

REGION

2



BHAGWANT MAAN QUESTIONS SHOULD I SEND PROTESTING FARMERS TO LAHORE, IF THEY ARE NOT ALLOWED TO ENTER DELHI TO SORT OUT MATTERS

CORPORATES & INDUSTRY

5



MANUFACTURING PMI DIPS TO 58.1 IN JULY, SECTOR REMAINS STRONG

POTPOURRI

8



SIDHARTH MALHOTRA WISHES HIS 'LOVE' KIARA ON HER B'DAY: 'YOU'RE THE KINDEST SOUL I KNOW'

Punjab PWD Minister Holds Meeting with SDMs & DROs; Reviews National Highways Land Acquisition Progress

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Public Works and Power Minister Harbhajan Singh ETO held a meeting with Sub-Divisional Magistrates (SDMs) and District Revenue Officers (DROs) from across the state to review the status of land acquisition for National Highways.

The PWD Minister along with Secretary PWD Priyank Bharti, Chief Engineer, National Highways, Punjab PWD (B & R) J.S. Tung and RO NHAI, Chandigarh, Vipnesh Sharma reviewed the progress of ongoing projects and discussed strategies to overcome challenges in land acquisition during the meeting that lasted for more than three hours. Cabinet Minister ETO emphasized the importance of expediting the land acquisition process to ensure timely completion of National Highway projects. He directed the SDMs to resolve any pending issues and ensure that landowners receive fair compensation. He men-



tioned that this review meeting would serve as the benchmark for performance evaluations in the upcoming meeting, which will be convened shortly.

The cabinet minister also appreciated the performance of officers who have achieved zero pendency in land acquisition, recognizing their dedication and commitment to efficient project execution. He encouraged other officers to follow their lead and strive for similar excellence.

Meanwhile, the SDMs and

DROs apprised the Minister regarding the current status and ongoing procedures of disbursement of reward money, and efforts to convince landowners to give possession of their land for National Highway projects wherever required. They shared updates on their efforts to engage with landowners by holding camps in villages, meeting one on one with landowners to address their concerns, and facilitating the acquisition process.

Concluding the meeting, PWD Minister Harbhajan Singh ETO emphasized that the Punjab government, under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann, remains steadfast in its commitment to accelerating infrastructure development and enhancing connectivity through the National Highways. He said state's progress in land acquisition will undoubtedly pave the way for seamless project execution, ultimately benefiting the people of Punjab.

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GST collections record 10 per cent YoY growth, cross Rs 1.8 Trillion in July '24

NEW DELHI: The Finance Ministry reported on Thursday that Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections for July 2024 totalled Rs 1.82 trillion, representing a 10.3 per cent increase compared to the same month last year. This figure also surpasses the Rs 1.74 trillion collected in June 2024.

While July's receipts did not match the record Rs 2.1 trillion collected in April, financial analysts view the current figures as consistent with the overall robust trend in GST revenue.

Experts anticipate further growth as the country approaches the festive season, traditionally a period of increased consumer spending.

It is worth noting that July's GST figures reflect sales from June 2024, typically considered a slower month for commerce before the onset of festive activities.

At the net level, after accounting for refunds of Rs



As per data released by the government, total refunds stood at Rs 16,283 crore in July. Net GST collection after accounting for refunds was over Rs 1.66 trillion (Rs 1,65,793 crore), a growth of 14.4 per cent. Gross revenues from domestic activities grew 8.9 per cent to Rs 1.34 trillion (Rs 1,34 lakh crore) in July. The GST revenue from imports jumped 14.2 per cent to Rs 48,039 crore. The data clearly suggests that overall GST collection has shown an encouraging trend.

16,283 crore, GST collections showed a more substantial increase of 14.4 per cent compared to last year. This growth occurred despite a 19.4 per cent year-on-year decrease in refunds issued.

The data reveals that producer states continue to be the primary contributors to GST revenue. Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu emerged as the largest collectors by value, underscoring their significant roles in the national economy.

These figures provide insights into the current state of India's economic activity and tax compliance. As the country moves into its festive season, stakeholders will be closely monitoring GST collections for indications of broader economic trends.

ED raid being planned over Chakravayuh speech, claims Rahul Gandhi



NEW DELHI: Congress MP and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi has claimed that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) was planning a raid on him.

He said some ED insiders had told him about a raid being planned, and that he was 'waiting with open arms'.

In a post on X on Friday, Rahul Gandhi said, "Apparently, 2 in 1 didn't like my Chakravayuh speech. ED 'insiders' tell me a raid is being planned. Waiting with open arms, @dir_ed. Chai and biscuits on me." He was referring to his July 29 speech in the Lok Sabha during a discussion on the Union Budget.

The Congress leader had alleged that the "NDA government had stabbed the middle class in the front and the back with announcements in Budget 2024 amid an atmosphere of fear across the country."

While referring to Mahabharata, he said, "Thousands of years ago, in Kurukshetra, six people trapped Abhimanyu in a 'Chakravayuh' and killed him. I did a little research and found out that 'Chakravayuh' is also known as 'Padmavyuh' -- which means 'Lotus formation'... In the 21st century, a new 'Chakravayuh' has been formed... What was done with Abhimanyu, is being done with India -- the youth, farmers, women, small and medium businesses."

BJP MP Anurag Thakur slammed Rahul Gandhi over the Chakravayuh statement and said the country has seen many "Chakravayuh of Congress Party".

He attacked Congress by counting seven Chakravayuh while saying that the first Chakravayuh was Congress itself, which divided the country.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget 2024 in the Lok Sabha on July 23.

SC of India suggests identifying 'creamy layer' in SC-STs



NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday suggested the application of the "creamy layer" principle to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) for availing benefits of affirmative action.

A 7-judge Constitution Bench was dealing with the question of whether a sub-classification amongst reserved category groups for giving more beneficial treatment would be permissible under the Constitution.

In a 6:1 decision, the majority overturned its 2004 judgement, which had ruled against giving preferential treatment to certain sub-castes within scheduled castes (SCs). However, the apex court clarified that while providing for sub-classification, the government would not be entitled to reserve 100 per cent seats available for SCs in favour of a particular sub-class to the exclusion of other castes in the List.

In his detailed opinion, Justice B.R. Gavai said: "When the 9-Judge Bench in Indra Sawhney held that applicability of such a test (creamy layer test) insofar as Other Backward Classes are concerned would advance equality as enshrined in the Constitution, then why such a test should not also be made applicable to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe."

"Can a child of IAS/IPS or Civil Service officers be equated with a child of a disadvantaged member belonging to Scheduled Castes, studying in a Gram Panchayat/Zilla Parishad school in a village?" he asked.

SGPC invites descendants of Rai Bular to come to India

Government should issue visas to descendants of Rai Bular on occasion of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Prakash Gurburab: Dharmi

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has sent invitations to four descendants of Rai Bular, an ardent devotee of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, living in Pakistan to visit India to attend the Prakash Gurburab (birth anniversary) celebrations of the first Sikh Guru coming in the month of November.

In the invitation letter sent to four families including Rai Muhammad Salim Akram Bhatti, a descendant of Rai Bular, the SGPC said that the Prakash Gurburab of Sri Guru Nanak Dev will be celebrated on November 15, 2024 in Amritsar, Sultanpur Lodhi, Dera Baba Nanak, Batala, Delhi and Nanakmatta (Uttarakhand), so the descending



family of Rai Bular should come to India between November 1 to 30, 2024 to participate in the Prakash Gurburab celebrations of the Guru. The SGPC has also assured to arrange all the accommodation and travel expenses of these families upon their arrival in India.

In this regard, SGPC President Harjinder Singh Dharmi said that the government should issue visas to the descendants of Rai Bular and allow them to visit India so that they can come here and participate in the

Prakash Gurburab celebrations of Sri Guru Nanak Dev and also see the painting of Rai Bular Ji installed at Central Sikh Museum in Sri Harmandir Sahib as a memorial. He said that Rai Bular's family has a mutually respectful relationship with the Sikhs because Rai Bular's place in history is important as an ardent devotee of Sri Guru Nanak Dev.

The SGPC President said that despite the fact that the SGPC had given invitation letters to this family several times and

wrote to the government, they were not given Indian visas and now the government should seriously consider this time. He said that earlier in the year 2022, when Rai Bular's painting was installed in the Central Sikh Museum, then also the SGPC had sent an invitation to the family to visit India on that occasion, but they could not come as Indian visas were not granted to them. The SGPC President expressed hope that this time the government will respect the sentiments of Sikhs by issuing visas to the descendants of Rai Bular Ji to visit India.

It may be mentioned that Mehta Kalyan Das, the father of Sri Guru Nanak Dev, worked for Rai Bular Ji. Rai Bular was an ardent devotee of Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji, who recognized the divine light in Guru at an early age. Rai Bular Ji gave thousands of acres of his property in the name of Sri Guru Nanak Dev, which is currently in the name of Gurdwara Sri Nankana Sahib.

EC hints at imminent Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir

FW DESK

In a clear indication that assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir are imminent, the Election Commission (EC) has directed the union territory administration to transfer officers posted in their home districts. This standard pre-election exercise aims to ensure impartiality and fairness.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during a visit to Srinagar in June, had assured that assembly polls would be conducted in the union territory and statehood would be restored. The Supreme Court, in its hearing on the Article 370 case last year, instructed the EC to hold elections in the union territory by September 30, 2024.

The EC's communication



to J&K's chief secretary and chief electoral officer said that no official connected directly with polls shall be allowed to continue in the present district (revenue district) of posting if she/he is posted in her/his home district or if she/he has completed three years in that district during the last four years or would be completing three years on or before September 30, 2024. The directive aligns with similar instructions issued to the chief secretaries of Maharashtra, Haryana, and Jharkhand, where elections are also due.

Wayanad Tragedy: GPS coordinates, aerial drone pictures used by rescuers to locate survivors

A family of four is rescued from an isolated house giving hope to hundreds of rescuers

WAYANAD: Rescue teams on Friday used GPS coordinates from aerial drone pictures and cell phones, including the last location of people who lived in the landslides-hit areas of Wayanad to help locate survivors, amidst accelerated search operations after the completion of the 190-foot-long Bailey bridge by the Army.

A family of four was rescued from an isolated house in an area near Padavetti Kunnu on the fourth day of the deadly landslides, giving hope to hundreds of rescuers,



As the Bailey bridge helped the rescue teams to move the heavy machinery, including excavators, and ambulances to the worst-affected Mundakkai and Chooralmala hamlets.

The search and rescue operations that resumed early morning received an impetus

According to official sources, the extent of human loss will emerge when rescuers clear houses covered by debris and wooden logs using heavy machinery.

Authorities reported that many more body parts had been collected and genetic testing was under way to identify the remains. Earlier in the day, Kerala ADGP MR Ajith Kumar said 300 people were still missing.

Around 40 rescue teams along with cadaver dogs are conducting search operations in six zones of the landslides-hit areas -- Attamalla and Aaranmala, Mundakkai, PUNCHIRIMATTAM, Vellarimala village, GVHSS Vellarimala and riverbank, officials said.

Wayanad landslide: Death toll reaches nearly 300



WAYANAD: The death toll in the Wayanad landslide disaster on Friday reached 297, and missing more than 200 people.

The rescue operations continued on the fourth day of the state's worst-ever natural calamity.

More than one thousand-member rescue team drawn from various forces besides locals divided into nine groups are working tirelessly to help people and search for the missing ones.

The worst-affected landslide areas are Churalpara, Vellarimala, Mundakkayil and PUNCHIRIMATTAM.

With a 190-foot Bailey Bridge now erected, the connectivity between Churalmalai and Mundakkayil has been restored.

Sniffer dogs have also been pressed into service. The rescue team is also equipped with heavy earth-moving equipment.

An officer heading the operations said there were some houses buried in one of the affected places where they were headed.

"Around 10 houses were there at the place we are reaching soon. According to what we are being told there might be some people, maybe alive," said the official.

Currently, there are now 91 relief camps where 9,328 people have been evacuated safely.

Nearly 50% posts of teaching staff in govt educational institutes in Haryana vacant

SATISH HANDA

University Grant Commission (UGC) has expressed deep concern over nearly 50% posts of teaching staff in government schools and colleges in the state are lying vacant and has demanded detailed report as regard total number of posts and the teachers working in these educational institutes immediately raising a question why vacant posts in the educational institutes are not being filled up by the state education department.

