrorists first killed the driver of the bus and then kept firing at the overturned bus for 20 minutes to ensure that no pilgrim survived the cowardly attack. The terror attack in Reasi and Kathua district followed the large participation of the people especially from the Valley in the Lok Sabha polls.

As the PM said the terror attacks were "the last ditch efforts of the enemies of Kashmir's progress, India would teach them a befitting lesson". PM Modi chose Srinagar as



the venue for the Yoga Day celebrations because he knew that the focus of the world would be on this event. Yoga has caught the imagination of the world in such a large manner that has perhaps not been matched by any other event before.

A total of 177 countries at the UN supported the Indian resolution on Yoga which was passed in a record time of 90 days. Never before in the history of the UN has any other

resolved restoration of statehood to the UT saying that J&K would soon touch new heights of progress and prosperity with its statehood back. This was a clear and loud message to the enemies of democracy in J&K. The country is determined to restore complete democracy in J&K and return political power to the elected members of the Legislative Assembly.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has already issued the primary notification asking the political parties to apply for election symbols. In all likelihood, Assembly elections would be held in J&K before the deadline of September 30 set by the Supreme Court. PM Modi also spoke about the security situation when he said that the Centre is determined to eradicate terrorism at all costs from the soil of J&K.

He referred to two security review meetings taken by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in this regard.

resolution was passed in such a record time. It was under this backdrop that PM Modi decided to have the world's attention focused on Kashmir by his presence in Srinagar.

Undeterred by the terror attacks, PM Modi made the big announcement that preparations for the Assembly elections are already underway and that the people of J&K would soon have an Assembly of elected representatives. He also as-

sured restoration of statehood to the UT saying that J&K would soon touch new heights of progress and prosperity with its statehood back. This was a clear and loud message to the enemies of democracy in J&K. The country is determined to restore complete democracy in J&K and return political power to the elected members of the Legislative Assembly.

FM Nirmala Sitharaman holds pre-Budget meeting with India Inc.



NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday chaired the third pre-budget consultation with industry leaders and associations in connection with the forthcoming General Budget 2024-25 here on Thursday.

The pre-budget consultation meeting was also attended by Union Minister of State for Finance, Pankaj Chaudhary, Finance Secretary, and Secretary, Department of Expenditure; Secretaries of Departments of Economic Affairs, DPIIT, Ministry of Heavy Industry and Ministry of MSME as well as the government's Chief Economic Adviser.

Apex business chamber, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has in its wish list for the Union Budget 2024-2025 urged the government to maintain corporate tax rates at current levels to provide tax certainty for businesses.

CII is also seeking rationalisation of Angel Tax by removing Section 56(2)(viib) in order to further nurture innovation & startups. According to the industry chamber, the scrapping of this section would "greatly aid in capital formation" for the startup sector.

Under Section 56(2)(viib) of the Income Tax Act, for a startup to become eligible for angel tax exemption must meet certain conditions which industry claims are cumbersome and come in the way of attracting more investments.

As far as indirect taxation is concerned, CII has in its proposals sought the removal of the restriction to avail ITC (input tax

credit) "to ensure seamless flow of credit to businesses where the property being constructed is being used for further providing an output service (such as renting, etc.)"

CII has also sought the rationalisation and simplification of the Capital gains tax rate structure.

Besides, the apex business chamber is seeking the rationalisation of stamp duty on land and phasing out the cross-subsidy on power rates to "reduce the cost of doing business".

CII has also suggested that captive power plants (CPPS) should be brought at par with the power sector for coal pricing, allocation, and transportation.

It is also seeking a phasing out cross-subsidisation of railway passenger fares by freight to cut logistics costs for businesses.

In the pre-budget consultation meeting with the Finance Minister on Thursday, Subhrakant Panda, Immediate Past President, highlighted the importance of simplification of the tax system. He said: "The Union Budget should continue the process of simplification and rationalisation of taxes for enhancing ease of doing business. This will also reduce tax related litigations and improve efficiency in the taxation system."

He also emphasised the need to continue supporting the growth momentum by energising demand, laying thrust on infrastructure development, taking further measures to rein in food inflation, supporting MSMEs and prioritising innovation, and research & development in the country.

Akali Dal Badal opposes extension of NSA against Amritpal Singh



CHANDIGARH: Opposing the extension of the National Security Act (NSA) imposed against newly-elected Amritpal Singh, Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) President, Sukhbir Badal, on Thursday lashed out at Punjab Chief Minister, Bhagwant Mann, and accused him of "dancing to Delhi's tunes on Sikh and Punjab issues."

"The Punjab government's records clearly show the decision to extend NSA in this case is Bhagwant Mann's. His anti-Punjab and anti-Sikh face stands fully exposed now," Badal said in a statement here.

He emphasised that the party "is fully committed to the atmosphere of peace and communal harmony in the state and will continue to lead efforts to preserve it. There can be no progress and prosperity without peace and communal harmony and our party will not flinch from its responsibility.

"At the same time, we are equally firmly opposed to repressive black laws like the

NSA and the UAPA that are unacceptable."

"Going beyond and above his party's political and ideological differences with Amritpal Singh," Badal said the decision to extend NSA in this case was a "clear violation of the Constitution and of basic human rights and civil liberties."

The Akali chief further said, "I have already clarified that our party is guided by the sacred principles taught to us by the great Guru Sahiban and accordingly we oppose repression and injustice even against our opponents. "SAD goes beyond considerations of political gain or loss while pursuing these principles. "We said it in our manifesto and also in our resolutions that for the party, principles are above politics."

Badal said differences of ideology with Amritpal Singh apart, "we will oppose repression and injustice against him or against anyone else and we don't care what political cost we have to pay for this."

Modi bothered about his own survival, not about students says Rahul Gandhi

Alleges, NEET, NET scam outcome of institutional capture

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi today said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was psychologically broken and his concern was the survival of his government and not the future of lakhs of students suffering because of the paper leaks.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here today, Gandhi announced that the opposition will not let the government off the hook on this crucial matter and the responsibility will have to be fixed and the guilty punished.

Taking a dig at Prime Minister Modi, he said, if he could order



and stop the war in Gaza and Ukraine, as was claimed by his supporters, why cannot he stop the paper leaks. He alleged that the repeated and regular paper leaks were the result of the institutional capture by the BJP and its parental organization. He said the entire education system had been destroyed by the BJP by inducting people, not based on merit, but on their ideological affiliations. "Till it is not reversed, it will continue", he said, while observing it was an "anti-national activity" and was

badly hitting the students.

The Congress leader said it started with Vyapam in Madhya Pradesh, the ideological laboratory of the BJP and spread across the country. He said, MP was the epicenter from where it started and then spread to BJP ruled Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh.

Replying to a question, he said, this was a national crisis and the Modi government was incapable of handling it. Gandhi said, Modi government was crippled and he was only concerned about how to save his own government by appointing his own person as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the paper leaks were not his concern. "PM is crippled right now, the Prime Minister's main agenda is the speaker. So, he is not bothered about NEET. That is where his mind is", he remarked.

Govt issues draft guidelines to curb unwanted business calls, messages



NEW DELHI: The Consumer Affairs Ministry on June 20 sought public comments until July 21 on draft guidelines to curb unsolicited and unwanted business communications like promotional calls and text messages.

The guidelines — prepared after consultations with stakeholders, including telecom firms and regulators — define "business communication" as any communication related to goods or services like promotional and service messages but excludes personal communication.

IMD forecasts light rain for northern states, heavy rain for south

NEWDELHI: A Western Disturbance, seen as a cyclonic circulation over Himachal Pradesh and its neighbourhood and an induced cyclonic circulation over Uttar Pradesh, is likely to result in light to moderate rainfall in Delhi - which had already received some showers, Haryana, Punjab, and Chandigarh on Friday and Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan during the next 5 days, and expected to bring respite to the northern states that have been reeling a scorching heat wave, the IMD said.

Rains have also been forecast for Jammu-Kashmir-Ladakh-Gilgit-Baltistan-Muzaffarabad

and Himachal Pradesh. The IMD has forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall over Kerala, coastal and south interior Karnataka, and the Konkan-Goa region during the next 5 days as the Southwest Monsoon picks up momentum.

It also said a trough at mean sea level runs off Karnataka and Kerala coasts and lower-level winds are likely to strengthen on the west coast during the next 3 days. Under its influence, scattered to fairly widespread light to moderate rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning is likely over Gujarat, Konkan and Goa, central Maharashtra



and Marathwada during the next 5 days. Fairly widespread to widespread light to moderate rainfall, accompanied by thunderstorms, lightning, and

gusty winds (30-40 kmph), is likely over Karnataka, Kerala, Mahe, and Lakshadweep, and isolated to scattered light to moderate rainfall over coastal

Andhra Pradesh and Yanam, Rayalaseema, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, and Karaikal during next 5 days.

A cyclonic circulation lies over Vidarbha and its neighbourhood in the lower tropospheric levels. Under its influence, fairly widespread to widespread rainfall with thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds (40-50 kmph) is very likely over Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, and Chhattisgarh during the next 5 days.

Isolated heavy rainfall is very likely over Vidarbha during June 21-23, and Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh on June 21-22. The IMD said a cyclonic cir-

ulation lies over northeast Assam and its neighbourhood which is likely to result in widespread light to moderate rainfall, accompanied by thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds (30-40) kmph) over the northeastern states and sub-Himalayan West Bengal during the next 5 days.

A cyclonic circulation lies over Bihar and adjoining east Uttar Pradesh which is likely to result in fairly widespread light to moderate rainfall, accompanied by thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds (30-40 kmph) over Gangetic West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andaman & Nicobar Islands during next 5 days.

Punjab Cong staged a strong protest against the BJP govt over the NEET scam

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee (PPCC) President Amarinder Singh Raja Warring spearheaded a significant protest today against the incumbent Central BJP Government in light of the recent NEET examination scam and the abrupt cancellation of the UGC-NET examination. The protest, held outside Punjab Congress Bhawan in Chandigarh, witnessed a large turnout, with demonstrators showing solidarity against the incompetency of the BJP government.



been undermined. This government has played with their future," Warring stated emphatically.

Addressing the gathering, PCC Chief Amarinder Singh Raja Warring lambasted the BJP government for its failure to protect the interests of the youth. "The future of our youth is being jeopardized due to the incompetency of the BJP government. The hard work of students preparing for years for the NEET examination, an examination crucial for their future, has

ment's handling of the education system.

"We must continue our fight because this issue concerns not only the students who took the NEET examination but also the entire nation's future. A generation of future doctors has suffered due to a scam that benefitted a few while the rest were left to suffer. This government has failed the nation repeatedly, be it by undermining democracy, neglecting farmers, stifling media freedom, or now,

ruining the future of our youth," Warring declared.

Warring pointed out the alarming frequency of examination leaks under the BJP government, citing 41 different examinations compromised to date. "Is this the integrity of our education system? An inquiry is essential as the dreams of countless youths have been shattered. We will always fight for the betterment of the nation and Punjab, raising our voices until justice is served," he asserted.

The protest, led by Punjab Congress Chief Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, proceeded towards the BJP Punjab Headquarters but was halted by the police, resulting in the detention of the peaceful protesters.

"The police halted our peaceful demonstration and detained all those in attendance. However, the voice of the people cannot be silenced by force. Punjab Congress will continue to champion the

rights of the people of Punjab and the nation. These roadblocks will not deter us; we will persist in our protests against the BJP's incompetency until justice is served to our youth," Warring affirmed.

The protest saw the participation of prominent leaders including Working President Bharat Bhushan Ashu ji, former Speaker and Chairman Campaign Committee Rana KP Ji, MP Patiala Dr. Dharamvir Gandhi Ji, MLA Tripath Rajinder Bajwa Ji, former Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu ji, former MLA Lakhvir Singh Lakha ji, former MLA Madanlal Jalalpur Ji, former MLA Navtej Singh Cheema Ji, former MLA Sukhpal Bhullar Ji, former MLA Pritam Singh Kotbhai Ji, Sr. Simarjeet Singh Bains Ji, President Punjab Mahila Congress Gursharan Kaur Randhawa Ji, and NSUI Punjab President Ishpreet Singh Sidhu Ji along with other senior Punjab Congress leaders.

Punjab govt reopens state's only silk seed grainage center in Dalhousie, which was closed for 15 years

DALHOUSIE: Punjab's only sericulture silk seed grainage center in Dalhousie (Himachal Pradesh), which had been closed for the past 15 years, has been reopened with the concerted efforts of Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann led Punjab government.

Horticulture Minister Chetan Singh Jouramajra today visited the government sericulture silk seed grainage center, reviewed the site and issued necessary instructions to the officials to start the operations.

The Horticulture Minister stated, "previous dispensations had neglected this valuable asset of the state of Punjab, but Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann has decided to reopen this center", mentioning that an initial installment of Rs.14 lakh has been approved for this center, which



will enable the preparation of silk seed grains starting in September and to be provided to the farmers at affordable prices.

Jouramajra informed that Dalhousie's environment is highly suitable for silk seed production and the reopening of this center will directly benefit about 1500 farmers of Punjab's Kandi area. He added that farmers of the districts of Gurdaspur, Pathankot, Hoshiarpur and Ropar will ben-

efit from this center.

The Cabinet Minister noted that previously, the department provided silk seeds to silkworm rearers from Central Silk Board centers, but with the reopening of this silk seed center in Dalhousie, the Punjab government will be able to produce its own silk seeds, which will further enable to provide the silk seeds to silkworm rearers at reduced transportation costs.

Congress gears up for VS polls in Haryana, claims 70+ seats in assembly polls

PARVESH HANDA Chandigarh

Upbeat after its performance in the recent Lok Sabha polls in Haryana, the Congress has stepped up its efforts to take on the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in the State, where Assembly elections are due

after a few months this year. The Congress has started searching for winning candidates in all 90 Vidhan Sabha constituencies, also kicked off its campaign to reach out to people to keep the momentum going in the run-up to the Assembly polls. HPCC president Ch. Uday Bhan along with former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Karnal Lok Sabha candidate Divyanshu Budhiraja addressed a 'Karyakarta Sammelan' in Karnal. The event that was also organised in Kurukshetra, and will also be held in Sonapat and Panipat on Friday has started campaigning for the Vidhan Sabha elections, likely to be held in October.

FD gives approval for implementation of the sixth pay commission on employees of Punjab aided institutions, says Cheema

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Finance Minister Advocate Harpal Singh Cheema on Thursday said that the Finance Department has given its in-principal approval regarding the implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission on the employees of aided institutions of the state.

Revealing this in a press communiqué issued here, Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said that this decision would benefit the employees of aided schools and colleges under the



Departments of School Education, Technical Education & Industrial Training, non-teaching staff of these institutes under the Higher Education department, and retirees of aided schools. "The concerned Administrative Departments have been directed

to issue notification for implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission on these employees of aided institutions and retirees of the aided schools", he added.

The Administrative Departments will examine the financial statements of the last three years of all the aided schools and colleges, so as to correctly assess the deficit analysis and to send a detailed proposal giving financial implications. "After considering the Administrative Departments' proposal, the Finance Department will give financial sanction to these institutions", said the Finance Minister.

Cheema emphasized the Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann led Punjab Government's commitment to improving education in the state.

"The education sector will not face any dearth of funds," said the Finance Minister, adding, "We've witnessed a revolution in education these past two years, and we'll continue taking steps to ensure quality education for future generations."

Out of 19702 ponds in Haryana over 3500 have lost existence

PARVESH HANDA Chandigarh

According to a recent report, out of the total number of 19702 ponds in Haryana state more than 3500 ponds have already lost their existence due to utter neglect by the government. A ray of hope is seen with 'Amrit Sarovar Yozna' introduced by the ruling state government. A preliminary information reveals that nearly 2598 ponds across the state have already been encroached where either unauthorized buildings have been constructed or unrecognised residential colonies have been developed and few cases are also under trial in the courts. According to a recent survey, more than 2278 ponds in Haryana state have gone dry, 11839 ponds are having contaminated water declared unfit for use and water in few ponds have even been declared harmful for the animals.

According to the official record as regard encroached ponds in the state include 393 ponds in Karnal district, 332 ponds in Kaithal district, 297 ponds in Jind district, 277 ponds in Mahendergarh district, 205 ponds in Fatehabad



district, 196 ponds in Hisar district, 160 ponds each in Rohtak and Faridabad districts and 142 ponds in Bhiwani district.

According to information collected from few important districts in the state, 739 ponds in 419 villages in Kurukshetra district have contaminated water, of these 311 ponds have water strictly declared unfit for use, which also include 216 ponds having water even harmful for the animals. There were 40 to 50 ponds situated inside old Rohtak town years ago where one can now find a number of residential colonies in the area over such encroached ponds. Similarly, out of the total number of nearly

900 ponds in Sirsa district as many as 160 ponds have completely disappeared, nearly 100 ponds have gone completely dry and anti-social elements have started encroachments in nearly 520 ponds. The residents of Sirsa also sent complaints to the District Development & Panchayat Officer regarding encroachments over ponds, but to no result except notices were sent to the encroachers.

A recent survey reveals that more than 1050 ponds situated in rural areas in Haryana state have disappeared or have no water in these ponds since the past few years, now awaiting action under 'Amrit Sarovar Yozna' to have life once again.

Police teams recover 4.10kg heroin, two pistols, Rs 2.07-lac and 7 vehicles

JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

Commissionerate Police in a 10-day long operation has busted a trans-border illegal arms and narco-terrorism hawala racket with the arrest of eight accused persons including a Kingpin identified as Ranjit Singh alias Kaka, said Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Gaurav Yadav in statement here on Thursday.

Apart from Kingpin, other arrested persons have been identified as Rajinder alias Raja, Abhishek alias Abhi, Vishal alias Shalu, Lovepreet alias Kalu, Gurbhej alias Bheja, Gurjant and Jaspal, all residents of Gharinda in Amritsar.

DGP Gaurav Yadav said that police teams have also recovered 4.10kg heroin, two pistols—Pakistan-made Zigana pistol and .32 bore pistol—along with 45 live cartridges and Rs 2.07 lakh drug money from their possession, besides impounding their seven vehicles bought with drug money. The recovered



vehicles include Hyundai Verna, Mahindra Thar, Hyundai i20, Maruti Swift Dzire, Maruti Zen, Activa scooter and Splendor motorcycle.

The DGP said that the operation is still ongoing to nab other entities with cross-border linkages and Hawala involvement.

The development came after meticulous investigations of backward and forward linkages carried out by the Amritsar Commissionerate Police into the arrest of a local drug peddler identified as Rajinder alias Raja (22) of Gharinda in Amritsar, who was arrested with 500 grams heroin, Rs 40,000 drug money, Verna

car and a pistol. Accused Ranjinder Raja was also wanted by the Amritsar Rural Police in an attempt to murder case.

Sharing more details, Commissioner of Police (CP) Amritsar Ranjit Singh Dhillon said that during investigation, carried out by team of CIA 1 led by Insp Amandeep Singh and Police Station Islamabad under the supervision of ADCP Zone 1 Dr Darpan Ahluwalia and ADCP Detective Navjot Singh Sandhu, into the arrest of Rajinder Raja, backward linkage was traced to kingpin Ranjit Singh alias Kaka.

He said that after the meticulous follow-up of financial trail and technical investigations, Police teams have successfully arrested Kingpin Ranjit Kaka and other accused persons, with further recovery of smuggled heroin, firearms and live cartridges.

9,995 PG Teacher posts vacant in 2,300 schools across Haryana, education should not be commercialised: Selja

PARVESH HANDA

Former Union Minister Kumari Selja recently elected as MP from Sirsa while addressing media persons here stated that the BJP government was privatising education as such thousands of teaching positions were vacant in government schools across the state, but the state government was avoiding to fill up these vacancies thus promoting private schools in the state, which was becoming a major concern, especially for the economically weaker sections as their

children primarily attended government schools and the government was keeping these children deprived of education to push them further behind.

Selja said that 9,995 PGT positions are vacant in 2,300 schools in Haryana and the large number of vacancies indicate that the education system in government schools had become weak due to this, as such this disruption in education was affecting the students in government schools. She claimed that this showed a clear conspiracy by the ruling BJP government to keep



the needy children away from education. Selja added that both education and healthcare were essential services, but the BJP government failed to provide quality services in

education and health sectors.

Selja also highlighted that the situation was similar in higher education. She accused the BJP government for bring-

Indian agencies responsible for masterminding Nijjar's killings, says Jathedar Akal Takhat

AMRITSAR: The Panthic Samagam was held here on the occasion of the first death anniversary of Shaheed Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar who was killed on 18-06-2023 on Canadian soil.

The samagam was organized by Dal Khalsa under the leadership of Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh of Akal Takht Sahib.

Flanked by SGPC president Harjinder Singh Dhami, the Jathedar in his address to the gathering termed Nijjar as shaheed (martyr) of Sikh quam.

He said Canadian PM Justin Trudeau has responsibly pointed finger towards the Indian intelligence agencies for masterminding the assassination of Nijjar.

He said countless martyrs have sacrificed their lives for the sake of the Sikh cause. They all have fallen to the bullets of the enemy which is anti-Sikh and anti-Panth. Jathedar took serious note of transnational killings and urged the Sikh masses to be



alert and protect the lives of youth who are struggling for the cause. He talked about the establishment of quami ghar (Sikh homeland).

Jathedar and SGPC president presented the siropa to the family members of Bhai Nijjar that lives in Canada. The siropa was received by organizers of the event on the family's behalf.

Anil Vij reacts on Kiran Choudhary's entry in BJP, says SRK group has broken up

Kanwar Pal Singh, another party senior leader read out the resolution. "The forthright reporting by foreign media outlets especially CBC, ABC, Al Jazeera at the international level in the case of Bhai Nijjar has punctured the hollow claims of the Indian Foreign Minister's statement that "transnational operations are not our policy", said Kanwar Pal.

He further said with the extradition of Indian agent Nikhil Gupta to America, it is now hoped that more secrets of target killings being engineered and authorized by the Indian external agencies will come into the open.

A resolution adopted during the gathering attended by hundreds of Sikhs stated that presently, the Sikhs who adhere to the ideology of Khalistan are on the target of the Indian state and the state is spending all its resources to carry out their target killings on foreign soil.

Former Home Minister of Haryana, Anil Vij reacted today to Kiran Choudhary joining the BJP while speaking to media persons. He said, "This means the SRK group has broken up. This is very good news. If she has joined the BJP, it's even better", he added. Notably, Anil Vij was surprised upon hearing the news of Kiran Choudhary's resignation. In a surprised tone, Vij said, "Kiran Choudhary has left Congress? Amid the political upheaval in Haryana, senior Congress leader and MLA Kiran Choudhary, along with her daughter Shruti Choudhary has bid farewell to the Congress party."



SATISH HANDA Chandigarh

Haryana Guv Bandaru Dattatreya honours Vishvas Foundation

PARVESH HANDA Ambala

Blood donation is called Mahadan and on the occasion of Blood Donor Day, a State Level blood donor felicitation ceremony was organized by the Haryana Red Cross Society in Ambala. In which His Excellency the Governor and Chief Indian Red Cross Committee Bandaru Dattatreya participated. During this former Home Minister of Haryana Anil Vij, Vice President of Haryana State Branch Chandigarh Sushma Gupta, General Secretary Mukesh Aggarwal and Secretary of District Red Cross Society Panchkula Savita



Aggarwal were also present. In this program women blood donors and service institutions were invited and honored for their great donation.

President of Vishvas Foundation, Sadhvi Neelima Vishwas said that with the blessings

of Gurudev Shri Swami Vishwas Ji, in the program of this felicitation ceremony, Vishvas Foundation was honored by His Excellency the Governor with a memento and appreciation letter for continuously organizing blood donation camps in the Tricity i.e. Chandigarh, Panchkula & Mohali. This honor was received jointly by Joint Secretary Rishi Saral Vishwas and Sandeep Parmar Romi on behalf of Vishvas Foundation.

Every Indian soldier is in a way a Yogi, says Rajnath Singh

NEW DELHI: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh led the Armed Forces in celebrating the 10th International Day of Yoga on Friday, and said Indian soldiers are like Yogis.

He performed various Yoga asanas and breathing exercises with soldiers at 1 Corps in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. Chief of the Army Staff General Manoj Pande along with 600 people, including senior officers, Agniveers, families and children attended the event.

The Defence Minister said that the day is a matter of pride for the nation as the world is acknowledging and adopting this great cultural heritage of India with zeal. He credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for taking Yoga to the world.

On this year's Yoga Day theme -- 'Yoga for Self and

Society' -- Rajnath Singh said 'Yoga' and 'Dhyan' are ancient Indian practices which connect a person with oneself, family and society.

"Yoga and Dhyan are part of our culture, which has always been 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramaya', that is, we pray for everyone's happiness and good health. We pray for the welfare of the world. This is the speciality of our civilization. We believe in collaboration rather than a clash of civilizations," he added.

Highlighting the benefits of this centuries-old practice, Rajnath Singh said that Yoga strengthens physical fitness, mental calmness and spiritual well-being. It helps in harnessing the aggressive capabilities which is important for the soldiers for the security of the



country, he added.

Rajnath Singh said, "Every Indian soldier is, in a way, a Yogi. The world has been witness to the physical and mental fitness of our soldiers many times. Not only on the borders, their service to the nation during national calamities is a testament to their strong physical and mental health. The way they

avoid unnecessary aggression in adverse circumstances and stand up aggressively to protect the integrity and sovereignty of the country, whenever needed, reinforces their identity of a Yogi."

He exhorted the soldiers to continue practising Yoga daily as it unites the body and mind while acting as a stepping stone

to achieve spiritual consciousness.

The Defence Minister pointed out that despite the availability of various resources, which provide comfort, people are unhappy, and suffering from stress as well as psychological and physical pressures.

He said, "Today, people are suffering from loneliness as they get separated from their families. There are several family dispute cases pending in court. Social media is creating psychological pressure and self-doubt among youth, leading to anxiety and depression. The latest facilities are essential as they are part of economic development, but they are limiting physical activities and increasing problems like diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity. These problems can be dealt with Yoga."

NCC cadets perform Yoga at iconic sites across country



NEW DELHI: Nearly eight lakh National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets on Friday performed Yoga at several schools, colleges and iconic sites such as Sun Temple in Odisha's Konark, Red Fort in Delhi, Dal Lake in Srinagar, and Sabarmati Riverfront in Gujarat's Ahmedabad among others, to observe the International Yoga Day.

The Defence Ministry in a statement said that Chief of the Army Staff-designate Lt Gen Upenendra Dwivedi, who is currently Vice Chief of the Army Staff, led the celebrations at an event organised by the Indian Army Headquarters in Delhi. He performed asanas with DG NCC Lt Gen Gurbirpal Singh, other senior officers and about 250 NCC cadets. Addressing the cadets, the DG NCC extolled the benefits of yoga and urged them to incorporate the practice in their daily routines to sustain physical and mental health.

Learning from the voting rate in the last election; Modi's big 'surprise gift' for the 'food grower', crop's prices will increase

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi once again took a big decision for the country's 'food grower, Annadata' and farmers by forming the government for the third time at the Centre. After declaring the results of the Lok Sabha elections, the central government decided to increase the minimum support price (MSP) of 14 crops at once in a cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

It should be noted that the farmers of North India have been demanding to increase this support price for a long time. They even went on the road to protest to fulfill this demand. Even at the beginning of this year, the national politics was once again agitated by the peasant revolt. Farmers staged sit-in protests at several borders of Delhi. But no decision has been taken in this regard till now by the BJP government. As a result, the results of the BJP in these



states are also bad this year, according to experts.

The cabinet members hold a special meeting under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi.

After that, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnab said, "The Prime Minister has repeatedly given priority to farmers. After the formation of the government for the third time, the first decision has also been taken for the farmers. An important decision has been taken for the betterment of farmers in the cabinet meeting on this day. Kharif crop season has started. For that, the Cabinet has decided to increase the minimum support price of

14 grains. It is known that after this government decision, the minimum support price (MSP) of paddy has been increased to Rs.117 per quintal in the coming days. These 14 grains also include cotton, millet, sorghum means jowar, bajra, ragi, moongdal, tur dal, or urad dal. Subsidiary prices of all these crops are also going to increase in the coming days. It is known that as a result of this action of the central

government, the 'food growers' farmers of our country will gain 35 thousand crore rupees. Incidentally, after coming to power for the third time after the election, Narendra Modi gave a great gift to the 'Annadata'. On the first day after taking the oath, he went to his office in South Block and signed the Kishan Nidhi file. 20 thousand crores allocated through this scheme will be distributed among 9.3 crore farmers.