According to information, there are 10 state universities, 182 government colleges having a total number of 5416 teaching staff, which include more than 2000 lecturers working on contract basis in the colleges, as against 7986 vacancies and rest of 2570 posts for the teaching staff in colleges lying vacant since a long time. Apart from this, there are no principals in 80 colleges in the state. Punjab and Haryana High Court, too, had given six months time to fill up all vacancies for the posts of lecturers in government colleges on a writ moved in the court as regard acute shortage of teaching staff in government colleges. During year 2010, UGC had fixed minimum qualification NET and Phd for the post of Assistant Professor in colleges, which was also not implemented by a large number of colleges in the state when a Single Bench in the High Court had directed



to implement the same in 2020 and now the case is under trial in Double Bench in the High Court.

Districtwise requirement of teaching staff and shortage in government colleges has been identified as shortage of 30 lecturers out of total number of 260 posts in Ambala district, shortage of 182 lecturers out of total 556 posts in Bhiwani district, shortage of 115 lecturers out of total 369 posts in Faridabad district, shortage of 80 lecturers out of total number of 244 posts in Fatehabad district, shortage of 171 lecturers out of total number of 674 posts in Gurugram district, shortage of 116 lecturers out of total number of 425 posts in Jhajjar district, shortage of 159 lecturers out of total number of 513 posts in Jind district, shortage of 181 lecturers out of total number of 354 posts in Sirsa district, shortage of 90 lecturers out of total number of 256 posts in Sonapat district, shortage of 54 lecturers out of total number of 134 posts in Yamunanagar district, shortage of 42 lecturers out of total number of 97 posts in Charkhi Dadri district, shortage of 76 lecturers out of total number of 170 posts in Kaithal district.

India and Vietnam adopt 'new plan of action' to solidify strategic partnership

NEW DELHI: Emphasising that India's 'Viksit Bharat 2047' and Vietnam's 'Vision 2045' continue to accelerate development and have opened up many new areas of mutual cooperation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced Thursday that both countries have decided to further strengthen their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership by adopting a "new plan of action".

"New steps have been taken for cooperation in the field of defence and security. The Army Software Park built in Nha Trang was inaugurated today. The agreed US\$300 million credit line will strengthen Vietnam's maritime security. We have also decided that co-

operation will be strengthened on the issues of terrorism and cyber security," PM Modi announced while addressing the media along with Vietnamese PM Pham Minh Chinh at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi.

Both leaders held bilateral discussions with Prime Minister Modi who also hosted a luncheon in the honour of the visiting high-level delegation from Hanoi, which included several ministers, deputy ministers and business leaders.

In his remarks, PM Modi highlighted how the dimensions of relations between New Delhi and Hanoi have expanded and deepened over the last 10 years with the relationship transforming into a Comprehensive Stra-



ategic Partnership.

"Our bilateral trade has increased by more than 85 per cent. Mutual cooperation has expanded in energy, technology, and development partnership.

tween the two countries. Along with this, tourism is continuously increasing, and people have also been given the facility of e-visa," said PM Modi.

He also mentioned the extensive conservation and restoration work done by the Archaeological Survey of India at the UNESCO heritage site of My Son Sanctuary in Quang Nam province of Vietnam.

"As we all know, Buddhism is our shared heritage, which has connected the people of both the countries at a spiritual level. We invite people from Vietnam to the Buddhist circuit in India. And we want the youth of Vietnam to also take benefit of the Nalanda University," stated PM Modi.

Mutual cooperation in defence and security areas has gained new momentum. Over the past decade, connectivity has increased. And today we have more than 50 direct flights be-

Bhagwant Maan questions should I send protesting farmers to Lahore, if they are not allowed to enter Delhi to sort out matters

SATISH HANDA
Sirsa

Addressing election rallies at Sirsa and Barwala in Hissar district, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday made an attack at the Centre government, raising question if the BJP-led government will not allow the protesting farmers camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri borders to enter Delhi, should he send them to Lahore? Maan said, farmers from Punjab led by Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha began the 'Delhi Chalo' march on February 13 to press the government to accept their demands which include that the Centre should give a legal guarantee for minimum support price for their crops, but they were stopped by the Haryana Police, which had set up barricades, including cemented blocks and iron nails on the Ambala-New Delhi national highway. The farm-



ers have been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border since the past over five months leaving their families in a hope to discuss matters amicably with the government in centre. Maan said that the border has been closed with iron nails and barricading so that farmers cannot enter Delhi and sort out issues since the government runs from Delhi, and if they will not be allowed to enter Delhi, should they move to Lahore? Maan said while addressing rallies in Hissar's Barwala and the other in Sirsa's Dabwali. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has announced to contest on all the 90 seats in Haryana. Punjab CM said even four years ago, the farmers were stopped from entering Delhi, when as many as 726 farmers died during the farmers' protest against the farm laws. In his address, Maan alleged that people of Haryana have given chance to different political parties but they all robbed the state. Maan

said if a doctor is not able to cure ailments of patients the doctor should be changed similar to Delhi and Punjab voters, people of Haryana should also vote for a change this time. The AAP leader briefed several initiatives of the AAP governments in Punjab and Delhi, saying in Punjab 43,000 government jobs have been given purely on the basis of merit, whereas there have been number paper leak incidents in Haryana in past some time but in Punjab people have not heard such things. Touching the sentiments, Punjab CM said that Punjab and Haryana are brothers, though we may have become separate states but our hearts are one. Maan said, we are giving 600 units of free electricity to everyone per billing cycle of two months in Punjab, the AAP government in Delhi has reformed the government schools providing better infrastructure than top level private schools, the children of poor families are cracking top competitive exams in Delhi now, the health

services have witnessed much improvements at present and we have taken the government to people's doorsteps to facilitate them and make their lives better. Maan urged the people of Haryana not to be carried away by the fake promises being made by the BJP and the Congress, since they (BJP and Congress) used to rule by turns and people had no other option, but now they have an alternative in the AAP government. Raising a question Maan asked that BJP has been in power for 10 years, did they solve the problem of employment to youths jobs or undertaken development except fake announcements. "I am told if it rains for one minute in Barwala, people have to take out boats. Such is the situation," he said. Making an attack on the BJP government at the Centre, Maan said during the Lok Sabha polls, the saffron party talked of "400 paar" but now they are running their government with the support of allies. Bhagwant Maan said, Arvind Kejriwal belongs to Haryana and he changed the direction of the country's politics, whereas the BJP will change the Constitution if they get an overwhelming majority. Taking a dig at the BJP Maan said, beware of the BJP's 'lollipops', as they gave 'lollipops' during the Lok Sabha elections also, when they claimed to have reduced cooking gas cylinder price after hiking it manifold. Further taking a dig at the BJP, Maan said, "They claim to keep about double-engine (government), but changed one engine midway replacing Manohar Lal Khattar and brought another engine. Was the engine defective or what happened, they brought another engine." Maan told the people of Haryana that the country or the state does not need a double engine but it needs a new engine and only a single engine is sufficient to run the government smoothly.

55,200 Cigarettes sticks having market value Rs.9,38,400/- seized



Lady passengers from Pakistan intercepted with Gold handles fitted with utensils with silver colour coating

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

On baggage scanning, officers of Baggage SGRDJI Airport, Customs (preventive) Commissionerate, Amritsar intercepted a passenger who had arrived at SGRDJ (Shri Guru Ramdas ji International Airport), Amritsar on 01.08.2024 from Singapore by SCOOT flight no TR 512. Their personal search was conducted along with their baggage, resulting into recovery of 55,200 sticks of cigarettes from the passenger valued at Rs. 9,38,400/-. The smuggled cigarettes were seized on 02.08.2024 under relevant provisions of Customs Act, 1962. In a third seizure by the Custom department, whereupon a female passenger was returning from Pakistan and heading towards Noida via land route through ICP Attari Border. While examining her baggage utensils brought by her looked suspicious. Further examination revealed the handles of the utensils were made of gold disguised with silver colour coating. The 24 Carat gold in handles of utensils were seized on 01.08.2024 under relevant provisions of Customs Act, 1962. Further investigation is in progress.

Include Punjab in Atal Bhujal Yojana, demands MP Vikram Sahney



NEW DELHI: Rajya Sabha MP Vikramjit Sahney on Monday demanded that Punjab should be immediately included in the Atal Bhujal Yojana for sustainable groundwater management. Sahney said Punjab contributes "47 per cent of wheat and 21 per cent of rice to the Central pool. So it is extracting excess water from the ground to ensure food security of the country and in the process Punjab is facing ground water depletion and deterioration."

The Minister of Jal Shakti informed the House that Punjab had not fulfilled the criteria for the Atal Bhujal Yojana and the state government should answer in this regard. Responding to the Jal Shakti Minister, MP Sahney gave a guarantee on the floor of the House that Punjab has complied with all the parameters of the scheme and even the incentivisation scheme for bridging the irrigation gap is pending for launch by the Central government which would address Punjab's groundwater issues. Sahney added that Punjab's groundwater utilisation "stands at 164 per cent and levels could drop below 1,000 feet by 2039."

Three of a family who were travelling on motorcycle were killed in a fatal road accident with a school bus here on July 29. Confirming about the accident, police said the accident occurred at the bordering town Ajnala at village Punga. Four people, who were riding on motorcycle, fell down when a speedy school bus hit the bike from rear, killing three people on the spot and leaving one seriously injured. Police said among dead there were two females including one three years old girl and one middle aged man identified as Heera Masih who was driving the bike at the time of accident. Police said one seriously injured lady who was admitted in the hospital was still described as critical. After the accident, people of a nearby village gathered on the spot who in a fit of anger damaged the bus and driver of the bus has been arrested by the police, said police.

Three of family killed in road accident and one seriously injured



JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

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Punjab Police busts trans-border narcotic smuggling network ; one held with 3.5 kg drug



JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

Commissionerate of Amritsar Police has busted a trans-border narcotic smuggling network with the arrest of a drug smuggler identified as Gurmej Singh of Bhindi Saidan Ajnala after recovering 3.5kg heroin and one lakh drug money from his possession, said Commissioner of Police (CP) Amritsar Ranjit Singh Dhillon here on Thursday. Apart from recovering heroin consignment, Police teams have

also impounded the CD Deluxe motorcycle, on which the accused was travelling. Dhillon said that accused Gurmej Singh was directly in touch with Pak-based drug smuggler and has been engaged in drug trafficking. Drones were being used to transport the drug consignments from Pakistan, he added. Investigations are on to establish backward and forward linkages in this case, he added. Sharing operation details, Dhillon said that the police teams had got reliable inputs that drug smuggler Gurmej Singh has retrieved the drug consignment and was waiting to deliver it to someone in area of Chherhata Amritsar.

Gulab Chand Kataria takes oath as 37th Governor of Punjab

CHANDIGARH: Gulab Chand Kataria was sworn in as the 37th Governor of Punjab on Wednesday. Chief Justice of Punjab and Haryana High Court, Justice Sheel Nagu, administered the oath of office to Kataria at the Raj Bhawan here. Haryana Governor Bandaru Dattatreya and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann were present on the occasion. Kataria took the oath in Hindi. He signed the oath form that was counter-signed by the Chief Justice. Later, Kataria signed separate charge reports, both as Governor of Punjab and Administrator of the Union Territory of Chandigarh.



Earlier, the Governor designate arrived at the Guru Nanak Dev Auditorium of the Raj Bhawan in a ceremonial procession. He was accompanied by the Chief Justice. Chief Secretary Anurag Verma sought permission to start the ceremony and read out the warrants of appointment of Kataria as the Governor.

Punjab CM slams Union Govt for 'Deliberate' Delay in Releasing Rs 1000 Crore for Healthcare



CHANDIGARH: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann alleged that the Union government has stalled Rs 1000 crore of the state under the National Health Mission to deprive the Punjabis from the access of quality health services. Interacting with the media persons after flagging off 58 hi-tech ambulances for the state, the Chief Minister said that the state government is committed to impart quality health services to the state but the Union government is continuously hatching conspiracies to deny these to Punjabis. He said that the Union government has stalled the grant of worth Rs 1000 crore under the National Health Mission just to torpedo pro-people initiatives being taken by the state. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that this is a condemnable move as the non BJP governments are being harassed by the Union government on one pretext or another. The Chief Minister said that Aam Aadmi clinics have revolutionized the health care sector in the state. He said that 1.75 crore people have taken the benefits of these clinics in the state and more than 95% of patients visiting these clinics daily recover from their ailments. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that ever since the starting of these clinics have witnessed a huge footfall indicating that every third person of the state has taken benefit from these clinics.