RSS, Bajrang Dal should join protests against irregularities in NEET, NET: Digvijaya Singh



BHOPAL: Former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh said on Friday that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bajrang Dal should also come forward and join the protest against the alleged irregularities and paper leaks during the conduct of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) and the National Eligibility Test (NET). Addressing a gathering of party workers assembled here to protest against the alleged paper leaks, the veteran Congress leader also said that like the RSS workers, those agitating against the irregularities in NEET should also reach out to the people with their messages. "RSS workers would never hit the streets to face lathi-charge by the police. Instead, they would go from door to door and meet the people," Singh said. Speaking on the alleged discrepancies in the NEET and NET, Singh demanded justice for the affected students and strict action against those involved in the alleged nexus of paper leaks. Terming the alleged irregularities in the examinations as "anti-national activities", Singh said the RSS and the Bajrang Dal should also come forward in the interest of the people.

Akhilesh Yadav for court-monitored probe in paper leak

LUCKNOW: Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav has demanded a court-monitored probe to unmask those behind paper leaks even if it involves those who enjoy the patronage of people in government. Lashing out at the Union government over the cancellation of the UGC-NET exam following an alleged paper leak, he said that the exam mafia was making a mockery of students' future.

"Such frequent paper leaks raise concerns if it were a part of a deeper conspiracy to destabilise India's human resource and cause law and order situation. A court-monitored probe



was a must to unravel the truth," he added.

He also said, "In February, the police recruitment examination paper was leaked and thereafter that of the review officer and assistant review officer (RO/ARO). The agencies then made a mockery of the NEET. Now the UGC-NET exam has been cancelled after

it was leaked." He added that irregularities in the NEET exam will lead to a situation where honest and dedicated students will not be able to clear the exams on their

merit and add to the shortage of qualified and efficient doctors.

Akhilesh said: "If undeserving individuals make it through using unfair means, ultimately it will reflect poorly on the quality of medical treatment in the days to come. The situation gets more concerning since the exam is held at the national level."

"Similarly, cancellation of the UGC-NET exam will cause delay in making available qualified teachers. Shortage of teachers will directly and indirectly impact the development of the country which in turn will prove detrimental to the nation," he added.

BSF recovers two China-made Pak drones in Punjab

The Border Security Force (BSF) said on Thursday that in extensive search operations based on specific inputs, two China-made Pakistani drones were recovered in Punjab.

In the first incident, BSF troops recovered a drone from Rattankhriya village in Amritsar district. In the second incident, troops and Punjab Police recovered a drone from Dal village in Taran Taran district.

Both drones are Chinese-made DJI Mavic 3 Classic models.

The reliable information and swift action of BSF troops thwarted yet another attempt at drone intrusion in Punjab from across the border, said the BSF.

The BSF, responsible for safeguarding the 553-km long varied, tough and challenging India-Pakistan border in



Punjab, said that in 2023 it detected and shot down 107 drones and seized 442.395 kg of heroin.

Last year, the BSF troops of the Punjab Frontier handed over 12 Pakistani nationals, who had inadvertently crossed the International Border, to Pakistan Rangers.

Braving innumerable challenges, including inclement weather conditions and the spate of smuggling, BSF men are guarding borders around the clock with unflinching dedication.

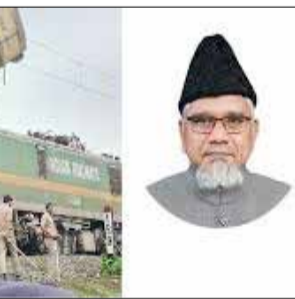
JH demands high-level inquiry into Kanchanjunga Express train accident



KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH) has demanded a high-level inquiry into the Kanchanjunga Express train accident and offered condolences to the bereaved families.

In a media statement, JIH Vice-President Prof. Salim Engineer said, "We are deeply saddened to hear about the tragic train accident near West Bengal's New Jalpaiguri railway station. We offer our sincere condolences, pray for the families of the victims, and wish a speedy recovery to the injured. Eyewitnesses say that the police, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), and disaster management teams reached the accident site after more than an hour. It is a matter of grave concern and should be investigated. We appreciate the local villagers who hurried to assist in rescuing the passengers and providing care for the injured. It is worth noting that Nirmal Jote village has a predominantly Muslim population that was



celebrating Eid. Despite this, they were quick to take action and provided timely assistance. With ambulances unavailable, many villagers transported passengers to nearby hospitals in their own vehicles. Some passengers also found refuge in the homes of Nirmal Jote residents to recuperate."

Prof. Salim Engineer said, "It is highly disturbing to see that such a train accident occurred just a year after the Balasore (Odisha) train accident in which more than 260 people lost their lives and over 900 were seriously injured. The Kanchanjunga Express train accident has resulted in 15 deaths and more than 60 injured. Obviously, we have not learned from our mistakes nor taken any course correction measures. Jamaat-e-Islami Hind demands a high-level inquiry into the accident and its findings must be made public. Those found guilty should be punished. We demand that the government take steps to ensure such accidents are not repeated. We also demand adequate compensation for affected families."

Chhagan Bhujbal demands caste census in India



MUMBAI: Amid the ongoing protests over Maratha and OBC quotas in Maharashtra, NCP minister and Samata Parishad Founder, Chhagan Bhujbal on Monday made a strong case for conducting a caste census across India, saying that he will urge Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the same.

"If this census is done, it will be of great benefit to the OBCs of the country as they will get a huge amount of funds from the Centre," he told reporters after chairing the Samata Parishad meeting here.

"Narendra Modi has become the Prime Minister of the country for the third time. Now we are going to make an appeal to him to get a caste census done. If it is done, it will shed light on various issues of OBCs. We will not only understand the population but also the situation of OBCs," said Bhujbal.

He added that the funds would be available to OBCs also which currently are available only to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Paper Leakage: Making a mockery of the youth

JAG MOHAN THAKEN

There is hardly an examination held in our country, where the paper is not leaked. The government has failed to safeguard the sanctity of the recruitment or admission tests, whether at central level or at states level. The honest, unemployed youth or the young generation, everywhere is being cheated and the money is making the mare go. Isn't it the failure of the government or its system?

Making the future of the youth bleak, just within weeks two major papers held by the central government were leaked one after the other, what it shows?

Accepting the unfair play in NEET and NET examinations and informing about the cancellation of NET examination just held on the previous day, the central government issued a release on June 19 that the National Testing Agency (NTA) conducted the UGC-NET June 2024 Examination in OMR (pen and paper) mode on 18th June, 2024 in two shifts across different cities of the country.

On 19th June, 2024, the University Grants Commission (UGC) received certain inputs from National Cyber Crime Threat Analytics Unit of Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the Ministry of Home Affairs on the Examination. These inputs prima-facie indicate that the integrity of the aforesaid examination may have been compromised.

To ensure the highest level of transparency and sanctity of the examination process, the



Ministry of Education, Government of India has decided that the UGC-NET June 2024 Examination be cancelled. A fresh examination shall be conducted, for which information shall be shared separately. Simultaneously, the matter is being handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (C.B.I.) for thorough investigation in the matter.

The release further divulged that in the matter pertaining to the NEET(UG) Examination-2024, the issue related to grace marks has already been fully addressed. As regards certain irregularities alleged in the conduct of the examination in Patna, a detailed report has been sought from the Economic Offences Unit, Bihar Police. Government will take further action, on receipt of this report.

Government is committed to ensure the sanctity of examinations and protect the interest of students. It is reiterated that any individual/organization found to be involved in this matter will face strictest action.

The General Secretary of the All-India Congress Committee, former Union Minister and newly elected MP from the Sirsa Lok Sabha seat in Haryana, Kumari Selja said that while the investigation into the NEET paper leak was

still ongoing, the government has now plunged the future of millions of students into darkness by cancelling the UGC NET June 2024 exam due to a paper leak. The hardworking candidates are left with only tears in their eyes. Who will account for their months of hard work?

Kumari Selja said that the UGC NET exam was held on June 18 and was cancelled on June 19. Over 11 lakh candidates had applied for the exam, and 9 lakh 8 thousand 580 candidates appeared. The UGC NET June 2024 session exam was cancelled by the Ministry of Education due to the suspicion of malpractice in the exam.

Congress @INCIndia on Thursday alleged, "In the last 5 years, 43 recruitment exam papers have been leaked in the country and these paper leaks have directly affected 1.75 crore candidates. Do PM Modi and the education minister understand what millions of youths and their families go through due to paper leaks and exam cancellations?"

Taking a dig at PM Modi, Indian National Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge tweeted on Thursday in Hindi, "What kind of 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' is this, where the paper is leaked every day! How

has the Modi government ruined the country's education and recruitment system? Paper leaks, fraud and gross irregularities in NEET, UGC-NET, CUET (Common University Entrance Test) have now been exposed."

Kharge further adds, "The shower of knowledge on the students by the head of a government which cannot conduct a nationwide examination without any fraud is dishonesty! Pushing millions of youths into the quagmire of unemployment with false promises, Modi ji was roaming around universities yesterday, under the shadow of the camera!"

Aam Adami Party workers and leaders, while protesting against NEET paper leak in Jalandhar on Wednesday, alleged, "This directly shows failure of BJP govt how Modi govt is messing with lives of hardworking students. But we will continue to do justice to the youth of the country."

They demanded the resignation of the Prime Minister and the Union Education Minister over the rigging in the NEET exam.

The leaders of AAP said that the rigging in the NEET exam is no less a crime than treason. 24 lakh children have been affected by this. They alleged that there was rigging at two levels in this exam. First, papers were leaked in Bihar and Gujarat and sold for 50-70 lakhs. After this, NTA wrongly gave grace marks to some students.

AAP leaders alleged that the BJP has an old connection with paper leaks. Papers have been leaked 70 times in the last 7 years in BJP ruled states. This is a very big matter. Therefore, this matter should be looked into directly by the Supreme Court.

Jag Mohan Thaken is a Senior Journalist, Columnist & Political Analyst, views are personal

G-7 finally moves toward inclusivity and relevance

The recent “G-7 Outreach” Summit, hosted by Italy’s Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, marked a significant departure from traditional gatherings. With leaders from ten countries, including India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the summit aimed to move beyond the outdated “West vs the Rest” narrative. Italy’s decision to invite predominantly Global South countries, such as BRICS members Brazil, India, and the UAE, alongside seven African nations to discuss energy issues, and to hold the summit in the Mediterranean Apulia region, underscores this shift. Historically, the G-7 was a powerhouse of the world’s most developed democracies, convening to address global financial and developmental challenges. Yet, recent years have seen this dynamic group struggle. Manufacturing slowdowns, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the fallout from the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Western sanctions have left the G-7 appearing weary and less effective. The unstable political fortunes of many G-7 leaders have further weakened the group’s image. While the G-7 reiterated its “military, budget, humanitarian, and reconstruction support” for Ukraine, it lacked a clear strategy to end the war. Similarly, the call for a Gaza ceasefire was not embraced by Israel. The sharp focus on China’s role in the Indo-Pacific and concerns over “industrial targeting” and unfair practices raised doubts about whether any G-7 nation would reduce its significant trade ties with Beijing. Commitments to infrastructure projects, like the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor, seemed more rhetorical than actionable. For India, attending for the eleventh time, the summit offered Modi a platform to engage with global leaders. However, the lack of substantial bilateral meetings with key partners like the U.S. and Canada was notable. Modi highlighted India’s democratic achievements, the potential of technology and AI to reduce global inequalities, and the importance of the Global South, particularly Africa. Yet, these issues might find more effective discussion and resolution within the broader, more inclusive G-20 framework.

LETTERBOX

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Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.

THE FINANCIAL WORLD

RNI NO. CHAENG/2001/03736

PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY SWINDER BAJWA ON BEHALF OF FW MEDIA

PRINTED AT JAGJIT PUBLISHING CO. PVT LTD D-12, INDUSTRIAL AREA, PHASE-1, MOHALI, PUNJAB 160059

PRINTER & PUBLISHER SWINDER BAJWA OWNER* : FW MEDIA

PUBLISHED AT: PLOT NO-F5, IT PARK, CHANDIGARH CHANDIGARH 160101; PHONE: 9888040061

EDITOR* ABDUL WASEY

(*RESPONSIBLE FOR SELECTION OF NEWS UNDER THE PRB ACT)



JEAN DRÈZE BELIEVES THE MODI GOVT DELAYS CENSUS TO FAST-TRACK DELIMITATION

Census needed without delay

Why has the 2021 Census been delayed for so long? Here is one plausible answer: the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is delaying the Census because it wants to fast-track the “delimitation” exercise in anticipation of the 2029 Lok Sabha elections.

If this sounds absurd, think again. The 84th amendment of the Constitution clearly states that the next delimitation exercise is to be based on the first census after 2026. If the next census happens, say, in 2024 or 2025, then delimitation will have to wait until after the following census, i.e. sometime in the 2030s. So, if the BJP wants delimitation before the 2029 elections, then it must continue to drag its feet on the census until 2026 or even 2027 (since a 2026 census may not qualify as having taken place “after 2026”).

Delimitation refers to periodic attempts to ensure that the shares of different States in Lok Sabha seats are similar to their respective population shares, and also that all constituencies have the same population size as far as possible, as required under Article 81 of the Constitution. As is well known, the forthcoming delimitation exercise is likely to shift the balance of Lok Sabha seats in favour of States that have experienced relatively fast population growth since 1973, when the last inter-State delimitation was carried out (based on the 1971 Census). This means, in particular, that the seat shares of the northern States will grow at the expense of the southern States. Naturally, this is a can of worms. Some of the southern States may rebel. If the BJP is able to get away with this, however, its electoral prospects will improve, since it has a much stronger base in the north than in the south.



The Opposition could try to thwart this plot by insisting on the timely completion of the Census, before 2026. There is certainly an objective argument for it. Census data are essential for many purposes, including the implementation of welfare schemes. To illustrate, the number of people benefiting from subsidised food rations would increase by more than 100 million if updated census figures were available to revise the coverage of the National Food Security Act. Postponing the Census deprives many people of essential entitlements. The Opposition could feed two birds with one crumb by insisting on an early census and deferred delimitation. The issue could also be taken to the Supreme Court: setting the date of the Census is the Central government’s privilege under the law but postponing the 2021 Census by more than five years can be construed as an abuse of privilege and infringement of people’s fundamental rights.

However, there is a catch, or so it may seem. This catch is related to women’s

reservation. The 106th amendment of the Constitution, passed last September, provides for one-third reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. Under Section 5, this is due to come into effect “after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken for this purpose after the relevant figures for the first census taken after [2023] have been published” (emphasis added). So far, this has been interpreted to mean that women’s reservation would begin after the larger delimitation exercise required by the 84th amendment. In that case, an early census would postpone women’s reservation, by postponing delimitation. However, the words “for this purpose” in Section 5 can also be read to mean that women’s reservation could proceed on the basis of its own delimitation exercise (involving nothing more than the designation of “women only” constituencies) in advance of the larger delimitation exercise. Therefore, nothing prevents the Opposition from arguing for (1) an early Census, (2) women’s reserva-

tion from then onwards under the 106th amendment, and (3) delimitation later on (sometime in the 2030s) under the 84th amendment.

How much is the BJP likely to gain from delimitation? Before June 4, 2024, it seemed like it had a lot to gain because it had overwhelming support in the northern States and very little in the south. Today, that picture has changed, as the BJP lost ground in the north but gained some in the south. Nevertheless, the BJP still has a strong stake in delimitation. To see this, consider the following exercise. If the seat shares of political parties within States were to be kept constant even as the 543 Lok Sabha seats were redistributed across States in proportion to their current population, how would this affect the overall seat shares of the NDA and INDIA coalitions today? The answer is that the NDA’s seat share would rise by about 3 percentage points, from 54% (294 seats out of 543) to 57%, while INDIA’s share would drop by 2 percentage points or so. In absolute terms, this means that the NDA would have about 309 seats instead of 294 – an extra 15 seats. This is a big deal. The reverse side of the coin, however, is that delimitation might lead to a backlash against the BJP in the south. The BJP may or may not decide to cross that creaky bridge before 2029.

The fact remains that postponing the Census is hard to justify. Aside from obstructing women’s reservation, it deprives millions of people of essential entitlements. They should not be held hostage to any party’s electoral stratagems.

Jean Drèze is Visiting Professor at the Department of Economics, Ranchi University. Views are personal.



PRIYANKA PANDIT ON HOW GEOPOLITICAL RIVALRY AND GLOBAL ECONOMY FRAGMENTATION THREATEN LIBERAL ORDER

The financial burden of global economic division

The announcement by United States President Joe Biden, in May, to slap a fresh round of tariffs on a range of Chinese imports, has refuelled fears of a new phase of decoupling in the world economy. Siding with Washington, policymakers in Europe are also deliberating having a “united front” to counter China’s pursuit of coercive economic practices.

While this may define the trajectory of China-U.S. relations, it is not clear what the long-term costs are going to be. With China, the West’s trade risk calculations have increasingly become a function of national security. Contesting the liberal premise, the new political rhetoric in Washington assumes that since economic interdependence does not benefit China and the U.S. equally, it is likely that Beijing will weaponise vulnerabilities to its ends. In fact, the Biden administration’s decision to resume a tariff war with China, reveals how political, and not economic, considerations become key in deciding what goods would receive tariff increases.

The story in the tariffs

The latest tariff on Chinese electric vehicles (EV) is a case in point. Given that the U.S. imports few EVs from China, the decision reinforces Mr. Biden’s pro-union stance and his support for the ongoing efforts of the United Auto Workers (UAW) to scale up EV manufacturing domestically. Conceived as a pre-emptive measure, the quadrupling of tariffs from 25% also explains the fear that the American auto union has vis-à-vis the fast-growing Chinese car and battery industry and its ability to outcompete traditional domestic automakers in no time.

The new tariffs on medical devices, on the other hand, are a straightforward way to grow independent of China. For a decade



now, China has been the primary source of medical equipment to the U.S., with imports nearing \$640 million in 2023.

Many American health-care businesses have their manufacturing and research laboratories in China, and they have been ramping up their investments owing to China’s growing health-care needs for the elderly and demand for quality health-care services. However, the deepening mistrust between the leaders of China and the U.S. creates pressure on the private sector and is likely to increase the burden of health-care costs on domestic patients in both countries. What protectionist enthusiasts often forget is that the costs of protection are borne through higher prices paid by consumers.

The long-term effects

While continuity with the Trump-era tariffs seems to be the obvious answer to deal with an aggressive China, the world economic situation is at odds with the geopolitical realities. The vicious cycle of tit-for-tat tariffs further exacerbates the dangers arising

out of protectionism, encouraging other countries to follow suit. Moreover, the new import restrictions on Chinese clean energy products would delay the green transition targets and the expansion of renewables worldwide. As China faces slowing growth and rising household debts, many western multinationals dependent on China’s vast consumer market will see a dip in their earnings.

For resource-rich countries such as Australia and Brazil, a slowing Chinese economy would not only hurt their exports in various commodities but also create downward pressures on iron-ore prices. For these economies that are heavily dependent on China for their exports, diversifying into other markets is never an easy task.

Similarly, the European Union’s approach to de-risking trade in critical raw minerals with China may entail a greater risk of Beijing tightening its iron grip on the supply chain. As the scramble to control the value chain of rare earths intensifies, one cannot rule out the possibility of a mineral-rich grouping, led by China, trying to dictate the terms of green trade in the years to come.

Southeast Asia has also not been immune to the effects of protectionism and great power competition. While the region is said to benefit from production and investment shifting from China, the dependence on Beijing for technology and investment continues to run high. And the region’s prospects of replacing China as the major supplier of components and manufactured goods

could dim if Washington imposes stricter rules of origin and eschew access to goods from third countries that use components either made in China or by Chinese firms located in these countries.

With a burgeoning consumer market, India remains next in line in expecting to benefit from the decoupling dynamics. But, one is not sure of the extent of gains in terms of global market share and the time this transition would take. The reason is that India’s manufacturing continues to be in a catching-up phase despite several initiatives by the government. New Delhi faces tough competition in low-end manufacturing from its South and South-East Asian neighbours, and its deep economic entanglements with China remain.

A potential crisis

One, therefore, sees no end in sight if this cycle of escalation continues. More than its real significance, global investors would deeply feel the psychological effects of decoupling. What makes this strategy worse is its deliberate distancing from the World Trade Organization (WTO). Once a flag bearer of WTO rules, Washington continues to block the appointment of judges to the WTO Appellate Body, rendering the adjudicatory process paralysed. While a direct collision between the two is unlikely, the intensifying geopolitical rivalry along with the fragmentation of the global economy puts the future of the liberal international order at a high risk. And, it would benefit neither the U.S., China or the rest of the world.

Priyanka Pandit is Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations and Governance Studies, School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS), Shri Narayana University, Delhi-NCR. Views are personal.



BOOKS: REVIEW

New book helps kids know rich artistic traditions of Kerala

“Why is he hiding behind the curtain?” is a charming and educational graphic novelette written by Arun Narayan and illustrated by Sanusha US. This 32-page book, complete with over 300 illustrated panels, is designed to introduce readers aged eight and above to the rich artistic traditions of Kerala, particularly Kathakali and Ottanthullal.

The book begins with an intriguing peekaboo game on stage, setting the tone for the immersive experience that follows. A colorful, rectangular piece of cloth held by two men is lowered slightly to reveal the mask-like face of the artists on stage before being pulled up again, drumming up excitement and building anticipation for the Kathakali play about to be staged. This playful prelude captivates young readers, drawing them into the vibrant world of Kerala’s traditional performing arts.

Arun Narayan, convener of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), Palakkad chapter, conceptualized this novelette in response to a noticeable absence of young audiences at traditional art performances. Recognizing the need to bridge this gap, he envisioned a graphic novel that would engage children and ignite their interest in these cultural treasures.

Illustrator Sanusha US, an architect by profession, initially planned to create a graphic novelette on local heroes and cultural heritage. However, the pandemic delayed their plans until a jewellery chain approached Sanusha’s design house with a request for activity books for children. Instead, Arun and Sanusha proposed a graphic novelette that included activity pages to keep children engaged. This idea evolved into a book that not only tells a story but also includes interactive elements

such as coloring pages and puzzles.

“Why is he hiding behind the curtain?” follows the adventures of Appu and his elder sister Anu as their parents take them to Kerala Kalamandalam, a renowned center for Kathakali training. Through their journey, readers learn about the origins, training, makeup, and staging of Kathakali plays. The book also includes a brief narrative of the Kathakali play “Kalyanasou-gandhikam,” an excerpt from the Mahabharata in which Bhima encounters his half-brother Hanuman while searching for a flower Draupadi desires.

The character of Appu, modeled after an inquisitive child the authors met during a workshop in Bhimananad, Palakkad, drives the narrative with his endless questions. His curiosity mirrors that of the young readers, encouraging them to explore and ask questions about their cultural



Why is he hiding behind the curtain? By Arun Narayan Here and Then & INTACH; 32 pages; Rs299

heritage. Arun and Sanusha’s own love for comics, such as Amar Chitra Katha, Hergé’s Tintin series, and the Asterix series, inspired them to create a similar engaging medium to introduce children to Kerala’s rich traditions. Sanusha’s illustrations bring the story to life with richly detailed panels that provide a 3-D effect, especially in depictions of the Koothambalam (a traditional performance space) and the various Kathakali characters. Her meticulous attention to detail ensures that the visuals are as captivating as the story, making it an engaging read for children accustomed to dynamic and colorful imagery.

One of the book’s strengths is how it answers each of Appu’s questions

with patience and clarity, making complex art forms accessible to young minds. For instance, when Appu asks why Ottanthullal artists wear skirts, the answer is revealed through his adventure, blending learning with storytelling seamlessly.

Published by Here and Then in association with INTACH, “Why is he hiding behind the curtain?” is priced at Rs 299, making it an affordable and valuable addition to any child’s library. It not only entertains but also educates, fostering a deeper appreciation for India’s cultural heritage among the younger generation.

To sum it up, “Why is he hiding behind the curtain?” is a delightful and informative graphic novelette that serves as an excellent introduction to Kathakali and Ottanthullal. Arun Narayan and Sanusha US have successfully created a vibrant, engaging, and educational tool that will surely spark curiosity and appreciation for traditional performing arts in children. This book is a must-have for parents and educators looking to instill cultural values and knowledge in young minds.

India becomes third-largest domestic airline market

NEW DELHI: Driven by robust growth in the aviation sector in the last decade, India is now the third-largest domestic airline market in the world, up from 5th position 10 years ago.

Ten years ago, India was the smallest market with around 8 million seats, followed by Indonesia at 4th and Brazil at 3rd place, and the US and China occupying the top two positions.

Today, the US and China remain the largest domestic aviation markets. "However, India is surpassing the Brazilian and Indonesian domestic markets to become the third-largest domestic market with airline capacity of 15.6 million seats in April 2024," according to OAG data. India's capacity growth rate of seats over a 10-year average is the highest, growing at 6.9 per cent annually.

"India is the fastest growing



market across all five domestic markets we considered. China was close behind with annual growth of 6.3 per cent between 2014 and 2024, and there is a much smaller growth rate in the US and Indonesia," according to the data. According to the OAG report, another interesting metric to consider across these large domestic markets is low-cost carrier (LCC) capacity share.

In April 2024, LCCs accounted for 78.4 per cent of domestic airline capacity in India, the highest LCC share of any of these five domestic markets.

"In the last 10 years, IndiGo has almost doubled their market share, from 32 per cent of capacity in 2014 to 62 per cent today. While the rest of the market has barely grown, averaging just 0.7 per cent a year, IndiGo has a

domestic capacity growth rate of 13.9 per cent annually," the report mentioned.

The country has seen robust growth under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, paving the way for shaping the future of the aviation industry for the next 25 years.

On November 19 last year, airlines in India flew 4,56,910 domestic passengers. This was the highest single-day air traffic since the pandemic hit, marking a remarkable 7.4 per cent surge above pre-Covid averages, as per the Civil Aviation Ministry's data.

According to the government, the number of airports in the country has increased to 157 from 74 in the last 10 years.

More than 91 lakh passengers availed the facility of Digi Yatra, and over 35 lakh users downloaded the app in 2023.

Oyo to raise up to \$125 million at \$2.5 billion valuation

NEW DELHI: Hospitality major Oyo is reportedly raising \$100-\$125 million in fresh funding at a market valuation of \$2.5 billion.

According to a TechCrunch report on Monday, citing sources, the global budget-hotel chain is finalising a "fresh fundraising of about \$100 million to \$125 million that slashes its valuation to \$2.5 billion". Oyo was yet to immediately comment on the report. Last month, the hospitality major announced to refile its initial public offering (IPO) papers with the markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) after refinancing its existing \$450 million Term Loan B (TLB) at a lower interest rate.

With this move, the company anticipates annual savings of \$8-10 million in the first year



and \$15-17 million thereafter. The company registered its first profitable financial year in 2023-24, with a net profit of Rs 100 crore, according to Ritesh Agarwal, its Founder and CEO. "This was our eighth consecutive quarter of a positive EBITDA and we also have a cash bal-

ance of about Rs 1,000 crore," Agarwal had posted on X.

The global credit rating firm Fitch has taken note of the company's improved performance and strong cash flows, "upgrading our credit rating". "FY25 will clearly be even more exciting," said Agarwal.

Inspiro Wins Gold in the 2024 Asia-Pacific Stevie Awards



MANILA (PHILIPPINES): Inspiro, a leading global CX outsourcing company, was awarded a Gold Stevie Award for Innovative Use of Technology in Customer Service at the 11th annual Asia-Pacific Stevie Awards held recently in Manila, Philippines.

The Asia-Pacific Stevie Awards are the only business awards program to recognize innovation in the workplace in all 29 markets of the Asia-Pacific region. The Stevie Awards are widely considered to be the world's premier business awards, conferring recognition for achievement in programs such as The International Business Awards* for 22 years.

Vikram Solar bags milestone order for NLC India Limited at GSCEL's Solar Park

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Kolkata

Vikram Solar, a leading Indian Solar Module manufacturer, has secured a 393.9 MWp module supply order for NLC India Limited at GSCEL's Solar Park (Stage 2) in Khavda, Gujarat.

Describing this order as a significant milestone for the company, Gyanesh Chaudhary, Chairman & Managing Director, Vikram Solar, said here recently "This landmark order brings Vikram Solar's total PV module supply contract to the Khavda Solar Park to over 1 GW, while underscoring our role in advancing the region's renewable energy infrastructure."

"We aim to fulfil the 393.9 MW order with ALMM listed



580 Wp and n-Topcon bifacial modules produced at the state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities and meeting stringent internal quality standards alongside rigorous ALMM standards," he said. "Vikram Solar is proud to be involved in India's unparalleled decarbonization initiative and as the nation charts a course towards a sustainable future, we are committed to architect tomorrow's solutions and propel India to global leadership in sustainability," he added.

Jakson Green to set up 'world's first flue gas CO2 to 4G ethanol project for power plant'

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
New Delhi

Jakson Green, a leading new energy transition platform, will be establishing the "world's first flue gas CO2 to 4G ethanol project for a power plant. Highlighting the project's significance, Kannan Krishnan, Joint Managing Director, Jakson Green Private Limited, said that in being awarded a critical role in India's ground-breaking project towards a greener future, Jakson Green - as the Licensing, Engineering, Procurement and Construction (LEPC) partner - will spearhead

this project targeted for operation within two years. "Ethanol is crucial to achieving India's blending goals, strengthening energy security and fostering a cleaner future. This ground-breaking project reinforces the company's position as a frontrunner in India's green molecule space," he said, adding that with over 8,500 TPA of green hydrogen and its derivatives production capacity under development across six marquee Power-X projects, Jakson Green is uniquely positioned to spearhead India's clean energy transition and contribute to a sustainable future.