The Chief Minister said that today 58 new hi-tech ambulances have been dedicated to the people of the state thereby ensuring that they are available to people in hour of distress. He said that with this addition in the fleet of ambulances a total number of 325 ambulances have been pressed into the service of people across the state to ensure that they get health services in time. Bhagwant Singh Mann asserted that these Ultra Modern Ambulances have been

Congress and AAP playing friendly match in Haryana politics: Aseem Goel

SATISH HANDA
Ambala

While addressing media persons here Haryana Transport and Women & Child Welfare Minister Aseem Goel said that both Congress and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) are playing friendly matches in the state politics, whereas AAP has become merely an 'Vote Katu' party. On a media question regarding former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda and MP from Sirsa Kumari Shelja both organizing separate 'Yatras' to undertake poll promotion in the freedom struggle, making the country self-reliant in food production and safeguarding the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the country, Punjab has been completely ignored in the Union budget. He said that this step motherly treatment with the state is unwarranted and reflects the myopic mindset of the Union government towards the state. Bhagwant Singh Mann further said that this high handedness of the Union government will not be tolerated and Punjabis will give a befitting reply to it. The Chief Minister also reiterated his demand for a special economic package for the state in recognition of the immense contribution made by Punjabis in every field. He said that it is the need of hour to ensure that Punjab makes tremendous progress in every sphere adding that this will give a major fillip to the growth and development of the state. However, Bhagwant Singh Mann bemoaned that currently, the tax holiday given to other states is acting as an impediment to the industrial growth of the state as industrial units are shifting there. The Chief Minister welcomed the appointment of the new Governor of the state and expressed hope that constitutional rights of both the Government and the Governor will be safeguarded. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the outgoing Governor had unnecessarily tried to create hiccups in the smooth functioning of the state government. He said that it is unfortunate that the Governor had not granted sanction for calling a budget session and had even declared a session illegitimate only to grant it sanction later.



leaders have neither unity nor intention and their slogan '70 ke paar' is likely to collapse, since senior party leaders in the absence of unity are organizing separate processions to exhibit their power. Goel said Congress leaders are claiming to win 70 Vidhan Sabha seats in coming assembly elections, whereas Congress itself is divided in 70 groups which clearly indicates that Congress hold 50 poll rallies in the state prior to polls. He said, every political party is free to hold as many rallies as possible for the poll promotion in a democratic country. He said, it is merely a friendly match in which after forming a government in Delhi, AAP had an opportunity to form a government in Punjab but failed to win even a single seat in any other state they contested

polls. Goel said, Rahul Gandhi is passing through a tourism period involved in different activities. He was brought up in Western culture and is unaware where wheat crops grow, how sugar is manufactured and yet trying to learn Indian culture from the root level as well as passing through his travel period. On a media question regarding just declared Union budget, Goel said that this budget is fit for the welfare of common person as well as youths and likely to provide employment opportunities to over 30 lakh youths under various welfare schemes and provide technical know how to nearly 20 lakh youths since government has decided to open 1000 ITIs in the state to boost start ups and provide them financial assistance to set up self-employment units.

The first flight from Ambala airport will be to Ayodhya on August 15, and second flight will go to Jammu : Anil Vij



SATISH HANDA
Ambala

Haryana's former Home Minister Anil Vij while talking to media persons here said that he hopes the under-construction civil enclave (airport) being developed in Ambala will be operational by August 10, 2024, and the first flight to Ayodhya will be on August 15, 2024. Vij was inspecting the work on the under-construction civil enclave in Ambala on Sunday. During the inspection, he provided some essential instructions to the authorities working on the site and also took stock of the remaining work. It is noteworthy that Anil Vij had secured approval for the civil enclave (airport) from the central government and had laid the foundation stone with the Haryana Chief Minister. Since then, the construction of the airport has been progressing rapidly, and Vij periodically reviewing the work to ensure timely completion. Vij inspected the construction of the civil enclave (airport) as part of this ongoing effort. During the inspection, while interacting with the media persons, Vij said that work at the civil enclave is being carried out around the clock and he is hopeful that it will be completed by August 10, with the first flight to Ayodhya scheduled for August 15. He added that all necessary permissions from various departments have been obtained. Vij indicated that the first flight would likely be to Ayodhya and the second one would go to Jammu. He noted that the most challenging part is managing the first flight, but subsequent additions will be easier. He also remarked that cities with airports experience significant development and Ambala's airport, being the only one located in the city center, will also increase employment opportunities.

Punjab Police busts international drug network; two held with Rs. 1.07 cr drug money

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

Counter Intelligence (Punjab Police) Amritsar has seized over Rs 1.07 crore drug money and apprehended two operatives of foreign-based top drug smugglers Gurjant Singh alias Bholu and Kinderbir Singh alias Sunny Dyal, said Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Gaurav Yadav here on Sunday. Those arrested have been identified as Dilbag Singh, a resident of village Lohka in Tarn Taran and Kamaldeep Singh, a resident of Patti in Tarn Taran. Apart from seizing drug money, Police teams have also recovered one money counting machine and two mobile phones from the possession, besides, impounding their Maruti Swift car. DGP said that the Counter Intelligence Amritsar has received intel-inputs that foreign-based drug smugglers Gurjant Bholu and Sunny Dyal are running an organised crime syndicate involved in drug trafficking and illegal weapons distribution across the state and have



tasked their operatives to collect the drug money and send them using Hawala route. He said that in an intelligence-based operation, Police teams from Counter Intelligence Amritsar have arrested two of their operatives identified as Dilbag Singh and Kamaldeep Singh from a rented accommodation at Fatehgarh Churian Road, Amritsar. The DGP said preliminary investigations have revealed that both the arrested persons were in constant touch with both Gurjant Bholu and Sunny Dyal via encrypted social media platforms and were to send the recovered drug money worth over Rs 1 crore to them using Hawala route. Both Gurjant Bholu and Sunny Dyal have been facing several criminal cases due to their involvement in criminal activities, he said, while adding that further investigations are on to establish backward and forward linkages in this case.

Haryana education department on CBI radar allegedly involved in Rs 300 crore frauds

SATISH HANDA

CBI registered a case on 18th July this year under sections 167,218,404, 418,420, 477-A, 120_B of IPC and section 13(1)(C), 13(1)(D)(2),13(2) Act 1988 registered four another FIRs and have demanded the names of all teachers having charge of mid-day meals in the schools from DEEO of eight districts in the state Ambala, Kaithal, Karnal, Kurukshetra, Panipat, Jind, Yamunanagar and Panchkula. during 2014 to 2018 when embezzlements took place. According to information, in government schools a teacher is deployed holding the charge of mid-day meal for 30 students, as such there are more than 11000 permanent as well as temporary teachers on contract basis holding the charge of mid-day meal in government schools in the state. Investigation reveals that during 2014 to 2018 amount worth Rs 300 crore including amount worth Rs 170 crore towards mid-day meal was allegedly embezzled between year 2014 to 2016, which also included



the amount of scholarship as well as amount spent on uniforms supplied to the students. CBI has also sent notices to all government schools about the number of students admitted in the school, how many students availed benefits of taking mid-day meals and has also called in-charge teachers for recording their statement. Information reveals that prior to year 2013-14, admissions in government schools were being made off-line and after this through the MIS portal in which a large number of students were found having no Aadhar card resulting in a large number of fake admissions being done in schools. Moreover, there was no record available in many schools in 12 Haryana districts due to floods witnessed during last year 'rainy season.

FinMin slams Oppn's 'misleading campaign' on Budget 2024, cites UPA-era figures

NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday reiterated her defence of the Union Budget 2024-25 and said that the government didn't 'discriminate' between BJP and non-BJP states, as claimed by the Opposition parties.

She also lashed out at the Opposition over a 'motivated and misleading' campaign and said that not naming any state didn't mean that it was deprived of its right and revenue. FM Sitharaman, who presented her seventh consecutive Budget this year, also sought to turn the tables on the Congress by recalling the financial documents of UPA eras, which didn't mention all the states. "In 2004-05, the Budget didn't name 17 states,



in 2005-06, there was no mention of 18 states, in 2006-07, 13 states were missed out, in 2009-10, a whopping number of 26 states were left out while the 2012-13 budget didn't mention all the states," the FM pointed out. "Does that mean no money

was allotted to these states? Does that mean that these states were bereft of funds?" she asked.

Flagging statements of Opposition leaders on cooperative federalism, she said that a deliberate attempt was made to delude and mislead the public

at large. A misleading campaign is being run by the Opposition parties and as part of this gameplan, they are spreading canards and fake information. She added that they are trying to create fear in people's minds by distorting the facts. The Finance Minister also shared details of various allocations and outlays in the current Budget for the states, which were not named in her speech. "Talking about Railway projects alone, the one in Bihar, Bengal and Jharkhand has been allocated Rs 12,000 crore while the one in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh will entail a cost of Rs 770 crore," FM said, citing random figures.

"In terms of road highway projects, Kerala has been allocated Rs 9,600 crores while

Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana and Delhi together have been sanctioned Rs 18,274 crores," she added.

She further lambasted the Congress-led Opposition for keeping mum on years of 'malpractice' (of not naming states in the Budget) and said that an unnecessary controversy has been created because a chairwala turned Prime Minister is running an efficient administration.

Notably, the INDIA bloc had raised questions over Budgetary allocations and also accused the Modi government of favouring two states Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, ruled by BJP and its allies. Protesting against the Budget 2024, they called it an "assault on the sanctity of the federal structure of India."

82 pc construction work on Delhi-Mumbai Expressway completed: Nitin Gadkari

NEW DELHI: As much as 82 per cent of the physical work on the construction of the 1,386 km Delhi-Mumbai Expressway has been completed as a cumulative length of 1,136 km has been built as of June this year, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari said in a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

The minister said that the construction of the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway including spurs comprises, "53 Nos. of packages having 1386 km length total 26 Nos. of packages have been completed." The revised schedule for the completion date of the Expressway is October 2025, he added. The corridor provides connectivity to major economic centres within Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

As per the detailed project report (DPR), the Expressway will reduce the distance from Delhi to Jawahar Lal Nehru Port (JNPT) in Mumbai by about 180 km and reduce travel time by up to 50 per cent to connected destinations, the minister added.

Apart from reducing travel time between the financial capital and the national capital, the expressway is also expected to strengthen the



economy of its regions. The quicker transport of goods is expected to give a fillip to industrial growth and exports.

The Expressway is expected to provide leverage to the tier-2 and tier-3 cities that it connects as the region is expected to see a rise of smart cities which can attract investors. Industry experts anticipate that the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway region will see a pool of investment opportunities in developing business clusters, residential properties, retail, malls, hospitals and educational institutes.

The Expressway also covers a lot of tourist spots including Ranthambhor, Keoladeo, and Sariska national parks as well as historic cities such as Ajmer and Jaipur. This is an opportunity for the hospitality and tourism industry to grow. The rise of the hospitality industry will be backed by the real estate sector.

Narendra Modi exposed AAP on roof leakage in the parliament



CHANDIGARH: Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) reacted to water leakage from the new Parliament House building during rain on Wednesday and said that this has exposed the corruption of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government.

Senior AAP leader and spokesperson of Punjab Neel Garg said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP leaders always talk about fighting against corruption while all their own projects are full of corruption. He said that it is very unfortunate that water started dripping in the first rain in a building built with thousands of crores. Not only this, the roof of the Delhi International Airports also collapsed a few days ago. Apart from this, many more bridges collapsed which were built during the Narendra Modi government.

He said that water did not drip only from the temple of democracy, Parliament House, water also dripped from the roof of the Ram temple that he built. The saying 'mukh par Ram, baghal mein chhuri' completely fits the actions of BJP.

Farooq Abdullah warns of war amid rising militancy in Jammu and Kashmir



FW DESK

National Conference president and former chief minister Farooq Abdullah on Tuesday expressed concerns about escalating militant attacks in Jammu and Kashmir, hinting at the potential involvement of Pakistani commandos, given the sophistication of the recent attacks. He apprehended that the situation could lead to war if the situation didn't improve in Jammu.

During a press interaction, Abdullah acknowledged the troubling increase in terrorism and the lack of progress in ongoing operations to apprehend the infiltrators.

"There is no doubt that terrorism is growing and highly trained people are coming. We pray to God that we will be saved from this calamity. We want them (Pakistan) to come to their senses. This will not solve problems but further deteriorate the situation," he said.

Abdullah stressed the need for peace between India and Pakistan but warned of the rising impatience among Indian citizens.

"Instead of peace, there could be an attack. That is what we fear. If it (militant attacks) continues, there will be a time when India will not tolerate this. People of India will want the government to take some steps so that terrorism stops," he said.

When asked about the possible infiltration of Pakistani commandos, Abdullah remarked, "It could be they are commandos, the way they are attacking. They seem to be highly trained. That is why we see a big danger."

Wayanad landslides: PM Modi speaks with Kerala CM, announces ex-gratia

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday and assured him of all possible Central assistance following the massive landslides in the Wayanad district, in which 19 people have died.

"Distressed by the landslides in parts of Wayanad. My thoughts are with all those who have lost their loved ones and prayers with those injured. Rescue ops are currently underway to assist all those affected. Spoke to Kerala CM Shri @pinarayivijayan and also assured all possible help from the Centre in the wake of the prevailing situation there," PM Modi posted on X.

The Prime Minister also announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh from PMNRF for the next of kin of each deceased in the landslides in parts of Wayanad.



The injured would be given Rs 50,000, said the Prime Minister's Office in a post on X.

Sources said the Prime Minister also spoke with the two Union Ministers from Kerala, Suresh Gopi and George Kurien, about the situation.

PM Modi has instructed BJP president J.P. Nadda to mobilise party workers in the region to

assist with the ongoing relief efforts, the sources also said. The landslides were reported to have occurred at around 2 a.m. Kerala Chief Secretary V. Venu told local media, "Around 2 a.m., landslides took place at least two to three times. At this point, few affected areas are cut off. The weather is also adverse for NDRF teams to go to some

of these affected areas. Everyone is on alert. We will carry out the rescue in a coordinated manner. We are still ascertaining about how many people are trapped. All options, including airlifting people, are being looked into to ensure rescue work is carried out." State Forest Minister A.K. Saseendran, who rushed to the spot said it was a bit early to assess the damages. "At least 53 people are admitted to a hospital here and six bodies are there. At another hospital, 13 injured are admitted and six bodies are also there. We have started the rescue operations and are waiting for helicopters to arrive. A new ropeway is going to be erected soon and the Army will be building a temporary bridge also to rescue people who are trapped in the area after a bridge was swept away," said Saseendran.

Deeply anguished by Wayanad landslides: Rahul Gandhi

NEW DELHI: In response to the devastating landslides near Meppadi in Wayanad, Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Tuesday expressed deep sorrow and called for urgent rescue and relief operations.

The area was cut off, and the local people and a team of professional rescue operators were engaged in locating people in the area, which has been ripped into two, with around 400 families being isolated. Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, conveyed his condolences to the families affected by the tragedy. Talking to his X handle, he said, "I am deeply anguished by the massive landslides near Meppadi in Wayanad. My heartfelt condolences go out to the bereaved families who have lost their loved ones. I hope those still trapped are brought to safety soon." Mentioning his discussions with Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and



the Wayanad District Collector, he said they assured him that rescue efforts are underway.

"I have requested them to ensure coordination with all agencies, set up a control room, and inform us of any assistance needed for the relief efforts. I will speak to Union Ministers and request them to provide all assistance possible to Wayanad," he further wrote, advising all the United Democratic Front (UDF) workers to assist in the rescue and relief efforts.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge also expressed his grief, saying, "Extremely pained

by the landslides in Wayanad, where several people are reportedly trapped. My deepest condolences to the families of the bereaved."

He urged the state and Central governments to "expedite relief and rescue operations and provide urgent medical help to the victims, in coordination with all the agencies."

"Congress leaders and workers should put in all their efforts to provide every possible assistance to the people," he said in a post on X, advising them to "coordinate with doctors, paramedics and kindly follow

up with the agencies to support the victims of the tragedy." Echoing similar sentiments, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi stated, "I am deeply saddened to see the devastation caused by the massive landslide near Meppadi, Wayanad. My heartfelt condolences and prayers are with all those who have lost loved ones."

She urged the government to expedite relief and rescue operations and called on UDF workers to provide support and comfort to those affected by the tragedy.

Mamata Banerjee's mike-off charge 'completely false': says Finance Minister Sitharaman



BENGALURU: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman dismissed West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's allegation of her mike being muted during a NITI Aayog meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as "completely false".

Answering a question posed by media in this regard in Bengaluru, Sitharaman stated, "It was good that West Bengal CM came and voiced her view. She said she is talking on behalf of all opposition which is also very well. For the allotted time, we heard her. If she wanted more time, like other CMs, she would have got it."

"But, she went outside and said 'my mike was put off and I walked out of the meeting' which was wrong. It is completely false. CM from Karnataka and the opposition didn't attend it. It's sad. They always say our voice is not heard. This was the forum to come and speak. To an extent Mamata Banerjee Ji was right. She

came but afterwards, she said something different," the Finance Minister stated. "I wished all opposition leaders would have come and voiced their opinion," she underlined.

On objections raised by Karnataka Congress leaders to the ED action, she stated, "If ED goes and finds black money, can we say the Congress will get unhappy, don't do it. That's what they did when they were in rule. Not allowed CBI to take action as their ministers would become targets. Actually, wherever they are going to search, they come with wall-level cash and a suitcase full of gold. Black money has to be searched and brought out."

When asked if her budget was a copy of Congress manifesto, she said, "Congress can never come up with a well thought out plan. It always believes in tokenism. Throw money and finish it off. How can we copy a poorly made scheme from them?"

President Murmu appoints new Governors in nine states

NEW DELHI: President Droupadi Murmu has appointed new Governors in nine states and a new Lieutenant Governor in Puducherry.

Former Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Haribhau Kisanrao Bagde has been appointed Governor of Rajasthan while former Tripura Deputy Chief Minister Jishnu Dev Varma has been appointed Governor of Telangana.

The President has appointed former Rajya Sabha MP Om Prakash Mathur as Governor of Sikkim. Similarly, former Union Minister Santosh Kumar Gangwar has been appointed as Governor of Jharkhand while former Lok Sabha MP from Assam Ramen Deka has been made Governor of Chhattisgarh.

Former Karnataka Minister C.H. Vijayashankar has been appointed as Governor of Meghalaya. C.P. Radhakrishnan who is presently Governor of Jharkhand has been made Governor of Maharashtra. Assam Governor Gulab Chand Kataria has been appointed as Governor of Punjab and Administrator of the Union Territory of Chandigarh. Similarly, Sikkim Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya has been appointed as Governor of Assam and has also been given additional charge as Governor of Manipur.

Former IAS officer K. Kai-lashnathan has been appointed Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry.

Soldier killed, Army Major among 4 injured in Kupwara encounter



FW DESK

The Indian Army successfully thwarted an attack by Pakistan's Border Action Team (BAT) in an encounter along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kupwara on Saturday. The encounter resulted in the death of one soldier and left four others, including a Major, injured.

A Pakistani terrorist was also killed in the encounter. The BAT, known for previous infiltration attempts, comprises commandos from the Pakistan Army and terrorists. The operation in Kupwara's Kamkari area was initiated following intel-

ligence reports about possible terrorist movements.

The injured soldiers were promptly evacuated from the site as the gunfight continued. Defence Ministry sources reported that the BAT team involved likely included regular Pakistan Army troops and SSG commandos collaborating with terrorist organizations.

The incident marks the second such encounter in Kupwara within three days. Earlier, on July 24, security forces killed an unidentified terrorist in the Lolab area of Kupwara, where a soldier also lost his life.

Maharashtra to contribute \$1 trillion to Indian economy: CM Eknath Shinde

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde emphasized recently that the State will be contributing one trillion dollars towards the nation's commitment of a five-trillion-dollar economy, and the State has established the "Maharashtra Institution for Transformation" (MAITRI) on the lines of Niti Aayog.

Shinde was expressing Maharashtra's commitment towards making the concept of "Viksit Bharat@2047" a reality, while speaking at the 9th meeting of the Governing Council of Niti Aayog at the Ashok Mandap in Rashtrapati Bhavan, which was presided over by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Describing Maharashtra's GDP development rate at 8.7% with growth rate set for 15%, he said Maharashtra is the "first" State in India to announce its agriculture produce export policy, while also finalising 72 "One District, One Product."



Urging the Prime Minister to consider the price policy for procurement of onion for buffer stock under the price stabilization fund (PSF) scheme, Shinde said Maharashtra is establishing an 'Onion Mahabank' that will be based on nuclear technology to help increase the 'shelflife' of onion and its storage capacity to 10 lakh tonnes.

The coming five years will witness 25 lakh hectares of land being brought under natural farming in implementation of the Dr Punjabrao Deshmukh natural farming campaign, he

said. The last two years witnessed Maharashtra signing MOUs for investment of Rs 5 lakh crore during the World Economic Forum in Davos, and three lakh jobs would be generated due to these agreements, he said.

With 46 lakh registered units contributing 18% of industrial produce, Maharashtra is ahead in MSME and 72 manufacturers across 36 districts have been selected under ODOP, the Chief minister said while noting that 30%

FDI of the nation has been attracted towards Maharashtra and 18,000 'Start-ups' have been successfully registered in the State.

Shinde said Maharashtra will initiate a new policy of housing provision for 'Senior Citizens,' besides efforts being made on all GIF-based urban development schemes to ensure their transparency and acceleration.

While a 'Rs 1.25-lakh crore', 390-kms-long 'Metro' route is under construction in Metropolitan Mumbai, metro route construction work is also underway in Nagpur and Pune, he said adding that big road projects are going on with the 'Konkan Coastal Road' and 'Konkan Green Field Expressway' likely to be 'milestones' in the development of the Konkan Region.

Maharashtra is also the first State to announce the 'Green Hydrogen' policy in which investment of Rs 2.11 lakh crore is expected for manufacturing 910 KTPA Green Hydrogen.

Ex-DGP alleges covert war by Pakistani commandos in J&K

FW DESK

Shesh Paul Vaid, a former Director-General of Jammu and Kashmir Police, has claimed that a significant number of commandos from Pakistan's Special Service Group (SSG) have infiltrated into Jammu and Kashmir to engage in a covert war with the Indian Army. Vaid's assertion appears to echo the claims of Amjad Ayub Mirza, an who resides in Britain.

While police sources acknowledge that dozens of Pakistani militants have crossed into India, particularly into the Jammu region this year, they have dismissed Vaid's claim of a large-scale infiltration by SSG commandos.

Vaid, who served as the DGP of Jammu and Kashmir from 2016 to 2018 made the statement in a video. He cited unnamed sources and claimed that Adil Rahmani, the GOC of the SSG commandos, is orchestrating the operations. According to Vaid, around 600 SSG commandos have been



earmarked for this mission, with many already infiltrated and more attempting to do so.

"This is an act of war intended to fully engage the 15 Corps and 16 Corps based in Kashmir and Jammu," Vaid stated. He also mentioned the involvement of a Lt Colonel Shahid Saleem of Pakistan Army, allegedly directing operations and activating local sleeper cells.

In a later post, Vaid partially revised his statement, indicating that only a few SSG commandos had infiltrated, with more expected to follow. He urged India to prepare for a prolonged conflict.



Reformed NITI Aayog to boost federalism

The recent boycott by seven Chief Ministers of the ninth Governing Council meeting of the NITI Aayog, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has sparked a crucial debate about the think tank's efficacy and its perceived role as an advisory body. The protest, driven by dissatisfaction over allocations and projects in the Union Budget, highlights a deeper issue of discontent among States, especially those governed by the opposition. The NITI Aayog, established to replace the Planning Commission, aimed to foster cooperative federalism by moving away from a top-down approach. However, its limited role in resource distribution and focus on creating state indices has inadvertently fostered competitive federalism. This dynamic has left the Finance Ministry with significant control over state grants, reducing the scope for consultation with States—a practice the Planning Commission facilitated despite its own criticisms. The BJP's political strategy of promoting "double engine" governments has further complicated matters. Opposition-ruled States allege preferential treatment for BJP-ruled States in investment projects. This perception of bias is exacerbated by the NDA government's dependence on support from Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, regions with notable developmental challenges. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's targeted budgetary support to these States underscores this contention, despite her intentions to address developmental deficits. To address the growing dissatisfaction, there is a compelling need to re-envision the NITI Aayog. Restoring some of the Planning Commission's responsibilities, particularly in terms of consulting with States on grants and projects, is essential for genuine cooperative federalism. While the Finance Ministry and the 16th Finance Commission focus on macroeconomic stability and financial system health, a balanced approach necessitates robust institutional support for state-level infrastructure and capital investments. Revitalizing the NITI Aayog with these considerations can bridge the current disconnect, ensuring that the vision of cooperative federalism is realized, fostering balanced growth and development across all Indian States.

LETTERBOX

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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)



SANJAY PRASHAR DELVES INTO INDIA'S SHIPOWNING AND SHIPBUILDING ECOSYSTEM

What's a perfect shipping budget?



Shipping is a high-volume, cash-heavy business dealing almost exclusively in foreign exchange where margin percentages are often low but can be surprisingly high too sometimes. India's top regulators, policymakers and tax authorities have not shown a real appreciation of its nuances.

India has a glorious history of shipbuilding and owning that the British destroyed even as they took control of the country. They then squelched efforts to rebuild the native shipping industry into the 20th century. More than 100 years after the British stamped out V O Chidambaram Pillai's swadeshi shipping initiative, India still does not have a robust shipowning, shipbuilding ecosystem.

Some in the past in India did see shipping as a crucial component of reinforcing national sovereignty and there were some stellar efforts. But, today, shipping in India continues to be a consequence of global shipping trends and governed largely by decisions made outside India.