PRESIDENT BIDEN FINALLY ASSERTS The US-Saudi to Sign Multipurpose Agreements for Trade in Dollar, Nuclear Technologies

GOPAL MISRA
The outcome of the ongoing secret parleys between the Biden Administration and Saudi Arabia is expected to be scripting a new financial arrangement in world trade.

The financial capitals across the continents are expecting that the deal might be announced much sooner than expected. If Saudi Arabia did not stress about replacing the dollar by the Chinese currency, yuan, for oil trade, it might get American civil nuclear technologies. To get these technologies, it has to conduct its huge oil trade in American dollars. It may also prevent China from obtaining Saudi oil in yuan.

The indications, according to American media, including the Wall Street Journal, are that this initiative of the Biden Administration reminds us of the 80-year old Bretton Woods Agreement of 1944. It had announced the crucial role of the American dollar as a world currency for exchange of goods and services.

In 1971, the then US President Richard Nixon had ended the gold convertibility of the dollar. Earlier, there used to be the support of gold for each dollar.

The situation had worsened further during the 1973 oil crisis. It, perhaps, led to the close understanding between the US and Saudi Arabia restricting the oil producing country to trade only in dollars.

A Boost to Dollar

It is being widely believed that unless the US-Saudi Agreement is announced, the American currency, which already has lost much of its sheen, might just be crippled. Meanwhile, the worldwide media is abuzz, including a number of social media platforms, that Saudi Arabia has refused to extend its 50-year old relationship with the USA regarding its reinvestments of the dollars acquired by selling its crude oil to a strategic ally.

The observers and analysts genuinely believe that with the shell oil available to the US, its dependency on West Asian oil has decreased. During the decades, seventies, eighties and nineties, the US was importing crude oil supplies from West Asia, specially Saudi Arabia for its energy requirements. However, the situation has undergone paradigm changes following the availability of quantity petroleum products in its neighborhood.

In this backdrop, it is being rightly interpreted



that by not renewing the existing arrangements, Saudi Arabia would soon be trading in other currencies. The Chinese have already initiated oil trade with Saudi Arabia in yuan.

BRICS Initiative

The association comprising India, China, Russia, Brazil and South Africa under its nomenclature, BRICS, has been promoting commodity based trade without using American dollars as an international currency.

These efforts are being augmented by the blockchain enabled digital currencies. These developments indicate the ongoing changes in the economic and financial dynamics of international trade, thus promoting alternative currencies.

headaches to Washington in coming years. It is already trading in Euros.

The Echoe in Social Media

It is true that neither Saudi Arabia nor the US has officially discussed the informal 50-year old trade arrangement ensuring use of the US dollars as an exclusive currency for oil trade. Yet, it is obvious that the informal arrangements made to regulate the current arrangements for investing dollars accumulated with the oil producing countries have become redundant. It, perhaps, is being echoed in the past one week on various news channels and publications. They have been discussing the implications of the discontinuation of the understanding reached between Saudi Arabia and the US on June nine, 1974. Since

no agreement was signed for the renewal of this understanding, the mechanism is believed to have ended now. There was no need to end it by formal notification, therefore, it cannot be stated that Saudi Arabia has refused to renew the agreement.

From this perspective, Paul Donovan, Chief Economist of the UBS Global Wealth, perhaps, is correct, that the refusal of Saudi Arabia to renew the Accord is incorrect, he has further described the discontinuation of this arrangement as just fake news. Since there have never been any treaty or official arrangements in this context, therefore, the discontinuation of this mechanism cannot be highlighted as a diplomatic setback to the USA.

It may be recalled that the two countries had set up a joint commission for regulating the huge dollars acquired by Saudi Arabia as well as other oil producing countries in West Asia.

The oil producing countries could invest their petrodollars in America securities, thus strengthening the US dollars as a world currency in global trade. Indirectly, it was also subsidizing the American economy by offering almost interest free funds.

The Fragile Trade System

It is yet to be ascertained

the impact on the world economy, if the petrodollars invested in American securities were suddenly encashed.

However, it might reduce the market value of the American dollar leading to a chaotic situation in global trade. It means the sustenance of the American dollars depends upon the oil rich countries as well as China. The Biden Administration couldn't encash the American securities when they matured a few months ago.

In order words, the fragile financial systems across the continents depend upon the counties, including China, having invested in American securities. If China encashes

its long-term bonds, the plight of the US currency will be just pathetic

In India, the implications of the shedding off the huge collection of US dollars by Saudi Arabia are being studied. Meanwhile, the financial markets are just awaiting the outcome of the American talks with Saudi Arabia.

Gopal Misra has been associated with national and international media. His books on journalism and geo-politics have been well-appreciated. Views are personal.

India and Group of Seven (G7): Connected through Pharmaceuticals

DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH

Group of Seven (G7) Summit remained in news in 2nd week of June 2024 as it was India's 11th participation in the G7 Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's fifth consecutive participation, and the first foreign trip for the G7 summit after being sworn in for a third term. The 50th G7 Summit had immense significance as the leaders of the seven member States (Italy, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America) came together along with participation from the European Union represented by the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission. Leaders from 12 developing countries in Africa, South America and the Indo-Pacific region were also invited. It also assumed significance for India as Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni hosted the first major international forum after assuming office in October 2022. Italy pulled out of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an initiative backed by China in December 2023 when the Prime Minister termed the joining BRI initiative as "a serious mistake".

G7 countries are among top 10 largest economies as per their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the U.S.A. is ranked No. 1, Germany at No. 3, Japan at No. 4, United Kingdom at No. 6, France at No. 7, Italy at No. 9, and Canada at No. 10. And India is ranked at No. 5 and is not very far away from Japan. Given the rate of growth in India

and Japan, India is expected to become 4th largest in another 12 months. India may emerge as the world's 3rd largest economy in 2-3 years after overtaking Germany given the growth rate of both economies. Aggregate GDP of G7 Member States is about 43 per cent of the global economy in nominal terms. It is a coincidence that India's drugs and pharmaceutical exports to G7 countries is about 42.11 per cent!

The G7 has taken up issues of global significance including those which had direct relevance to healthcare and pharmaceutical sector. In January 2002, it was the G8 bloc that played an important role in setting up of a Global Fund to fight malaria, TB and AIDS. The idea of the Global Fund was discussed at a G8 summit in Okinawa, Japan, in 2000. The bloc was known as G8 earlier as Russia was part of the Group from 1997 onwards until its expulsion in 2014. Since the creation of the Global Fund, more than US\$60 bn have been disbursed to fight against HIV, TB and malaria and for programs to strengthen systems for health across more than 155 countries. On August 29, 2023, Lady Roslyn Morauta, Chair of the Board, the Global Fund wrote that annually, the Global Fund spends a minimum of US\$ 600 million in India to procure essential health products, including HIV medicine, mosquito nets and diagnostic kits. She also acknowledged that several other global healthcare entities also turn to India for cost-effective pharmaceutical products, particularly for diseases like TB and HIV.

Member countries of G7 bloc are important for India's pharmaceutical sector in terms of ex-

Table 1:- Exports from India to G7 Countries in FY24

Country	Total Exports from India (\$ Mn) (April 2023-March 2024)	Percentage (%) Share in total exports
USA	8,728.83	31.37
UK	784.32	2.82
France	667.49	2.40
Germany	567.42	2.04
Canada	502.42	1.81
Japan	241.62	0.87
Italy	233.56	0.80
Total	11,725.66	42.11%

Source: Compiled from National Import Export Record for yearly Analysis of Trade (NIRYAT)



port markets as India exported pharmaceutical products worth US \$11.72 bn to these markets out of total pharmaceutical exports of US\$ 27.85 bn in FY24 (Table 1 for details).

In 2022, Indian pharmaceutical companies supplied 47 per cent of all generic prescriptions in the USA (IQVIA report). Further, Indian pharmaceutical companies supplied more than 50 per cent of the prescriptions in five categories. Indian pharmaceutical companies' share was 62 per cent in mental health, followed by 60 per cent in hypertension, 58 per cent in lipid regulators, 56 per cent in anti-ulcerants, and 55 per cent in nervous system disorders. India also has the highest number of U.S. Food and Drug Administration (USFDA)-compliant pharmaceutical plants outside of the USA.

In May 2024, the United

Kingdom has overtaken China to become India's fourth-largest export market. The UK was India's sixth-largest export destination in May 2023. In past few months, exports to the UK were dominated by items which included pharmaceutical products.

G7 countries have strong pharmaceutical industry as evident from the fact that 34 out of top 50 global pharmaceutical MNCs (68 per cent) belong to G7 countries (Table 2). One Indian company - Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Limited also figures in the list of top 50. Majority of these MNCs have presence in India, e.g., Pfizer began its operations in India in 1950, and operates through three legal entities namely Pfizer Limited which is listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange; Pfizer Products India Private Limited which is a 100% Pfizer Inc. Sub-

Table 1:- Pharmaceutical Companies from India and G7 Countries among Top 50 Global Pharmaceutical MNCs

Country	Pharmaceutical Companies (Global Rank)	Total Number out of Top 50 Global MNCs
USA	Pfizer (1), AbbVie (2), Johnson & Johnson (3), Merck & Co. (5), Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS) (7), Gilead Sciences (12), Amgen (15), Moderna (18), Viatris (19), Vertex (23), Biogen (25), Regeneron (28), Organon (30), Abbott Labs (36), Incyte (49) and Novavax (50)	16
UK	AstraZeneca (8) and GSK (10)	2
France	Sanofi (9), Les Laboratoires Servier (34), and Ipsen (46)	3
Germany	Boehringer Ingelheim (16), Bayer (17), Merck KGaA (24), Fresenius (40), and BioNTech (47)	5
Canada	Bausch Health (29)	1
Japan	Takeda (11), Astellas Pharma (22), Otsuka (26), Daiichi Sankyo (27), Chugai (35), and Eisai (38)	6
Italy	Menarini (45)	1
India	Sun Pharma (33)	1

Source: Compilation based on the ranking by EvaluatePharma (2023, May) and Christel, Michael (2023, June 10). 2023 Pharm Exec Top 50 Companies.

sidary; and Pfizer Healthcare India Private Limited which is a 100% indirect subsidiary of Pfizer Inc and is focused on manufacturing and research. AbbVie Therapeutics India Private Limited is a joint venture between Allergan (now part of AbbVie) and Piramal Pharma Limited that commenced commercial operations in 1996. Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS) was in news in February 2024 when it announced the opening of a new Innovation Hub in Hyderabad. Innovation Hub, a US\$ 100 mn site, has been opened to expand the company's global drug development and information technology and digital capabilities.

Johnson & Johnson (J&J) which is world's 3rd largest pharma company is in India since 1947. In 1947, it expanded into India, marketing Johnson's Baby Powder. In September 1957, J&J incorporated a separate legal entity in India with 12 employees. Now, the company has more than 6,000 employees across three business segments - consumer products, medical

devices and pharmaceuticals.

Takeda, a prominent Japanese pharma company has presence in India through a joint venture - Zydus Takeda Healthcare Private Limited, with Zydus Healthcare Limited. Menarini, Italian pharma major had started operations in India in 1994. At that time, it had a joint venture with Raunaq Industries, and the joint venture was named Menarini Raunaq Pharma Limited (MRPL). A. Menarini India Pvt. Limited operates in India at present and was in news in September 2023 when Lupin announced acquisition of five legacy brands from Menarini.

Many top MNCs from G7 countries are now listed on Indian stock exchanges, e.g., AstraZeneca India was established in 1979 and is a listed company on Indian stock exchanges. GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals Limited is also a listed company in India. Sanofi India Limited is present in India since 1956 as it was born under the name of Hoechst Fedco Pharma Private Limited, and is now

listed on the BSE and the NSE. Boehringer Ingelheim India was set up in 2003 and it currently ranks 8th among MNCs. It has entered into strategic alliances for diabetes management in India by partnering with Indian companies - Lupin Limited and Torrent Pharma Limited. Hence, MNCs from G7 countries have significant presence in India. Many MNCs from these countries are listed in India, and have collaborations/strategic alliances/joint ventures with Indian pharmaceutical companies in areas such as R&D, co-marketing, manufacturing, and licensing to name a few. This was visible when Oxford University, AstraZeneca, and Serum Institute of India (SII) came together for providing vaccine during recent pandemic.

Connection through pharmaceuticals is evident in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows too. In 2023-24, overall FDI equity inflows in India amounted to US\$ 44.42 bn. Among top 10 countries in terms of FDI

inflows in India, the US is the 3rd largest investor with \$4.99 bn foreign investments, Japan ranks 5th (\$3.17 bn), UK ranks 7th (\$1.2 bn), and Germany ranks 9th with \$505 mn.

Drugs and Pharmaceuticals sector is ranked 8th in terms of FDI with a Cumulative FDI Equity Inflow of US\$ 22,528 Mn from April 2000 to March 2024 which forms 3.32 per cent of total FDI Equity inflows in terms of US \$.

Through Vaccine Maitri initiative, India has shown the determination to make a difference at a difficult moment for global society while reinforcing reputation of the country as the 'Pharmacy of the World'. Through pharmaceuticals, G7 nations and India Connection through pharmaceuticals can further strengthen multilateral cooperation between G7 countries and India.

Dr. Anil Kumar Angrish, Associate Professor (Finance and Accounting), Department of Pharmaceutical Management, NIPER, SAS Nagar (Mohali), Punjab
DISCLAIMER: Views are personal and do not represent the views of the Institute.

RBI Governor expects growth in April-June quarter to surpass 7.2 pc estimate

MUMBAI: RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das expects the strong growth momentum of the last financial year to continue into the April-June quarter of the current financial year, bolstered by strong fundamentals of the economy.



“We are quite sanguine that the projection we have given for the first quarter of this year, 7.2 per cent, we are quite optimistic that it will be 7.3 per cent,” Das said on Tuesday at a media event.

Das also observed that private consumption is recovering, and highlighted that rural demand is reviving on the back of a stronger growth in the farm

sector. India Meteorological Department has forecast a higher-than-normal monsoon which is expected to result in a higher Kharif output. The RBI had on June 7 raised

the projection of real gross domestic product for the financial year 2024-25 to 7.2 per cent, from 7 per cent estimated previously. The governor said the GDP growth in the first quarter

“We are quite sanguine that the projection we have given for the first quarter of this year, 7.2 per cent, we are quite optimistic that it will be 7.3 per cent”

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.