In the last ten years, the total tonnage of India has only gone down. Practically no merchant ship is built today in India. China has become the world's No 1 shipbuilder while we have the biggest scrapyards.

Among the positives are the emergence of many Indian ship management companies that are, however, mostly registered and operating outside India, and Indian seafarers who bring in vital foreign exchange.

Budget 2024-25 did contain several measures to support Indian shipping. The Economic Survey spoke about ship leasing structures in Gift City in Gujarat and how that is a model. That shipping is being talked about is a welcome sign and an indicator that decision-makers in the government



are indeed interested in its development.

Among the details in the budget was removing customs duty on imported ship spares which is highly welcome. The previous set of laws led to arbitrary demands at customs and many shipping companies suffered severely as a result. And those laws were themselves indicative of how successive governments had little interest in shipping.

In the past, policies often supported a government-owned national company, the Shipping Corporation of India, but little else. There were several large private shipowners but almost all are extinct now — some done in by zealous tax authorities left wide-eyed by the millions of dollars in transactions that bank accounts of shipping companies were seeing every day. Today, ship stocks are not traded much in the Bombay Stock Exchange, and shipping companies have little visibility in India's corporate sector.

Even as the government pushes for trade linkages with countries based on container

movement such as the India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor, it needs to come up with policies to support the manufacture of containers within India. India is lacking in container manufacture and it is a key trade bottleneck.

The current BJP government has been making the right noises over the years but has less to show in terms of concrete results. Its major port project was the VadHAVAN project in Maharashtra, announced in 2016. In 2021, some Rs 51,000 crore was allocated out of the Rs 1 lakh crore budget allocation for shipping. In 2024, Rs 76,000 crore was announced. The government as yet has not indicated a timeline for its completion.

Gift City is being talked about when the horses have, for the most part, bolted. Attracted by the availability of liquidity, a fair and transparent arbitration system, as well as a welcoming regulatory regime, many Indians have blossomed as shipowners in Dubai. Luring them back will require much

effort and attractive policies.

In 2022, a new Merchant Shipping Act was promised but did not make its appearance in Parliament. One hopes we will see it at least this year. The new leasing, ownership, flagging policy has also been promised before but has not been seen yet.

Even in the case of ships managed and manned by Indians that has seen tremendous growth, the government's disallowing of Indian private security contractors has made those ships vulnerable to drone attacks and unmanned boats. Other countries have gone ahead with this and reaped the benefits of ensuring the security of their ships.

The three lakh Indian seafarers sailing in ships all over the world are among the least cared for by their parent nation among all the nationalities. They often endure gross human rights violations abroad and their government sees them largely as a tax opportunity.

The government may well consider making one of India's islands function with an open registry of ships that would allow foreign entities to register ships on that island. The island could allow free anchorage and bunkering so it becomes an attractive destination. Hong Kong's emergence as a major international finance and commerce center was due in-part to its shipping-friendly policies and it could be a model.

Bold and big-ticket initiatives are needed to truly leverage the potential of India's shipping to make the nation prosperous. Shipping awaits its dream budget.

Sanjay Prashar is a shipping industry professional and a former member of the National Shipping Board who contributed in formulating the Maritime Vision 2030. Views are personal.

N. RAMA RAO ON HOW LACK OF CENSUS SINCE 2011 HINDERS WELFARE SCHEME ACCESS

Any further delay in Census taking is perilous



When the Centre did not extend the deadline of June 30, 2024 to freeze administrative boundaries for the purpose of the Census, hopes were raised that the decennial Census operations, initially scheduled to begin in 2020 as a prelude to Census 2021, would at least commence in October 2024. It usually takes about three months after the boundaries are set, to make massive preparations for the field work. However, these expectations were belied when the Budget 2024-25 recently allocated Rs 1,309.46 crore for the Census, a significant reduction from 2021-22 when Rs 3,768 crore was allocated for the decadal exercise, thereby indicating that it may not be carried out even after the considerable delay. The next Census, therefore, continues to be on hold with the government yet to announce the new schedule.

An absolute necessity

Conducting the Census on a priority basis is a must, as in the absence of a Census after 2011, a majority of our country's population is unable to access several schemes, benefits and services. Moreover, the implementation of the women's Reservation Act passed in the Parliament last year, reserving 33% of seats in Parliament and Assemblies for women, awaits the conduct of the Census.

It is imperative that sufficient provisions are made in the 2025-26 Census Budget so that the 2021 Census that has been postponed could be held at the earliest, in 2026, on completion of the first phase in 2025 that would include house listing and housing census and updating of the National Population Register (NPR). The preliminary arrangements for the Census, such as preparing updated maps and lists



of administrative areas, pre-testing draft Census questionnaires, training of officers and core staff, who would train the large number of field staff in collecting the Census data digitally, i.e., on mobile app, planning the field work, logistics, budgeting have all been taking place in the Census Directorates in States and Union Territories for the past few years in anticipation of putting through a Census.

My visit to the Census Directorate of Tamil Nadu in Chennai and talks with the officials there have revealed that they are ready to undertake the task once the new Census date is fixed. All that is required is quick refresher training for them. The amount of Rs 1,309.46 crore allocated in the 2024-25 budget could be utilised by the Census department to carry out several preliminary activities such as firming up of the enumeration areas, questionnaire finalisation, refresher training of the core staff in the proposed digital census, and

tabulation plan.

The Constitution (Eighty fourth Amendment) Act of 2001 was specifically made so as not to have delimitation of the constituencies till the first Census conducted after 2026. In the event of the Centre thinking in terms of having the Census in 2027 and utilising the population figures obtained from it for delimitation purposes, then the Census reference date should be announced soon, with the new deadline for the freezing of the boundaries of the administrative units by the State governments and Union Territory administration.

To create a comprehensive database of usual residents in the country, the NPR with details of persons usually residing in villages and towns and other rural and urban areas was first prepared in 2010 during the Houselisting and Housing Census phase of Census 2011. It was updated in 2015 incorporating changes due to birth, death and migration. This process was put through

under the Citizenship Act, 1955. The NPR would be updated again during the House listing and Housing Census Operations (Phase 1) of the forthcoming Census.

The draft form of the NPR for the next Census has questions such as "mother tongue, place of birth of father and mother and last place of residence" — which were not in the NPR of 2011 Census prepared in 2010. The inclusion of the new questions has been opposed by some States and citizen groups as the NPR is the first step toward compilation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), according to the Citizenship Rules 2003. The Centre has however clarified that NPR data will not be used in the preparation of the NRC.

The Centre has to make a decision whether to retain or not the contentious questions in the NPR format to be updated in the first phase of the upcoming Census.

There is growing demand for a caste-based census to be conducted by the Centre to precisely understand the economic well-being of the marginalised communities. In an affidavit filed in the Supreme Court of India on September 23, 2021, the Union Government had stated that a caste census (except that for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes done traditionally) was unfeasible, and "administratively difficult and cumbersome".

The Centre has to take a call now on whether or not to collect caste information in the next Census.

N. Rama Rao is Retired Deputy Registrar General (Census and Tabulation), and former United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Census Adviser for Cambodia and some other countries. Views are personal.

BOOKS: REVIEW

New book captures essence of Mumbai through 21 stories

How does one capture the essence of a city as dichotomous as Mumbai? A city that oscillates between allure and repulsion, that has been a muse for writers since its inception. In the anthology *Maya Nagari — Bombay-Mumbai: A City in Stories*, editors Shanta Gokhale and Jerry Pinto offer a profound exploration of Mumbai through a collection of 21 carefully curated stories. The editors, rather than aiming to encapsulate the financial capital in its entirety, have compiled stories that they have read and loved, resulting in a rich tapestry of the city's multifaceted existence.

The anthology features a stellar lineup of writers, including literary giants such as Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, Eunice de Souza, Cyrus Mistry, Bhupen Khakkar, Ambai, Urmila Pawar, Jayant Kaikini, and Maharashtra's beloved humorist Pu La Deshpande. Gokhale and Pinto themselves con-

tribute to this collection. Reflecting Mumbai's linguistic diversity, the anthology includes stories written in English, with translations from Marathi, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, Kannada, and Gujarati. As Gokhale eloquently states in the introduction, "To understand our own lives better, we must enter other lives, and we do that best with literature."

The stories offer a glimpse into the lives of Mumbai's diverse inhabitants: chawl residents, street dwellers, mill workers, single women, advertising executives, and furtive lovers. Dubbed the "most expensive slum in the world," Mumbai is portrayed as a city teeming with energy and grime. While the anthology largely delves into the city's bleak underbelly, it is not devoid of hope.

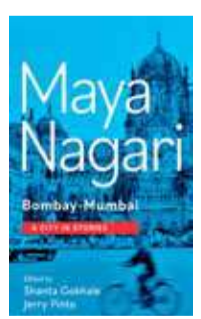
For instance, in Deshpande's "A Cultural Movement Is Born," chawl life is depicted with its fair share of intrigues and tragedies, but also its comedies: "Batatyachi Chaal (chawl) and Bharat shared the same raashi. As a result, caste skirmishes, absence of unity, disease and earthquake-like tremors when matrons of a certain girth went up or down the stairs, presented everyday dangers."

The 21 stories are not only well-chosen but also beautifully translated, many by the editors themselves. The Ganesh Chaturthi festival, the city's chawls, and the closure of its mills serve as recurring themes in the book. Within these narratives, the church of St. Don Bosco becomes the Don Boss, and a building called 'Queen's Diamonds' overlooks a garbage heap. God visits Dadar Bridge only to be ensnared by the city's gritty side, and a British policeman finds a semblance of respectability in India only to end up in a metaphorical no man's land after independence.

The anthology presents a spectrum of contrasting realities: a Ram devotee and an atheist forge an unlikely friendship, a Ganesh idol is held hostage, a sex worker strives to

city of voices and perspectives. Each story, with its unique narrative style, adds a layer to the city's complex identity. From the bustling streets to the quiet, introspective moments of its characters, the anthology paints a vivid picture of Mumbai's relentless pace and its capacity for intimate, human connections. The editors' choice to include stories in multiple languages also pays homage to Mumbai's rich cultural mosaic, making the anthology not just a literary collection but a celebration of the city's multilingual heritage.

Maya Nagari — Bombay-Mumbai: A City in Stories is more than an anthology; it is a journey through the heart of Mumbai. It is a must-read for anyone looking to understand the complexities of this vibrant city. Through these stories, readers can experience the city's pulsating life, its perpetual dance between despair and hope, and the indomitable spirit of its people. Gokhale and Pinto have succeeded in offering a literary map of Mumbai, one that is both enlightening and deeply moving. This collection stands as a testament to the power of storytelling in capturing the soul of a city that is forever in flux.



Maya Nagari | Bombay-Mumbai: A City in Stories
 Ed. Shanta Gokhale, Jerry Pinto
 Speaking Tiger
 400 pages; Rs 799

earn money for a trip home, and a young journalist and a trade union leader become lovers. These stories draw readers into the characters' grief, joy, anxieties, and celebrations, delivering emotional gut punches along the way.

In Manto's "Babu Gopi Nath," the titular character explains his love for kothas (brothels) and shrines: "Because both establishments are an illusion. What better refuge can there be for someone who wants to deceive himself?" This sentiment captures the essence of Bombay/Mumbai—a city of illusions and myriad contrasting realities. Maya Nagari aptly represents the sea of stories the city creates daily, rivaling the vast ocean that lines its shore.

The book's ability to capture the essence of Mumbai lies in its diver-

Trom Industries Soars 90 pc above IPO price in stellar NSE SME debut

NEW DELHI: In a dazzling market debut on August 1, Trom Industries, a prominent player in the solar EPC sector, saw its shares skyrocket on the NSE SME platform.

The stock opened at Rs 218.50, marking a stellar 90 per cent premium over its issue price of Rs 115, igniting investor enthusiasm and highlighting the growing appetite for renewable energy stocks. The company's initial public offering (IPO), which concluded on July 29, garnered overwhelming interest from investors across categories.

The issue was oversubscribed by a staggering 459 times, with the non-institutional investors (NII) category leading the charge at 751.90 times subscription. Retail investors and qualified institutional buyers (QIBs) also showed robust participation, with subscription



rates of 483.14 and 197.07 times, respectively. Trom Industries' IPO comprised a fresh issue of 27.28 lakh shares, priced in the band of Rs 100 to Rs 115 per share. The company successfully raised Rs 8.93 crore from anchor investors on July 24,

setting a positive tone for the public issue. Founded in 2011, Trom Industries has established itself as a key player in the solar energy sector, offering a range of services including residential solar rooftop systems, industrial solar power plants, ground-

mounted solar power plants, and solar street lights.

The company plans to utilise the IPO proceeds for capital expenditure to set up a new solar power plant, meet working capital requirements, and fund general corporate purposes.

The impressive listing and overwhelming subscription rates underscore the market's confidence in Trom Industries' business model and the broader solar energy sector. As India pushes towards its ambitious renewable energy goals, companies like Trom are well-positioned to capitalise on the growing demand for solar solutions. Investors and market watchers will be keenly observing Trom Industries' performance in the coming months, as it navigates the challenges and opportunities in the rapidly evolving renewable energy landscape.

Manufacturing PMI Dips to 58.1 in July, Sector Remains Strong



NEW DELHI: India's manufacturing sector continued its robust performance in July, albeit with a slight moderation in growth, according to the latest HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) released on August 1.

The seasonally adjusted PMI eased to 58.1 in July from 58.3 in June, primarily due to a mar-

ginal slowdown in new orders and output growth. Despite this small dip, the index remained well above the long-term average, indicating sustained strength in the manufacturing sector at the start of the second quarter.

Pranjal Bhandari, chief India economist at HSBC, commented, "India's headline

manufacturing PMI showed a marginal slowdown in the pace of expansion in July, but with most components remaining at robust levels, the small dip is no cause for concern."

A notable bright spot in the report was the strong performance of exports, with international sales expanding at the second-strongest rate in over 13 years. This surge in external demand has helped maintain high employment levels in the sector.

However, the positive demand conditions have also led to increased input costs, with inflation accelerating. Manufacturers have been able to pass on these higher costs to consumers, resulting in the rate of inflation rising to its highest level in about 11 years. Bhandari warned that this trend "may signal further inflationary pressure in the economy."

ONDC unveils Interoperable QR Code to boost E-Commerce



NEW DELHI: In a landmark development poised to reshape the digital commerce landscape, the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), an initiative of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, has introduced its innovative interoperable QR code.

This announcement marks a significant step in ONDC's mission to democratise e-commerce, making it accessible for every seller, from local artisans to neighbourhood shopkeepers. On Tuesday, ONDC unveiled the QR code during its ongoing alpha phase. This tool allows sellers to create a unique QR code that customers can scan using any ONDC-registered buyer app.

Following initial testing, the QR code is set to expand across the entire ONDC network, promising a transformative shift in how digital transactions are conducted.

T Koshy, Managing Director and CEO of ONDC, emphasised the importance of this development, stating, "Now, every seller has the power to reach customers digitally, just like the e-commerce giants. It is a massive leap towards an open, inclusive, and democratised digital marketplace."

The new QR code system provides sellers with unprecedented flexibility. They can display their unique QR codes on storefronts, products, marketing materials, or social media platforms. This enables instant connection with customers, whether they encounter the code in a physical store or via online channels.

For consumers, the QR code introduces a new level of convenience. Scanning the code with any QR scanner app or an ONDC Buyer App connects them directly to the seller's online store through their preferred buyer app. This seamless integration bridges the gap between offline and online shopping experiences, enhancing accessibility and customer engagement.

SA Tech Software Debuts on NSE SME With 90% Premium

NEW DELHI: SA Tech Software, an IT consulting subsidiary of SA Technologies Inc., made a strong debut on the National Stock Exchange's Small and Medium Enterprise (NSE SME) platform on Friday.

The company's shares opened at Rs 112.1, marking a 90 per cent premium over its issue price of Rs 59. Prior to the listing, the grey market had indicated a premium of Rs 53, suggesting strong investor interest.

The initial public offering (IPO), which consisted entirely of fresh equity issuance totalling 39 lakh shares, garnered significant attention from investors, with the issue being oversubscribed by more than 600 times. The company plans to utilise the net proceeds from the public offer for debt repayment, working capital requirements, and general corporate purposes.

Headquartered in Pune and Bengaluru, SA Tech Software specialises in AI-driven IT outsourcing solutions and global development centres (GDCs).

The firm offers a range of services, from individual support to large-scale enterprise transformations, with the capability to scale its professional



workforce from 1 to 1000 as per client needs. SA Tech's GDCs focus on innovation, research and development, cost-efficient solutions, quality assurance, and round-the-clock operations. The company has over a decade of experience serving both global and domestic clients.

Through its service partnership with its parent company, SA Tech caters to international clients and maintains a diverse portfolio ranging from small businesses to large enterprises. The company emphasises its ability to leverage global talent to address complex technological challenges. In its pre-listing statement, SA Tech highlighted its long-standing relationships with enterprise clients as a key factor in building trust and providing a mix of stability and growth opportunities.

For the fiscal year ending March 2024, SA Tech Software reported total revenues of Rs 23.88 crore and a net profit of Rs 2.48 crore.

India's Core Sector Growth Slows To 20-Month Low In June

NEW DELHI: India's eight core industries, which account for 40 per cent of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), experienced a significant slowdown in growth during June 2024. The core sector growth rate declined to 4 per cent, marking a 20-month low, compared to 6.4 per cent in May and 8.4 per cent in June 2023.

The first quarter of the fiscal year saw overall growth of 5.7 per cent, down from 6 per cent in the same period last year. This deceleration was primarily driven by a slowdown in five of the eight key industries including crude oil, refinery products, steel, electricity, and natural gas. Coal maintained strong performance with 14.8 per cent growth, while cement rebounded to 2.7 per cent growth after contracting in May.



However, steel growth sharply declined to 2.7 per cent from 6.8 per cent in May, and electricity growth nearly halved to 7.7 per cent. Economists suggest that this slower core sector growth may impact overall industrial production. ICRA, a credit rating agency, projects June's Index of Industrial Production growth between 3.5-5 per cent, following May's

5.9 per cent increase. Despite the current slowdown, experts remain optimistic about India's economic outlook. The Reserve Bank of India recently revised its growth forecast upward to 7.2 per cent for the fiscal year, while the International Monetary Fund projects 7 per cent growth. The government's Economic Survey estimates growth between 6.5-7 per cent.

Manoj Mittal takes charge as Chairman & Managing Director of SIDBI

NEW DELHI: Manoj Mittal takes charge as Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) of the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), following his appointment by the Government of India.

Manoj Mittal has over 33 years of extensive experience in the Finance sector, including his previous tenures as Managing Director and CEO at In-



dustrial Finance Corporation of India (IFCI) and Deputy Managing Director at SIDBI. Small Industries Develop-

ment Bank of India (SIDBI) was established on April 2, 1990, under an act of the Indian Parliament. SIDBI is mandated to serve as the Principal Financial Institution for executing the triple agenda of promotion, financing and development of the MSME sector and coordination of the functions of the various Institutions engaged in similar activities.

Voluntary Licensing in Pharmaceutical Industry: Impact on Market Access & Pricing



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH

are allowed to use the patented technology. In pharmaceutical sector, it has been observed that non-exclusive voluntary licenses are given out to multiple licensees to increase market access and bring down the prices of drugs as this leads to competitive pricing and wider distribution.

Out of 34 Voluntary License deals observed during the period 2011-2024, therapeutic categories such as HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, and Covid-19 have received maximum number of Voluntary Licenses, i.e., 31 out of 34 Voluntary Licenses. It can be attributed to high prevalence, and the existing cost of treatment in these therapeutic segments. Tuberculosis, Gram-negative infections and Leukemia (Oncology) respectively had one Voluntary License in each case. Out of 34 cases of Voluntary Licenses, HIV/AIDS had dominant share, i.e., 50 per cent. In 2017, it was for the first time that a drug was licensed for Tuberculosis condition. Year-wise details observed and Condition-specific aspects have been covered in Table 1. This also reflects the need to reassess the priority list of high-priced drugs due to emergence of high-prevalence diseases such as cancer and blood-related disorders.

The Access to Medicines Foundation has judged various pharmaceutical companies based on the actions which companies have taken to address key access to medicine priorities, i.e., Governance on Access, R&D, and Product Delivery. Pharmaceutical companies have been ranked by the foundation. Descending Order is: GSK, J&J, AstraZeneca, Novartis, Merck KGaA, Pfizer, Takeda, Sanofi, Bayer, Roche, Novo Nordisk, Eisai Co., Boehringer Ingelheim, Gilead Sciences, BMS, Astel-

las Pharma, Daiichi Sankyo, Merck & Co., AbbVie and Eli Lilly. Although these pharmaceutical companies have been rated so high with respect to 'increasing market access' but all these pharmaceutical companies are not implementing voluntary licensing as a method to achieve 'market access'. There are many pharmaceutical companies whose drugs are listed on WHO's Model List of Essential Medicines, and are therefore, fit candidate under Non-Exclusive Voluntary Licenses. Rather, these pharmaceutical companies are opting for 'parity pricing', 'competitor-based pricing', among other measures.

Gilead Sciences has signed the highest number of Voluntary Licensing deals, and the number of deals for the company stood at 11 out of 34 in the period from 2011 to 2022. ViiV Healthcare had 4 deals during this period, followed by AbbVie (3), Merck & Co. (3), Bristol Myers Squibb (2), and Shionogi & Co. (2). Other nine deals had involvement of organizations - AstraZeneca, Eli Lilly, J&J, Novartis, Otsuka, Pfizer, Pharco Pharmaceuticals, Russian Direct Investment Fund and Tibotec and each had one VL deal.

At the time of Voluntary Licensing deal, it is mentioned that the move will have positive impact so far as gaining market access is concerned. In 21 out of 34 Voluntary Licensing deals, innovator pharmaceutical companies gained access in more than 100 countries through each Voluntary Licensing deal. In 8 out of 34 VL deals, companies gained access in 55 to 99 countries, and in 5 cases, these companies got access in 15 to 55 countries through each VL deal. Innovator pharmaceutical companies got access in upper-middle income countries, Lower Middle



Income Countries (LMICs), and Lower Income countries in different regions such as Eastern Europe, Central Asia, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, North Africa and the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

It is commonly observed that prices of originator drugs are quite high, and the generic versions of the same drug seem to be quite affordable for people with poor-paying capacity. At any point of time, prices vary for each drug, e.g., Daklinza (Dacatasvir) 60 mg price of Bristol Myers Squibb was US\$ 75,000 whereas generic versions from Zydus, Mylan, and Hetero had the price tag of \$17.96, \$17.96, and \$35.93 respectively in May 2024. So, generic price in this case was around 0.02% - 0.04% of the originator's price. For another drug - Vemlidy (Tenofovir Alafenamide) which is used in HIV/AIDS, available in 25 mg, Gilead had a price of \$1407 whereas generic version from Natco and Macleods had a price tag of \$14.45 and \$14.95 respectively. In this case, generic price was just 1-1.1% of the patented drug price.

Voluntary licenses are signed based on certain terms and conditions. An important condition is regarding the royalty payment by the generic manufacturers to the patent-holders. Usually, certain percentage of net sales is charged as royalty. There are instances where in

cases of emergency and high-burden, licenses are issued royalty free too. For example, in 10 VLs, royalty was not charged so these were royalty-free deals in the cases of pediatrics and APIs. In 5 cases, royalty rate was 5 per cent. In 2 cases, royalty percentage was 3-5%.

There are instances where innovator pharmaceutical companies preferred tiered charging of royalties. A report by MSF (Voluntary Licenses: Full brief by Medecins Sans Frontieres Access Campaign) cited that ViiV Healthcare (GSK) entered into a licensing agreement for adult formulations of dolutegravir with the Medicines Patent Pool (MPP). Agreement had royalty clause of 5-10% in countries where a patent is active and granted. Further, sub-licensed generic manufacturers were obligated to pay royalties of 5 per cent in Moldova, the Philippines, India and Vietnam; 7.5 per cent in Indonesia, Egypt, Morocco, Armenia, and Ukraine; and 10 per cent in Turkmenistan.

Voluntary licenses include 'anti-diversion' clauses so as to prevent generic medicines from being resold outside the licensed territory, protecting lucrative markets for patent holders. Patent-holders apply many other means of control. Gilead's sofosbuvir (for Hepatitis-C) license imposed stringent requirements on providers and

Table 1- Voluntary Licenses Issued (2011-2022)

Therapeutic Category	2011	2013	2014	2015	2017	2018	2020	2021	2022	Total
Covid-19	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	5	1	8
Gram-negative Infections	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Hepatitis-C	-	-	3	1	1	1	-	-	-	6
HIV/AIDS	6	2	4	2	1	-	1	-	1	17
Leukaemia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
TB	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Total	6	2	7	3	3	1	3	5	4	34

Source: Based on announcements of respective Voluntary Licensing deals

patients, complicating treatment access and procurement processes. These clauses directly affect 'parallel importation' by imposing burdensome reporting requirements and strict monitoring of third-party distributors.