SBI board approves to raise up to Rs 20,000 cr via long-term bonds

NEW DELHI: The State Bank of India (SBI) on Wednesday announced it would raise long-term bonds up to Rs 20,000 crore via a public issue or private placement during the ongoing financial year (FY25).



In a stock exchange filing, India's largest public sector bank said: “... we submit that the Central Board at its meeting held today has, inter alia, accorded approval for raising long-term bonds up to an amount of Rs 20,000 crore through a public issue or private placement, during FY25”.

The SBI stock closed at Rs 854, up more than 1 per cent,

apiece on the BSE.

The move came as Indian banks, including the SBI, are strengthening their capital reserves to cater to increasing loan demands. Several other state-run banks including Canara Bank and Punjab National Bank also have plans to raise funds through the debt route during the current

financial year.

Earlier this year, the SBI had raised Rs 5,000 crore through perpetual bonds at an 8.34 per cent coupon. In the January-March quarter of FY24, the SBI clocked a 24 per cent jump in net profit at Rs 20,698 crore, compared to Rs 16,695 crore in the same period of the previous year. The country's largest bank declared a dividend of Rs 13.70 per share for FY24. The SBI also recorded an improvement in its asset quality during the fourth quarter as gross non-performing assets (GNPA) declined to 2.24 per cent of total loans from 2.78 per cent last year.

RBI : Purvanchal Coop Bank's licence cancelled



MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank has cancelled the licence of Purvanchal Cooperative Bank, Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh as it does not have adequate capital and earning prospects.

The Commissioner for Co-operation and Registrar of Cooperative Societies, Uttar Pradesh has also been asked to issue an order for winding up the bank and appoint a liquidator, the RBI said.

On liquidation, every depositor would be entitled to receive deposit insurance claim amount of his/her deposits up to Rs 5 lakh only from Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC). As per the data submitted by the Purvanchal Co-operative Bank, about 99.51 per cent of the depositors are entitled to receive full amount of their deposits from DICGC, the RBI said.

“The bank does not have adequate capital and earning prospects,” it said, and added public interest would be adversely affected if the bank is allowed to carry on its banking business any further.

Rs 18.82 cr fine imposed on crypto exchange Binance

NEW DELHI: The Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) has slapped a penalty of Rs 18.82 crore on the world's largest crypto exchange Binance for alleged contravention of the country's anti-money laundering law.



The federal agency issued an order on Thursday charging the exchange with “dereliction of duty” being a Virtual Digital Asset Service Provider (VDASP) category of reporting entity under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

India's anti-money laundering law stipulates VDASPs to get

registered as a reporting entity with the FIU and share timely suspicious transaction reports with it, which help the FIU to keep a check on financial crimes.

The summary order accessed by PTI said Binance was first issued a notice on December 28, 2023 as it operated in India and provided services to Indian clients.

India stems wealth exodus amid robust economic development

NEW DELHI: Buoyed by overall economic development, India has stemmed its wealth exodus, with just 4,300 millionaires projected to leave the country in 2024 — compared to 5,100 last year, a new report has projected.



India is seeing high net outflows because of the success of its sizeable economy in generating new millionaires, according to “The Henley Private Wealth Migration Report 2024”.

The report by international investment migration advisory firm Henley & Partners mentioned that India is witnessing a steady net outflow of millionaires but here, the story is more positive. “Opportunities

for overseas investments are opening up for many wealthy Indians, especially in Australia and the US,” the report added.

The fastest-growing economy in the world, India is likely to

be the third country, after China and the UK, in terms of migrations from the country.

India continues to lose millionaires, especially to the UAE. “However, in our view, these

outflows are not particularly concerning as India continues to produce far more new high net worth individuals (HNWIs) than it loses to emigration,” the report noted.

India increased the number of millionaires in the country by 85 per cent in the last decade. With 326,400 HNWIs, India ranks 10th in the world regarding the number of millionaires. The UK is expected to see an unprecedented net loss of 9,500 millionaires in 2024 — second only to China worldwide, and more than double the 4,200 who left the country last year.

“An unprecedented 128,000 millionaires are expected to relocate worldwide this year, eclipsing the previous record of 120,000 set in 2023,” said Dominic Volek, Group Head of Private Clients at Henley & Partners.

Sunita Singh-Dalal, Partner leading the Private Wealth & Family Offices at Horani in Dubai, said that the evolution and development of the UAE's wealth management ecosystem is unprecedented.

“In less than 5 years, the UAE has introduced a robust regulatory framework that provides the wealthy with a range of innovative solutions to protect, preserve and enhance their wealth,” Singh-Dalal mentioned in the report.

Will the middle class smile! Is Finance Minister going to give big gifts in the Union Budget?

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

After coming to power for the third time, the central government is going to present the budget next month. In this context, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has been holding meetings one after another. Every year citizens, atleast middle class of the country wait to get some relief from the central budget. From the budget, the life and livelihood of middle class family members depends to a large extent. So naturally the countrymen have a lot of hope from

this central budget. Especially, now that the Finance Ministry is seriously considering income tax exemption options, which brings a lot of relief to the middle class families.

Recently Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his speech said, “The middle class is the driver of the country's development and their welfare and benefits are our priority”. Right now preparations for the budget are going on in full swing. In this budget, employees are expecting 3.0 income tax relief from the Modi government. According to sources in the Ministry of Finance, the cen-



tral government may bring changes in the tax system in the new budget.

It is known that in the new tax system, the income tax

rate is being reduced for those earning between 15 to 17 lakh rupees annually. Not only that, the government is trying to bring more and more people under the tax system. The new tax system introduced by the Modi government in the last fiscal budget has brought several changes to popularise it.

However, it will give relief to people on a large scale if tax exemption is provided for those who currently earn 15 to 17 lakh rupees per annum. Under the new tax regime, the government gives income tax exemption on annual income up to 7 lakh rupees. Whereas

under the old tax system no tax is payable on annual income up to Rs 5 lakh. However, a standard deduction of Rs 50,000 is applicable on both.

In other words, in the new tax regime, no tax will be payable on annual income up to Rs 7.50 lakh. It is known that according to the new tax slab, there is no tax on salary between Rs 0-3 lakh per annum. But after that 5% tax is levied on income between 3 to 6 lakh rupees. 20% and 30% tax is levied on income between 12 and 15 lakhs. Also 4% is levied as health and education cess.

LIC on the way to sell property of 60,000 crores across the country

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

LIC is one of the most trusted names for investors in our country. This company has been gaining the trust of investors over the years. In such a situation, this time a big update has come forward. According to the information received in this context, it is known that LIC is preparing to sell its real estate properties located in metros.



Not only that, it is also known that LIC has planned to collect 50 to 60 thousand crore rupees by selling those assets. Basically, the company is going to sell the plots and commercial buildings it holds. Besides, an internal team has already been directed to start working in this regard. According to information received in this context, LIC is currently on the way to sell all properties in Mumbai.

Some of LIC's prized properties noted, LIC's prized properties include the Jeevan Bharti Building at Connaught Place in Delhi, residential properties in Akbarali, Mumbai, as well as the LIC Building and Asiatic Society at Chittaranjan Avenue in Kolkata. According to the information obtained from the report, in terms of valuation, the total value of these properties has reached around 50 to 60 thousand crore rupees.

As per the information that according to the statistics of the financial year 2023-24, the profit of LIC was Rs. 40,676 crore. Meanwhile, public sector company LIC ranks third across India in terms of land ownership. In this situation, Indian Railways is in second place. Meanwhile, it is learned that LIC may form a new committee to sell assets, whose job will be to sell the property by fixing the right price.

Strike a Balance Between Inflation and Development

SATISH SINGH

Tstrike a balance between inflation and development, the Monetary Policy Committee has kept the repo rate unchanged at 6.5 percent in the latest monetary review. Earlier, the repo rate was increased in February 2023.



The Reserve Bank mainly tries to fight inflation by increasing the repo rate. When the repo rate is high, banks get loans from the Reserve Bank at a higher rate, due to which banks also give loans to customers at a higher rate. By doing this, the liquidity of money in the economy decreases and because of lack of money in the pockets of the people, the demand for goods decreases. Further, due to the high price of goods and products, their sale decreases & owing to which, a decline in inflation is recorded.

Similarly, in case of slowdown in the economy, efforts are made to increase the liquidity of money in the market to accelerate the developmental work and for this also the repo rate is cut, so that banks get loans at cheaper rates from the Reserve Bank and after getting loans at lower rates, the banks also give loans to the customers at tawdrier rates. At present, the inflation rate remains a matter of concern for the government and the Reserve Bank of India.

According to Care Edge Rating, despite the loan rate not softening, the loan growth rate has been around 16 percent in the financial year 2023-24 and it is estimated to be between 14 to 14.5 percent in the financial year 2024-25. Such a situation is very positive for the Indian economy. However, it can be called an exceptional situa-

tion. Anyway, due to the pace of lending remaining fast, both economic activities and growth rate are picking up. For this reason, the Reserve Bank of India has increased its growth forecast for the financial year 2025 from 7.00 percent to 7.2 percent.

The GDP growth rate in the fourth quarter of FY 2023-2024 was 7.8, while it was 6.1 percent in the same quarter last year. At the same time, the GDP growth rate in the financial year 2023-24 was 8.2 percent, which is 1.2 percent more than the estimate of the Reserve Bank of India i.e. the Reserve Bank had estimated the GDP growth rate to be 7 percent during the financial year 2023-24. Here, it is important mention that, the GDP growth rate was 7 percent in the last financial year.

According to the Ministry of Statistics, the growth rate remained high during the period under review due to strong performance in the manufacturing and mining sectors. The manufacturing sector has grown by 9.9 percent, which was minus 2.2 percent in the financial year 2022-23. Similarly, the mining sector grew at the rate of 7.1 percent during the financial year 2023-24, which was 1.9

percent in the financial year 2022-23. It is noteworthy that the manufacturing sector plays an important role in employment generation.

Retail inflation is still a matter of concern and it is estimated that there will not be much softening in retail inflation in summer. However, there may be some softening in it in the winter season. Although the Reserve Bank of India has projected inflation to be 4.5 percent in the financial year 2025, but this level is not enough to take a decisive decision for development. Wholesale inflation rose to a 15-month high of 2.61 percent in May, while it was 3.85 in February 2023. At the same time, it was 1.26 percent in April 2024, which was the highest level in 13 months. It was 0.53 in March 2024 and 0.20 percent in February 2024.

The National Statistical Office released the retail inflation data on June 12, 2024, according to which retail inflation was 4.75 percent in May, which was the lowest level in 12 months. There was some reduction in retail inflation in the month of April, but it was slightly higher than the month of May at 4.83 percent. Retail inflation was 4.81 percent in June 2023, while it

was 4.44 percent in July 2023.

Inflation is directly related to purchasing power. For example, if the inflation rate is 6 percent, then the value of Rs.100/- earned will be only Rs.94/- . Therefore, investors should invest according to the level of inflation, otherwise they will get less returns.

The rise and fall of inflation depend on the demand and supply of the product. If people have more money, they will buy more products and buying more products will increase the demand and if the supply is not according to the demand, the price of the products will increase. In this way, the market will get caught in the vicious cycle of inflation. Excessive flow of money in the market or shortage of products causes inflation. On the other hand, if the demand is less and the supply is more, then inflation will be less.

Customers buy goods from the retail market and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) measures the change in the price of the products available in the market. CPI measures the average price paid for products and services. Apart from crude oil, prices of products, cost of production, there are many other

things which play an important role in determining the retail inflation rate. At present, there are about 300 products since whose prices the retail inflation rate is decided.

In this way, inflation plays an important role in determining one's purchasing power. When inflation increases, the prices of both goods and services increase, which reduces the purchasing power of a person and the demand for goods and services decreases. Then, their production decreases, the company suffers losses, workers are laid off, employment generation decreases, etc. Due to this, economic activities slow down, and the pace of development is hampered.

Despite the lending interest rate remaining at a high level for the last few months, loan disbursement is increasing, and the pace of growth rate also remains fast. However, such a situation is an exception. HSBC India's PMI figure was 57.5 points in May 2024, which was 58.8 points in April, while the composite PMI was 60.50 points in May 2024, which was 61.50 points in April 2024. It is clear from the mentioned data that economic activities are booming.

Inflation in India is at a worrying level despite being within the tolerance limit set by the central bank. Therefore, the Reserve Bank of India has kept the policy rates unchanged in the monetary review. The central bank is very sensitive about inflation and it wants to keep the economy strong by maintaining a balance between inflation and growth rate, so that the common man does not face any problem and the pace of development also remains fast.

Satish Singh, Ahmedabad based Senior Columnist, Views are personal.

ASSOCHAM suggests strategic focus on capex ; review of MSME schemes in pre-Budget meeting with FM



NEW DELHI: Welcoming emphasis on fiscal consolidation, ASSOCHAM today expressed confidence that the Narendra Modi 3.0 government would proceed with a strategic focus on capital expenditure, prioritizing investment in infrastructure, education and healthcare , in the forthcoming Union Budget for 2024-25.

“We welcome the Government's emphasis on fiscal consolidation and believe it would proceed with a strategic focus on increasing capital expenditure. By prioritizing investments in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and other critical sectors, governments can stimulate economic growth while maintaining fiscal discipline.” ASSOCHAM President Sanjay Nayar said in his pre-Budget consultations with the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Another key area of focus , Nayar said, should be the MSMEs . “There is a pressing

need to establish a dedicated working group tasked with identifying underperforming schemes related to Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Such an initiative would systematically assess the effectiveness of current programs, pinpointing areas where interventions are falling short in supporting MSMEs. By conducting thorough evaluations and gathering empirical data, this group can recommend targeted reforms or adjustments to policies, ensuring that government initiatives align closely with the evolving needs and challenges faced by MSMEs”.

The ASSOCHAM pre-Budget presentation also suggested establishment of MSME universities across the country. Such moves would boost employment generation through MSMEs, while enhancing entrepreneurship in the country.

“There is a compelling need to establish MSME universities with specialized courses and training programs aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) on a global scale. These universities would serve as hubs of knowledge and innovation, equipping MSMEs with essential skills in areas such as technology adoption, financial management, quality management, market strategy, and compliance with international regulations”, the ASSOCHAM President said.

BharatPe, Invest India join hands to drive financial inclusion via ODOP initiative



NEW DELHI: Fintech platform BharatPe on Thursday partnered with Invest India to promote digital financial inclusion and financial literacy across One District One Product (ODOP) producers and sellers in the country.