Technology Transfers accompanying voluntary licenses are pivotal for enhancing regional availability and local manufacturing capacity of medicines. Gilead, Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS), and ViiV Healthcare exemplify this approach. For example, Gilead has NEVLs for Hepatitis C and HIV treatments, including technology transfers for products like remdesivir. Similarly, BMS initiated technology transfers for atazanavir, benefiting local manufacturers in Brazil. ViiV Healthcare partnered with the Medicines Patent Pool (MPP) for NEVLs on HIV products and established public-private partnerships (PPPs) to expedite generic child-friendly formulations of dolutegravir.

'Grant Back' clauses are also integral component of Voluntary Licenses which require licensees to grant patent holders rights to any improvements in manufacturing or formulations. For example, AbbVie's agreement with the MPP for glecaprevir/pibrentasvir mandated that sub-licensees must first offer AbbVie the option to purchase or exclusively license any new formulations developed. This restricts sub-

licenses from freely marketing their innovations. This clause has implications for equitable access to affordable medicines, particularly in regions with critical healthcare needs.

Through these clauses, innovator pharmaceutical companies create barriers for generic manufacturers to develop and supply improved formulations, impacting global health outcomes.

There are instances where Voluntary Licenses restricted the sourcing and production of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs), which significantly impacts production cost. For instance, Gilead's licenses (of Tybost, Elvitegravir, Vemlidy, and Tenofovir Disoproxil Fumarate) with Indian pharmaceutical companies, and the Medicines Patent Pool (MPP) limit API sourcing and supply, hindering competition and affordability. In certain cases such as the Otsuka-Mylan agreement on the TB medicine - delamanid, licensees were prevented from manufacturing APIs, resulting in minimal price reductions for generic versions. These constraints ultimately limit access to affordable medicines.

In certain cases, patent holding companies prevent generic companies from conducting any research or clinical trials on the licensed products without prior written consent from the patent-holding company. Such a restriction raises concerns as it potentially limits the scope of

permissible research activities, infringing on statutory research exemptions under national laws and the WTO Agreement on TRIPS, which typically allow such activities.

To address concerns highlighted, the licensing criteria should be based on 'health needs' rather than 'only income'. 'Grant Back' terms should balance innovation and competition. Alignment of license agreements with international research exemptions can foster broader scientific advancements and better healthcare solutions globally. Voluntary Licensing is definitely an effective mechanism that addresses global health disparities. Impact of Voluntary Licensing is visible in terms of market access, especially in low income and middle-income countries. In the process, innovator companies get enhanced revenue as royalty, generic players gain on account of patent reach, and patients get access to medicines at lower prices.

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Indian Bank eases Lending Norms to Serve SMA Marked MSMEs with Good Track Record

NEW DELHI: Indian Bank's Managing Director and CEO, Shanti Lal Jain, has announced the bank's willingness to lend to micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the Special Mention Account (SMA) category.

This decision comes in response to the government guarantee announced in the Union Budget 2024. Indian Bank is open to lending to SMA 1 and SMA 2 category customers, citing their existing relationship and customer history. Jain emphasised that the bank's familiarity with these customers and their track records makes them comfortable with extending credit to this segment. The move aligns with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's budget announcement of a new mechanism to support MSME credit during stress periods.

Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME) had made a forceful presentation before the Finance Minister during pre-budget consultations that rigid



SMA framework was leading to forced closures of MSMEs. FISME had made submissions before two deputy Governors of Reserve Bank of India also in this regard.

This initiative aims to facilitate the continuation of bank credit to MSMEs experiencing temporary financial difficulties, preventing them from sliding into non-performing asset (NPA) status. To support this effort, a government-promoted fund will provide guarantees to facilitate credit availability for MSMEs in the SMA stage. This measure is expected to

provide a safety net for both banks and MSMEs, encouraging lending to businesses facing short-term challenges. As part of this broader strategy, state-owned lenders are expected to develop in-house capabilities for MSME credit assessment. This approach marks a shift away from traditional asset or turnover-based criteria, potentially opening up credit access to a wider range of MSMEs, including those without formal accounting systems.

Indian Bank reported a 2 per cent drop in MSME collection efficiency in Q1 FY2024, at-

tributed to factors such as heat waves, elections, and seasonality. Despite this minor setback, the bank remains committed to the MSME sector, recognising its importance to the overall economy. In a move to further strengthen its MSME lending portfolio, Indian Bank is set to finalise a co-lending partnership with Arka Fincap within the next two months. This collaboration is expected to enhance the bank's reach and efficiency in serving the MSME segment.

Indian Bank's Q1 FY2024 results show a 40.6 per cent year-on-year increase in net profit, with gross advances growing by 12 per cent and RAM (Retail, Agriculture, and MSME) advances by 13 per cent. These figures underscore the bank's strong performance and its continued focus on key lending sectors. This initiative reflects the banking sector's efforts to support MSMEs during challenging periods, aligning with the government's focus on strengthening this crucial segment of the economy.

Union Budget : A little for all, but wait for a long haul



NEW DELHI: The week gone by was dramatic in more ways than one. Markets lost on the first four days of the week and extended losses for five consecutive days before a complete turnaround happened on Friday, which was the first day of the August futures series.

Incidentally, the Union Budget was declared on Tuesday and markets were on a losing streak before and after the announcement. Losses in the first four days of the week were covered and converted from

negative to positive by much more than the losses.

The gains on Friday were 1,292 points on BSESENSEX and 429 points on NIFTY. At the end of the action-packed week, BSESENSEX ended with gains of 728.07 points or 0.90 per cent while NIFTY gained 303.45 points or 1.24 per cent to close at 24,834.35 points.

The broader markets saw BSE100, BSE200 and BSE500 gain 1.65 per cent, 1.83 per cent and 1.92 per cent respectively. BSEMIDCAP was up 3.13

per cent while BSESMALLCAP was up 3.45 per cent. The week ended with gains in one trading session and losses in four sessions. FPIs incidentally bought on Monday and Friday and were sellers on the remaining three days.

The Indian Rupee lost seven paise or 0.08 per cent. It closed at Rupees 83.73 to the US Dollar. Dow gained on three of the five trading sessions and lost on two. It gained 301.79 points or 0.75 per cent to close at 40,589.34 points.

One wonders whether the US markets follow India or vice-versa. However, one thing is clear there is a correlation between the two and that the same is very close. On Friday we saw a sharp rally in Indian bourses and that reversed the losses for the week and enabled markets to close in the positive. The same happened in the US as well with Dow gaining 654 points on Friday. This would be something which should be watched closely going forward.

Digital economy to make up 1/5th of GDP by 2026: RBI



MUMBAI: India's digital economy is poised to constitute a fifth of GDP by 2026 from one-tenth at present, according to a Reserve Bank report released on Monday.

In the foreword of 'Report on Currency and Finance (RCF) for the year 2023-24', Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das emphasised that digitalisation in finance is paving the way for next-generation banking and improving access to financial services at affordable cost.

India is at the forefront of the digital revolution, the report said. The country has embraced not just financial technology (FinTech) but has also celebrated India Stack comprising biometric identification, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), mobile connectivity, digital lockers and consent-based data sharing.

The digital revolution is galvanising banking infrastructure and public finance management systems covering both direct benefit transfers and tax collections, the report said. Vibrant e-markets are springing up and expanding their reach.

"It is estimated that the digital economy currently accounts for a tenth of India's GDP; going by growth rates observed over the past decade, it is poised to constitute a fifth of GDP by 2026," the report said. Several enabling forces have come together to enervise this revolution. Although internet penetration in India was at 55 per cent in 2023, the internet user base has grown by 199 million in the recent three years.

Punjab National Bank's Q1 net profit surges by 159 per cent to Rs 3,252 crore



NEW DELHI: Government-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB) on Saturday reported a 159 per cent surge in its net profit to Rs 3,252 crore for the April-June quarter of 2024.25 compared to the corresponding figure of Rs 1,255 crore in the same quarter of 2023-24.

The public sector bank's net interest income (NII) during the quarter rose by 10.23 per cent to Rs 10,476 crore from Rs 9,504 crore in the same period last year, according to a filing with the stock exchanges.

PNB also recorded an improvement in its asset quality with gross non-performing assets (NPA) declining to 4.98 per cent of total loans as on June 30, 2024 from 7.73 per cent as in June 2023. As part of its strategy to improve profitability, PNB has been focusing on expanding retail, agriculture, MSME (RAM) portfolio, extending good corporate loans, controlling slippages and improving recovery, a senior official said.

The Delhi-headquartered bank also has plans to add another 150 branches to its network of 10,136 branches across the country. PNB also has plans of opening an office in Dubai during the current financial year. Currently, the bank has overseas operations in the UK, Bhutan and Nepal. The bank also has a branch in IFSC GIFT City Gandhinagar as the bank is focusing on improving its foreign exchange income.

PNB had also signed a MoU with Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA) for a collaboration in the field of lending in the Renewable Energy sector.

With this step, both institutions will lead to those companies who are engaged in promoting green energy solutions in the country which would also enable India to achieve its global commitments to fight climate change.

India's digital payments record double-digit growth: RBI data



MUMBAI: Digital payments in India have registered a 12.6 per cent increase year-on-year with the RBI's Digital Payments Index (RBI-DPI) rising to 445.5 at the end of March 2024 compared to 418.77 in September 2023 and 395.57 in March 2023.

"The RBI-DPI index has increased across all parameters driven by significant growth in payment performance and payment infrastructure across the country over the period," the RBI said on Friday.

The Reserve Bank has been publishing a composite RBI-DPI index since January 1, 2021 with March 2018 as the base to capture the extent of digitisation of payments across the country.

The RBI-DPI comprises 5 broad parameters that enable the measurement of penetration of digital payments in the country over different time periods.

These parameters are -- (i) Payment Enablers (weight 25 per cent); (ii) Payment Infrastructure -- Demand-side factors (10 per cent); (iii) Payment Infrastructure -- Supply-side factors (15 per cent); (iv) Payment Performance (45 per cent), and (v) Consumer Centricity (5 per cent).

Each of these parameters has sub-parameters which, in turn, consist of various measurable indicators.

Banks must follow 2015 Guidelines before declaring MSME loans as NPAs : SC

NEW DELHI: In a significant ruling, the Supreme Court of India has mandated that banks and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) must adhere to the government's 2015 framework before classifying loans to Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) as Non-Performing Assets (NPAs).

The court ruled that the 'Framework for Revival and Rehabilitation of MSME' from 2015 and subsequent Reserve Bank of India (RBI) directions have statutory force. This means that all scheduled commercial banks licensed to operate in India by the RBI are bound by these regulations.

According to the ruling, banks must identify "incipient stress" in MSME accounts before classifying them as NPAs. This process involves creating



three sub-categories under the "Special Mention Account" to detect early signs of financial distress. The court emphasised that MSMEs must provide authenticated documents to prove their status under the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act.

This requirement is crucial for MSMEs seeking to avail

themselves of the protections offered by the framework.

Notably, this verdict overturns a previous Bombay High Court order that deemed the 2015 framework non-mandatory. The Supreme Court termed the High Court's finding as "highly erroneous," reinforcing the binding nature of the framework.

However, the court also

SIDBI Partners with C2treds and UGRO Capital to Boost MSME Lending

NEW DELHI: In a significant move to enhance credit access for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the Small Industries Development Bank of India (Sidbi) has announced strategic partnerships with C2treds and UGRO Capital.

These collaborations, established under the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) co-lending framework, aim to leverage the strengths of banks and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) to boost priority sector lending. Sidbi, the apex institution for MSME promotion and development, has onboarded C2treds, a platform operating under the Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS) initiative. C2treds, regulated by the RBI, enables invoice discounting and promises to

provide MSMEs with liquidity within 24 hours through an online bidding process. This platform is part of C2FO, a global on-demand working capital platform serving nearly 2 million businesses worldwide.

Prakash Kumar, Deputy Managing Director of Sidbi, emphasised the institution's commitment to increasing credit flow to MSMEs, stating, "TReDS has become an effective tool for the prompt realisation of MSMEs' receivables, and Sidbi is onboarded on all operational TReDS platforms."

RBI Targets Fintech Lenders in Comprehensive Review of Loans under Rs 50,000



MUMBAI: In a move that signals growing regulatory concern over the burgeoning small-ticket loan market, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has launched a comprehensive review of loans up to Rs 50,000 across banks and fintech lenders.

This scrutiny comes in the wake of alarming patterns observed in consumer borrowing

behaviour and potential risks to financial stability. Sources close to the matter reveal that the central bank's attention was drawn to data indicating that a significant portion of borrowers in this segment simultaneously maintain three active loans.

This trend has raised red flags among regulators, who suspect it could be indicative

of 'evergreening' - a practice where new loans are used to repay existing debt, potentially masking underlying financial distress. More worryingly, there are suspicions that some of these funds may be finding their way into the capital markets, further exacerbating concerns about financial system stability and the misuse of unsecured credit.