The partnership will focus on increasing digital financial literacy among the ODOP stakeholders across several districts.

“Through the financial inclusion sessions, ODOP stakeholders, including artisans, small business owners, and local entrepreneurs, will gain access to essential financial tools and knowledge, fostering a supportive ecosystem for local businesses,” said Nirvuti Rai, MD and CEO, Invest India.

The move will enhance access to digital payment mediums among the ODOP merchants in tier 3-4 cities and rural areas.

The objective of ODOP is to convert each district into a manufacturing and export hub by identifying products with export potential in the specific district. “This also aligns well with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of fostering a balanced regional development across all districts of the country through ODOP,” said Nalin Negi, CEO of BharatPe.

INTERNATIONAL

US citizenship for 5 lakh likely under Joe Biden's new plan

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden is taking an expansive, election-year step to offer relief to potentially hundreds of thousands of immigrants without legal status in the US — aiming to balance his own aggressive crackdown on the border earlier this month that enraged advocates and many Democratic lawmakers.

The White House announced on Tuesday that the Biden administration will, in the coming months, allow certain spouses of US citizens without legal status to apply for permanent residency and eventually, citizenship. The move could affect upwards of half a million immigrants, according to senior administration officials.

To qualify, an immigrant must have lived in the United States for 10 years as of Monday



and be married to a US citizen. If a qualifying immigrant's application is approved, he or she would have three years to apply for a green card, and receive a temporary work permit and be shielded from deportation in the meantime.

About 50,000 non-citizen children with a parent who is married to a US citizen could

also potentially qualify for the same process, according to senior administration officials who briefed reporters on the proposal on condition of anonymity. There is no requirement on how long the couple must have been married, and no one becomes eligible after Monday.

That means immigrants who reach that 10-year mark

any time after June 17, 2024, will not qualify for the programme, according to the officials. Senior administration officials said they anticipate the process would be open for applications by the end of the summer, and fee to apply have yet to be determined.

Biden will speak about his plans at an event at the White House, which will also mark the 12th anniversary of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals programme, a popular Obama-era directive that offered deportation protections and temporary work permits for young immigrants who lack legal status. White House officials privately encouraged Democrats in the House, which is in recess this week, to travel back to Washington to attend the announcement.

India protests pro-Khalistan event in Canada

NEW DELHI: India on Thursday lodged a strong protest with Canada over Khalistan extremists holding a so-called "citizens court" and burning an effigy of PM Narendra Modi outside the Indian consulate in Vancouver, sources said.

India issued a note verbale or diplomatic note to the Canadian high commission conveying its serious objection to the latest actions by the Khalistan elements, they said.

In the note, India is also learnt to have communicated to the high commission its anguish over the space being given to the Khalistani separatists in Canada by the Justin Trudeau



government. New Delhi's protest came a day after the Canadian Parliament observed a "moment of silence" in the memory of Khalistan extremist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was

gunned down in Surrey, British Columbia, in June last year.

On June 14, PM Modi and his Canadian counterpart Justin Trudeau met briefly on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Italy.

UK MP faces backlash over 'Who Will Speak for Kashmir' letter



FW DESK

Conservative British MP Marco Longhi has come under fire after writing a public letter urging the British Pakistani community in Dudley North to vote for him in the upcoming UK polls on July 4. In his letter, released on the occasion of Eid al-Adha, Longhi emphasized his condemnation of India's "illegal actions in Kashmir" and pledged to continue raising the issue in Parliament.

Longhi's letter highlighted his commitment to speaking against what he described as the Indian government's "atrocities" towards the people of Kashmir. He also criticized the re-election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, predicting tougher times for Kashmiris and condemning Modi's plan to pursue full statehood for Kashmir, which Longhi claimed would strip Kashmiris of their special status.

The letter has sparked significant backlash. Rajesh Agrawal of the Labour Party criticized Longhi's actions as a "shameful attempt to divide communities," offensive to both Muslim and Hindu communities. Agrawal called for Conservative leader Rishi Sunak to withdraw support for Longhi's campaign and to apologize for what he described as divisive and alienating tactics.

United States: Putin's visit to North Korea a 'cause for concern'

WASHINGTON: Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to North Korea is "cause for great concern", the US government said.

"The deepening cooperation between Russia and North Korea is something that should be of concern," the US Department of Defence spokesman Pat Ryder said on Tuesday in Washington.

"Especially to anyone interested in maintaining peace and stability on the Korean peninsula, but also supporting the people of Ukraine as they continue to fight against Russian aggression," Ryder added.

White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said that the



delivery of weapons from North Korea had contributed to Russia being able to wage its brutal war in Ukraine. "We don't believe any country should give Putin a

platform to promote the war of aggression that we're currently seeing in Ukraine and Russia," Jean-Pierre said, adding that the war "is blatantly violating

the UN Charter and working to undermine the international system". North Korea, which is largely isolated internationally due to its nuclear weapons programme, has been accused by Ukraine's Western allies of supplying weapons and ammunition to Russia.

The governments in Moscow and Pyongyang have repeatedly dismissed those claims.

Putin was received by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang on Tuesday evening.

According to observers, the two-day visit will, among other things, focus on arms deliveries from Pyongyang, which Moscow intends to use in its war against Ukraine.

Israel announces ambitious plan to 'phase out' fossil fuels by 2050



JERUSALEM: The Israeli Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure has announced a strategic plan for the country's energy transition from traditional fossil fuels to biological, synthetic, and hydrogen fuels by 2050.

The plan's purpose is to adapt the country's economic growth to global climatic requirements and modernization. Xinhua news agency reported, citing a statement issued by the ministry on Sunday.

Under the comprehensive plan, Israel will ensure reliable fuel supply to every economic sector, enhance emergency preparedness in fuel supply, and promote the production and broader application of green fuels.

These goals would be aligned with the Israeli government's carbon reduction targets and expected changes in the country's energy mix.

Specifically, the plan aims to shut down the massive oil refineries in Haifa Bay, switch to imports instead of local production of petroleum distillates, and establish six or seven hydrogen fueling stations by 2030.

It will also promote transport electrification and the use of hydrogen power, synthetic fuels, and biofuels, to meet the Israeli government's target of reducing CO2 emissions from the transportation sector by 96 per cent by 2050.

China says Dalai Lama must correct his political propositions for talks; asks US to respect its sensitivities over Tibet



BEIJING: China on Thursday asked the Dalai Lama to thoroughly reflect and completely correct his political propositions for it to hold talks with him and asked the US to respect its sensitivity and importance to Tibet-related issues as Washington is set to pass a tough Tibet policy law.

On the central government's contact and talks with the 14th Dalai Lama China's policy is consistent and clear, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told a media briefing.

The key is that the 14th Dalai Lama must thoroughly reflect on and completely correct his political propositions, he said, without elaborating.

China watched warily the high-powered US Congressional delegation's visit to Dharamsala and its meeting with the 88-year-old Dalai Lama besides the strong remarks made by its leading members US House Foreign Affairs Committee chair Michael McCaul and former US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi questioning China's policy towards Tibet and their call to Beijing to hold talks with the Dalai Lama.

Their visit came as US President Joe Biden was set to sign the Tibet policy bill adopted by both the US Senate and the House of Representatives. The bill awaits Biden's signature to make it into law.

World's citizens to gather at UN to showcase yoga's power to unite

UNITED NATIONS: Citizens from around the globe will gather here on Friday to show the uniting power of yoga across boundaries and divisions as the world organisation celebrates the 10th International Day of Yoga.

The theme for this year's celebration is 'Yoga for Women Empowerment' and it will be featured on the North Lawn of the UN headquarters where diplomats, UN officials and employees, and aficionados of the ancient art will perform asanas in synchronicity. Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed is expected to participate in the event and a video message from General Assembly President Dennis Francis is anticipated.

The global celebrations with millions participating every year were set in motion by the General Assembly in December 2014 when it declared June 21 as the



International Day of Yoga in a resolution proposed by India, cosponsored by 175 countries and adopted unanimously.

The date was chosen because the Summer Solstice falls on that day in the northern hemisphere most years, although it is a day early this year and next.

The yoga celebration is here at 6 p.m. New York Time (3:30 a.m. IST Saturday) will

be webcast by the UN (<https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1b/k1bvb85iak>). With a blazing temperature of 35 degrees Centigrade, it will be held on a day that is forecast to be the hottest so far this year. India's UN Mission is cosponsoring it with the UN Secretariat.

Last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the yoga celebration at the UN and it

made it to the Guinness Book of World Records for the most nationalities -- 135 -- participating in yoga practice at one place.

On the day of the Solstice, Thursday, the annual 'Mind over Madness' event will be held at Times Square with day-long yoga sessions creating an island of calm and serenity amid the cacophony and the bustle of the place known as 'the Crossroads of the World'. India's Consulate General is one of the sponsors of the event that runs from 7.30 a.m. to 8.30 p.m. and features seven yoga classes run by instructors of several ethnicities and national origin showing yoga's universality.

PM Modi presented the idea of an International Day of Yoga in September 2014 at his first address to the General Assembly, declaring, "Yoga is an invaluable gift from our ancient tradition".

The Two Convictions in June, Yet American Democracy Asserts

GOPAL MISRA
With the battle lines finally drawn during the ongoing presidential poll to elect a new President, perhaps, the planet earth's most powerful leader, the world is witnessing a bizarre breathtaking political drama. The US being the only superpower in geopolitics, its elections have worldwide concerns and repercussions.

In this much keenly watched presidential election, two old horses, Joe Biden, 82 seeking re-election as a nominee of the Democratic Party, and Donald Trump, 78, a Republican Party candidate, considered to be a bull in a fine china shop, should have volunteered to be superannuated years ago. It is interesting to watch whether Trump successfully wrests back the coveted Whitehouse from Biden, who represents the well entrenched military-industrial complex. Trump, perhaps, represents last minute efforts, to safeguard precious American resources for keeping its position of being the world's only superpower.

Unfolding of a Shakespeare Tragedy
It is difficult to predict whether the political confrontation in the US with each side adopting questionable means to embarrass the other, would

be an extension of a comedy show or might be unfolding of a Shakespearean tragedy. The sudden decline of American influence might adversely affect the entire mankind. In spite of its innumerable inadequacies, the country still represents the American Dream of democracy, fair play and a land of opportunities. Even Trump has not invoked the issue that Biden is a Roman Catholic. In the history of the US, Biden is the first Roman Catholic president, who could complete the full term in the office. Earlier, John F. Kennedy was the first Catholic to be elected President in 1961, but two years later, he was assassinated in 1963.

In spite of the evolution of racial and religious tolerance in the US, mankind, however, is watching the political developments in the country.

The month of June in 2024 will be remembered for two convictions, punishing Trump for paying hush money to a porn star, Stormy Daniels. Trump's attorney, Michael Cohen, according to a Wall Street Journal report, has paid a huge sum of USD 130,000, equivalent to Rs 1.20 crores in India, to keep this sizzling sexual encounter under wraps. Trump, however, has not been convicted for his irrepressible sexual venture, but for manipulating records just contesting the presidential poll to hide the recipient of this huge sum.



Son's Drug Addiction

It is quite intriguing for a president to declare that he is proud of his son's conviction in a drug abuse case. Biden did it recently too before an international media at the G-7 summit in Italy.

Interestingly, neither Trump thinks that he has done any wrong by liaising with a woman of easy virtues for a one night sexual odyssey nor Biden feels he should be ashamed of the deeds of his son for indulging in drugs. Both agree that the prison term is just miscarriage of justice or a political vendetta.

Biden's assertion before the world press that he is proud of Hunter, while his two pretty granddaughters, Maisey, 23, and her elder sister, Finnegan, were seen smiling at their grandpa's admiration for their father.

trious families, who dominate the politics of the country.

Trump claims that he is being framed as a part of a sinister political conspiracy, but doesn't deny his close proximity or sexual extravaganzas with the girls associated with the darkest alleys of show business. On the other hand, Biden assures that he would not extend Presidential pardon to Hunter, but fails to explain why he is proud of his son.

It is being asked in India and other democracies across the continents, whether he approves the business practices and sexual exploits of Hunter. In spite of public rhetoric of the Biden administration against China, the President hasn't cared to explain Hunter's close economic ties with a Chinese company and Borisma Holdings, one of the largest investors in Ukraine's natural gas business. Hunter father's a daughter and refuses to accept her. His efforts to hide that her mother was being sexually exploited

was finally exposed, when under the judicial direction, the paternity test finally confirmed him as her father.

It is not known whether Biden is also proud of Hunter for abandoning the mother of Maisey and Finnegan, and now lives with the widow of his elder brother.

The Friends

The circle of friends in the Biden family comprises Jacob Elordi, an Australian actor, who has earned worldwide fame in Kissing Booth, and his new girlfriend Jade Giannulli.

The social circle of the first family comprises people like Giannulli's parents, Massimo and Lori Loughing, both actors, but were sentenced for five months jail for manipulating the college admission to Olivia and her elder sister, Isabella Rose. They, however, finally succeeded in getting the daughters admitted to the South California University, perhaps, by coughing up a half-million US dollars to the University. In this backdrop of corruption and no holds bar to win power and wealth dominates the candidate vying for power in Washington.

Gopal Misra has been associated with national and international media. His books on journalism and geo-politics have been well-appreciated. Views are personal.

Nikhil Gupta produced in US court, pleads not guilty in 'murder plot'

NEW YORK: Nikhil Gupta, who has been accused of being involved in a 'murder-for-hire' plot against a Khalistani separatist, has told a federal court here that he is not guilty.

Appearing before Magistrate Judge James Cott on Monday, he made the "not guilty" plea through his lawyer Jeffrey Chabrowe. This was his first appearance before a US court after he was extradited on Friday from the Czech Republic.

Outside the courtroom, Chabrowe told reporters that the case is a "complicated matter for India and the US" and there should be "no rush to judgment".

"We will pursue his defence rigorously," he said. He added that information will come out that will call into question the prosecution version. Assistant Federal Prosecutor Ashley Nichols told the court that Gupta is charged in the murder-for-hire plot.

Cott ordered to keep him in custody till the next court date on June 28, when a conference on the case is scheduled.

Chabrowe did not ask for bail while reserving the right to ask for it later.

According to the indictment -- the chargesheet -- Gupta, who also uses the name "Nick", is accused of participating in a plot to assassinate the leader of a "US-based organisation that advocates for the secession of Punjab state" and the establishment of a "Sikh sovereign state called Khalistan".

The group's leader, who is not named in the court documents, is Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a lawyer with US and Canadian citizenships, who lives in New York and runs a campaign for Khalistan.

Designated as a terrorist by the Indian government, Pannun leads the organisation called Sikhs for Justice which is conducting what it calls a "referendum" on Khalistan among Sikhs.

Gupta, a slightly-built 52-year-old, entered the courtroom dressed in black pants and a sweater and sat beside his lawyer at the defence table.

He and his lawyer talked before the proceedings began, at one point both of them laughed during their conversation.



the marshals escorting him made him take off the sweater and give it to his lawyer because he was not allowed to have it.

He was left with the T-shirt he wore underneath.

Before entering the courtroom, his handcuffs had been removed. Chabrowe told the magistrate the conditions are bad at the Metropolitan Detention Centre where Gupta is being held and that he has not eaten because vegetarian food was not available. He said that it was a matter of religion for Gupta.

Cott told the lawyer and prosecutors to take it up with the prison officials and report to him if it was not resolved in 24 hours. Chabrowe also told the magistrate that arrangements should be made to allow Gupta to pray.

During the proceedings when the lawyers and the defendants had to identify themselves, Cott greeted him, as is customary, when it was his turn, "Good afternoon, Mr Gupta".

The magistrate, seated on a podium with the US Seal and Flag behind him, read him his rights to a fair trial such as his right to remain silent if interrogated and the right to a lawyer.

He also said that since he was a foreign citizen, the US government may have to inform consular officials.

Nichols said that although it was not mandatory in this case, the government would do so.

Cott reminded the prosecution of the rules for a fair trial that requires them to provide the defence with all information that is "favourable to the accused" as soon as it becomes available to enable the defence to make its case.

to follow this, the case can be dismissed and disciplinary action can be taken against the lawyers, he said.

He later put this in a written order. Jagjit Singh, an associate of Pannun in his law practice, was in the courtroom observing the proceedings. After the proceedings ended, he recorded videos outside the court about the case.

Outlining the case against Gupta, the chargesheet said that he was recruited to "orchestrate the assassination".

Gupta, in turn, the document said, contacted a person he believed was a "criminal associate, but was, in fact, a confidential source working with US law enforcement".

That person introduced him to a "purported hitman" who was an undercover US law enforcement officer who was offered \$100,000 to carry out the assassination, the document said.

Gupta arranged for an advance of \$15,000 to be delivered by an associate to the presumed "hitman", who was also given details about Pannun and also told him that a Canada-based Khalistan leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was killed in British Columbia had been a "target", according to the document.

The prosecution said that Gupta had himself described his "involvement in narcotics and weapons trafficking".

Gupta was arrested in the Czech Republic last June at the request of the US.

His extradition was held up by his appeal to the Czech Constitutional Court earlier this year against his extradition, which was rejected last month clearing the way for him to be sent to the US.



Sikh pilgrims chant slogans before leaving for Pakistan to observe the death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in Amritsar on Friday. Hundreds of Indian Sikh pilgrims are expected to arrive in Pakistan to celebrate the 185th death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh the leader of the Sikh empire. PHOTOS: PRABHJOT GILL



Charanjit Kaur, Mother of pro-Khalistan activist Avtar Singh Khanda being honoured by SGPC President and Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) president Simranjit Singh Mann with other party leaders during a Bhog ceremony (final prayer) of Sri Akhand Path of Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy book) of first anniversary of Sikh separatist leader Avtar Singh Khanda at the Gurdwara Baba Atal Rai Sahib in Amritsar on June 15 PHOTO-PRABHJOT GILL

Kalki Koechlin starts shooting for 'Her Story' in Antichan-des-Frotignes, France



MUMBAI: Actress Kalki Koechlin, who was recently featured in the streaming movie 'Kho Gaye Hum Kahan', has commenced shooting for her next film 'Her Story' in France. In the film, Kalki portrays the character of Olivia, a self-deprecating American writer. The shooting is currently underway at Antichan-des-Frotignes in the Pyrenees. Discussing her role, Kalki told to media "Olivia is an intellectual from New York, with roots in France, who returns to write her grandmother's story. She finds herself half living the past and half predicting the future as the Covid-19 pandemic hits the world." She further explained that the film is a comedy exploring how patterns can be read out of practically anything and how individuals often feel accountable for the world's workings.

Talking Points

Narvijay Yadav



The highest demand for hotel rooms in India has been coming from temple towns. Hotel and air ticket bookings for religious places like Puri, Varanasi, and Ujjain increased by 60 percent, but the election results impacted the trend adversely.

Religious tourism in India has grown by 16 percent per annum since 2022. After the consecration (pran pratishtha) of Ram Lalla in January 2024, a huge increase was seen in the number of people reaching Ayodhya. Ram temple had the potential of drawing up to 5 crore visitors every year. This number is double that of Tirupati temple in Andhra Pradesh, where 2.5 crore people visit annually, offering the highest donations of Rs 1200 crore. Around 1.5 lakh pilgrims started reaching Ram temple every day. As a result, 25,000 new jobs were expected to be created in the hotel and travel industry. The Mahatma International Airport of Ayodhya, built for Rs 1450 crore, was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 30 December. It has been designed to accommo-

Religious Tourism Gets Unexpected Jolt



date 10 lakh passengers annually. At the beginning of the year, people were so excited that booking of air tickets to Ayodhya surged by 150 percent, and flight searches for this destination also saw a 70 percent jump. Oyo Rooms founder Ritesh Agarwal claims that the highest demand for hotel rooms is coming from temple towns. This trend grew upward in the last two years. Bookings for religious places like Puri, Varanasi, and Ujjain increased by 60 percent. Airfares for these cities have also increased by 20 percent compared to last year. Other religious destinations include Amritsar, Katra, Puri, Shirdi, Haridwar, Rishikesh and Tirupati. The number of people visiting Ayodhya suddenly shot up and an 80 percent increase was noticed in the number of people looking for hotel rooms. Till last month, there was a 70 percent jump in the number of people using the Oyo app in Ayodhya, while this figure was 50 percent in Goa and 60 percent in Nainital. The unexpected defeat of the BJP in Ayodhya was bound to have side effects. The storm of tourists that had been blowing in Ram's city since January has stopped after the announcement of the poll results. The anger of the people saddened by the defeat of the BJP erupted on social media and a campaign to boycott Ayodhya started. The result was that the interest of tourists and pilgrims in Ayodhya diminished. SpiceJet airline stopped its direct flight from Hyderabad to Ayodhya, which was launched two months ago. In February, this airline had direct flights to Ayodhya from Chennai, Bangalore, Jaipur, Patna, Darbhanga and Hyderabad. Its direct flights can now be availed only from Delhi and Ahmedabad. Passengers from other cities can no longer enjoy SpiceJets direct flights. On top of that, an Islamic terrorist organization has threatened to blast the temple. The number of devotees reciting Hanuman Chalisa and chanting Jai Shri Ram on flights to Ayodhya is rapidly diminishing. The Government of India had allocated a fund of Rs 700 crore for various projects in

Khushi Kapoor reveals her 'opening move' to approach someone for a date

MUMBAI: Bollywood Actress Khushi Kapoor says her "opening move" to approach someone for a date involves seeking "shared interests" and building the conversation from there. Talking about her "opening move", Khushi told to media "I would seek a shared interest and build our conversation from there, discovering mutual likes. For instance, I might inquire about new movies that the opposite person would be eager to watch or if they have an interest in sports." She also mentioned that exploring new activities and reading the "about me" section of her date's profile is something she would do. New activities and reading the "about me section" of her date's profile are something she would do.



Exploring a new and enjoyable activity that neither of us has tried before could be a wonderful way to connect. Reading the 'About me' section of my date's profile would be helpful to see the kind of topics you can speak on," said the actress, who is rumoured to be dating actor Vedang Raina. **What's a perfect date for Khushi like?** "A perfect date for me would definitely be something private and special where I'm able to talk and get to know the other person in a more personal space, so there's no pressure and it's relaxed and fun," said the 23-year-old actress. "Anything that can be fun for both of us, like a game night at home or a movie marathon with our favourite food," she added. Khushi, who joined the 'Opening Move' campaign for the dating application Bumble, offered her two cents to young individuals navigating the world of online dating. She emphasised the importance of being open and authentic in their interactions.

All around Echoes of Yoga



SATISH SINGH The significance of Yoga Day has increased in the past years, the credit for which can be given to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Yoga Guru Baba Ramdev and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. "International Yoga Day" has started being celebrated on the initiative of the Prime Minister. This day is celebrated every year on 21st June. This is the longest day of the year and yoga is also necessary for longevity. This similarity between yoga and 21st June is amazing. This day was first celebrated in the year 2015. Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, while addressing the United Nations General Assembly on 27th September 2014, advocated celebrating Yoga Day. Later, 11th December 2014, 193 members of the United Nations approved the proposal to celebrate "International Yoga Day" on 21st June. Even though "International Yoga Day" was started on 21st June 2015, its history in India is more than 10,000 years old. Yoga is also mentioned in the Rigveda. A figure sitting in a yoga posture has also been found in the seal (coin) of Pashupati of the Indus Valley Civilization. Physical exercises are also mentioned in the Upanishads. The description of the current form of yoga is also found in the Kathopanishad. Along with the Bhagavad Gita, yoga is also mentioned in detail in the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata. Maharishi Patanjali is considered the father of yoga. Maharishi Patanjali



are very popular. Students from all corners of the world come here to study and after returning to their country they run yoga centres. Ever since "International Yoga Day" started being celebrated, its popularity has been increasing rapidly. An important reason for this is the benefits it provides. Today, man is suffering from human disorders like selfishness, anger, jealousy, hatred, etc., but these can be controlled with the help of yoga and people are also succeeding in doing so through yoga. Regular asanas and pranayama in life makes the body and mind healthy. To be honest, following yoga rules makes our life disciplined. Today children, young and old are all benefiting from yoga. Some people are enjoying a complete life by incorporating its spiritual aspect into their lives. Yoga helped keep millions of people healthy during the Corona period, otherwise the number of people who died untimely during the Corona pandemic would have been higher. In such a situation, it would be appropriate to say that the way people are benefiting from it, it seems that its popularity will soon wave all over the world. However, in India, partial politics is also being done regarding yoga. Some people are linking it to Surya Namaskar, but such allegations are baseless. It is true that Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the initiative to make it a day, but this day is related only to human health and welfare. *Satish Singh, Ahmedabad based Senior Columnist, Views are personal.*

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Diljit says appearing on 'The Tonight Show' is a dream come true for all Punjabi music lovers



NEW DELHI: Actor-singer Diljit Dosanjh, who made his debut on 'The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon', described the experience as a "dream come true" for all Punjabi music lovers around the world. Diljit is the first Indian artist to perform on the iconic late-night show. This upcoming appearance on 'The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon' sets a new benchmark for the 'Born to Shine' hit-maker. "It's an incredible honour to be invited onto 'The Tonight Show'. I can't wait to share my music and Punjabi culture with a global audience," said Diljit. The actor added: "This is a dream come true, not just for me, but for all the Punjabi music lovers around the world." In 2023, Diljit became the first-ever South Asian artist to headline the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival. He then embarked on his record-breaking world tour, 'Dil-Luminati', in Vancouver's BC Place Stadium, he became the first Indian artist to sell out the venue, drawing crowds in Oakland, Newark, Washington, and beyond. His latest movies include 'Crew' and the critically acclaimed Netflix biopic 'Amar Singh Chamkila'.

Question Paper Leaks: How Antier is Solving India's Pressing Issue Using Blockchain

FW DESK The future of a nation depends on its education system, and when the integrity of that system is compromised, the repercussions are felt across society. For the last many years, India has struggled with the problem of question paper leaks, which continue to undermine fair assessments and public sector recruitments. However, Mohali based organization, Antier, has achieved a significant breakthrough by utilizing blockchain to address this issue. The blockchain consulting firm, deployed EduBlock Pro, a software system to conduct a government exam for Punjab State Aids Control Society (PSACS). This was a recruitment exam for staff nurses and lab technicians. **Rising incidents of question paper leaks** In 2023 alone, a spate of paper leak incidents impacted the education sector in Maharashtra, Assam, Telangana, and Rajasthan. Further, in the last five years, 41 instances of exam leaks were reported across 15 states, as a result of which nearly 1.4 crore job applicants suffered delayed appointments. Recently, in May 2024, one of the most prestigious medical entrance examinations, NEET-UG, faced paper leaks in Bihar. The system is plagued by rampant corruption, bribery, and favoritism, giving rise to such unethical practices and reduced public trust. **The problem is more serious than we think** Public confidence in the education system and recruitment processes is severely undermined, leading to widespread skepticism and disillusionment.



Paper leaks create an uneven playing field, where undeserving candidates gain an unfair advantage, impacting meritocracy and fairness. Numerous instances of delayed job appointments and academic admissions cause significant disruptions in the lives of millions of students and job applicants. Additionally, the need for re-conducting exams and investigations into leaks incurs substantial financial costs and diverts resources that could be used for developmental purposes. **How EduBlock Pro Works?** EduBlock Pro, Antier's flagship product, leverages advanced blockchain cryptographic techniques to secure the examination process with minimal human interference. It begins with encrypted student registration and secure question uploads by contributors. The exam board locks and validates questions using a public and private key infrastructure. On exam day, invigilators decrypt and unlock papers for secure distribution. By leveraging blockchain's inherent security, EduBlock Pro protects exam content against unauthorized access and manipulation. It uses Web3.0-based sequential encryption, asymmetric digital signature-based encryption, multiparty computation, and automated evaluation, ensuring a robust and transparent examination process, effectively preventing question paper leaks. "As demonstrated in the case of the recent PSACS hiring drive, hundreds of candidates applied and appeared for the examination held through the integration of EduBlock Pro. This affirmed the integrity and accuracy of the examination procedure, alongside the efficiency and effectiveness of the product." - Says Vikram Singh, Founder & CEO Antier. **EduBlock Pro aligns with UNESCO's SDG 9** EduBlock Pro aligns with UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 9 by contributing to inclusive industrialization and resilient infrastructure. The platform not only secures examinations but also promotes transparency and equitable governance. EduBlock Pro ensures the integrity of educational processes, fostering trust and reliability. This innovative approach supports fair practices in the education sector, creating a more inclusive and equitable environment. EduBlock Pro's vision extends beyond merely preventing exam malpractices; it aims to transform governance standards, making them more transparent, accountable, and accessible to all. **Antier - India's largest blockchain development company** With a strong foothold in building a multitude of decentralized applications and experience of almost two decades in the IT industry, Antier is India's leading blockchain consulting firm. Based in Mohali, Punjab, Antier boasts of a 700+ strong workforce and an accomplishment of delivering more than 1000 projects.