This latest move by the RBI should be viewed in the context of its November 2023 directive, which mandated that all regulated entities (REs) reassess their exposure limits for consumer credit.

The central bank specifically highlighted unsecured consumer credit exposures, requiring banks and other lenders to establish board-approved limits for various sub-segments by February 29, 2024.

Section 11A as Proposed in the Budget for Exceptional Cases only says Revenue Secretary of India



NEW DELHI: The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) today organised a Post Budget Conference to undertake an analysis of tax-related proposals. The conference saw in-depth analysis of both direct and indirect tax related proposals contained in the recent budget.

Speaking at the inaugural session, Sanjay Malhotra, Secretary, Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance said, "Consultation is an important part of the budget process and many of the proposals we received from industry bodies like ASSOCHAM has been incorporated in the budget and in the finance act. Simplification of capital gains is one such example and we look forward to your continuous feedback. The proposed insertion of Section 11A in GST Act is aimed at removing ambiguities and must be invoked only in exceptional cases and not resorted to as the norm."

Highlighting the role of the industry, he said "Not only are you the taxpayers, but you are also the tax collectors, the tax deductors and the eyes and ears of the government. I am confident that you will continue to support the government in this endeavour to raise revenue for the welfare of the country and I assure you that the government's efforts have always been to make life as simple as possible while you are paying your taxes."

On the changes in the Capital Gains tax, he said "The changes in the capital gains tax has been brought because all of you asked for it and we must know that simplification does not always mean that rates or

the tax incident will ultimately go down. It is a simplification measure and not a tax increasing or a revenue increasing, revenue augmenting measure. The revenue increase is marginal at 10 to 12.5 per cent and we will all benefit by avoiding the burden of complexity."

Ravi Agrawal, Chairman, Central Board of Direct Taxes, (CBDT), Ministry of Finance in his special address said, "The provisions introduced in the budget relating to direct taxes can be broadly categorized into simplification, standardisation and compliance. The purpose of tax administration is not penalty and prosecution but to provide comfort to the taxpayers. We are one of the leading nations to provide the facility of pre-filled forms and compliance has improved because of that. Last year we saw about 8.5 crore income tax returns, which is a significant increase. Also, about 72 lakh updated returns were filed indicating the enhanced ease in compliance."

"The Honourable Finance Minister has announced that we would be reviewing the Income Tax Act. The underlying thought here is that how do we rationalize and how do we make it simple for the taxpayer to actually navigate through the act and to the extent possible, their need for taking help or assistance of a professional may be minimized, at least for the common taxpayer. We will be working on it. And I hope that in the next few months, we should be able to make a comprehensive review." He added.

Sanjay Kumar Agarwal, Chairman, Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs, (CBIC), Ministry of Finance said, "The goal of the gov-

Government committed to making India a developed nation by 2047 says Piyush Goyal

Strong fundamentals in place for a \$55 trillion economy

NEW DELHI: ASSOCHAM organized a special session on 'Bharat@100: Leveraging unprecedented opportunities' Piyush Goyal, Hon'ble Minister for Commerce & Industry, Government of India graced the event as the Chief Guest. A book titled India@100: Envisioning Tomorrow's Economic Powerhouse authored by Dr K V Subramanian, Executive Director, IMF was launched by Commerce and Industry Minister.

Speaking at the event, Piyush Goyal, Hon'ble Minister for Commerce & Industry, Government of India said, "We have the ability, we have the willingness, the desire, we have the talent, skill and capability. As policy makers we have the intent and are deeply committed to making India a developed nation by 2047. The focussed efforts towards self-



sufficiency in defence, electric mobility and enhancing the quality of our manufacturing setups combined with enhanced transparency and technology adoption will help us have a stronger currency and a stronger macro-economy to get us to a \$55 trillion economy."

"Our economy will be at \$5 trillion in the next 3-3.5 years making us the third largest economy in the world. As we increase our shipping, focus on electric mobility and become

sufficient in defence, we are looking at a rupee appreciation. We can replicate, if not better, the China story between 2000-20." added the minister.

Krishnamurthy Subramanian examines this once-in-a-century opportunity that is knocking on India's doors in India@100: Envisioning Tomorrow's Economic Powerhouse. India@100 makes a strong case that India is at a turning point that cannot be disregarded, with a daring vision based in Indian reali-

ties. Four major pillars—the macroeconomic emphasis on growth, the microeconomic focus on social and economic inclusion, the vision of ethical wealth creation, and the strategy of a virtuous cycle sparked by investment—are examined by Subramanian through meticulous research and perceptive analysis. He thoroughly discusses the options for policy and the areas in need of reform within each pillar.

India@100 effortlessly ignites the reader's imagination and inspires a collective drive towards a future where India emerges as a dominant economic force. This is an invaluable book for anyone interested in the rise of the Indian economy. Addressing the august gathering Deepak Sood, Secretary General ASSOCHAM said, "The significant strides that the country has made in the preceding years is not by chance, it's by design, and the last 10 years are a testament of that."

INTERNATIONAL

Biden, Netanyahu discuss new deployments of US troops in Israel amid Iranian threats

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden discussed new American military deployments to counter Iranian threats of direct attack against Israel during a call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday night.



"The President reaffirmed his commitment to Israel's security against all threats from Iran, including its proxy terrorist groups Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis," the White House said in a statement after the call.

Together with this commitment to Israel's defence, Biden also stressed the importance of ongoing efforts to de-escalate broader tensions in the region.

US Vice President Kamala Harris also joined the call.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army has geared up for any Iranian assault against Israel after the assassination of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on Wednesday.

Sources in the Israeli Defence Ministry's office told media that after Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei's remarks about a retaliatory attack on Israel to avenge the killing of Haniyeh, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has prepared itself for any eventuality.

9/11 mastermind, 2 other defendants agreed to plead guilty: Pentagon

WASHINGTON: The mastermind of the September 11, 2001 attacks on US soil, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, and two of his accomplices have agreed to plead guilty, the Pentagon said in a statement. They are held at the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The Pentagon said that the Convening Authority for Military Commissions, Susan Escallier, has entered into pretrial agreements with Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, Walid Muhammad Salih Mubarak Bin 'Attash, and Mustafa Ahmed Adam al Hawsawi, three of the co-accused in the 9/11 case said the statement.



The official said that the specific terms and conditions of the pre-trial agreements are not available to the public at this time. The three accused, along with Ali Abdul Aziz Ali and Ramzi Bin al Shibh, were initially charged jointly and arraigned on June 5, 2008, and then were again charged jointly and arraigned a second time on May 5, 2012, in connection with their alleged roles in the September 11, 2001, attacks against the US, the Pentagon said. US Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell

condemned the plea deals. "The Biden-Harris Administration's cowardice in the face of terror is a national disgrace. The plea deal with terrorists, including those behind the 9/11 attacks, is a revolting abdication of the government's responsibility to defend America and provide justice" McConnell stated on X.

United Kingdom: Violent mob clashes with cops outside mosque in Southport



LONDON: A violent mob clashed with police outside a mosque in northwest England's Southport near the scene of a horror stabbing that left three dead. Merseyside Police said that the English Defence League is believed to be behind the violent protests.

Speculation about the alleged attacker's identity circulated online, fuelling the tension that already existed after Monday's horrific knife attack. The Sun reported. Protesters threw bricks at the mosque, set fire to cars and wheelie bins and caused damage to a local convenience store, police said. At least 22 police officers, responding to the situation, were injured and 11 were hospitalised after clashes.

UAE and Andhra Pradesh Explore Greater Economic and Investment Engagement

NEW DELHI: The UAE Embassy in Delhi, in collaboration with the UAE-India CEPA Council (UICC) and the Government of Andhra Pradesh, convened an economic and investment roundtable in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh. The event was co-chaired by Abdunnasser Alshaali PhD, the Ambassador of the UAE to India, and Sri T.G. Bharath, the Minister for Industries and Commerce and Food Processing of Andhra Pradesh.

UAE participants at the roundtable included Ahmed Aljneibi, the Director of the UICC, as well as representatives from UAE companies, Abu Dhabi Ports, Air Arabia, Aramex, DP World, DUCAB, Emaar, Emirates Airlines, Emirates NBD, FlyDubai, the Lulu Group, and Tabreed. From the Andhra Pradesh side, 50 senior government officials and company representatives were present at the event. Speaking on the occasion of the roundtable, Dr. Alshaali underlined the centrality of Andhra Pradesh within the UAE-India strategic partnership, and the need to exert all efforts to increase people-to-people, economic, and investment engagement. "It is essential to increase the level of economic and investment collaboration between the UAE and Andhra Pradesh."

US national debt surpasses \$35 tn for 1st time

WASHINGTON: The US federal government's total public debt has surpassed \$35 trillion for the first time, again sparking concerns about the nation's escalating debt problem and its implications for the US economy.



The total public debt outstanding climbed to \$35 trillion on Friday, according to the newly released Daily Treasury Statement released by the Treasury Department Monday. The data is updated at the end of each business day with data from the previous business day, Xinhua news agency reported. Just seven months ago, the US national debt surpassed \$34 trillion in late December 2023. Three months before that, the United States reached a historic milestone by passing \$

33 trillion. "The borrowing just keeps marching along, reckless and unyielding," said Maya MacGuineas, president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, in a statement. "Yet despite all the risks and warning signs, these alarm bells seem to be falling on deaf ears." "We are going to have to get serious about the debt, and soon. Election years cannot be an exception for trying to prevent

completely foreseeable dangers -- and the debt is one of the major dangers we are facing," said MacGuineas. According to the Peter G Peterson Foundation, a nonpartisan organisation focused on addressing US long-term fiscal challenges, the national debt of \$35.001 trillion translates to nearly \$104,000 of debt per person in the United States.

"Our deficits are caused mainly by predictable structural factors: our ageing baby-boom generation, rising healthcare costs, and a tax system that does not bring in enough money to pay for what the government has promised its citizens," the foundation said. Desmond Lachman, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and a former official at the International Monetary Fund, told Xinhua earlier that "there can be no question that the US budget deficit is on an unsustainable path." The "dangerous trajectory" poses "serious questions for the dollar" and inflation's long-run outlook, Lachman said. Analysts have joined the chorus of voicing serious concerns about the US debt problem. Economist E J Antoni, a research fellow of the Heritage Foundation, reports that based on the Fed's June numbers, interest on the national debt is the equivalent of 76 per cent of all personal income taxes collected by the government.

Trump vows to make US 'crypto capital of the planet'



WASHINGTON: Donald Trump, the former US President and Republican nominee for the White House, has pledged to turn the US into the "crypto capital of the planet and the Bitcoin superpower of the world" if elected and unveiled a plan to unlock the potential of the fledgling industry. The former President on Saturday also promised to appoint an advisory council to frame his administration's cryptocurrency policy, fire Gary Gensler, the current head of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which oversees the industry; and free a jailed American who ran the Silk Route market, a darknet platform, by commuting his life-term sentence to time served in jail. A one-time sceptic who called cryptocurrency -- digital money that is not backed by any central bank -- a "sham", Trump has embraced it in recent months and said in a speech to an annual conference of the industry in Nashville, Tennessee, that Bitcoin -- a type of cryptocurrency -- "stands for freedom, sover-

Russia to counter US missile deployment in Germany: Putin

ST. PETERSBURG: Russia will take corresponding countermeasures if the US deploys long-range weapons in Germany, President Vladimir Putin has said. "If the US implements such plans, we will consider giving up the previously assumed unilateral moratorium on the deployment of medium and short-range strike weapons, including increasing the capabilities of the coastal troops of our Navy," Putin said during the naval parade ceremony at Russia's annual Navy Day in St. Petersburg on Sunday. The US announced earlier this month the decision to begin episodic deployments of long-range weapons in Germany from 2026 to demonstrate its commitment to NATO and Europe. During his speech, Putin stressed that such missiles possibly equipped with nuclear warheads would hit targets on Russian territory within 10 minutes, Xinhua news agency reported.

S-Korea, US, Japan ink document formalising trilateral security cooperation

SEOUL: The defence chiefs of South Korea, the United States and Japan signed a document on the Trilateral Security Cooperation Framework (TSCF) on Sunday, Seoul's defence ministry said, in a move solidifying their continued commitment to three-way security cooperation against North Korean threats.



South Korean Defence Minister Shin Won-sik and his US and Japanese counterparts, Lloyd Austin and Minoru Kihara, respectively, inked a Memorandum of Cooperation on the framework in Tokyo amid their deepening security cooperation in response to the North's persistent nuclear and missile threats and growing military alignment with Russia, Yonhap news agency reported. As the first document that institutionalises joint efforts for trilateral security cooperation among defence authori-

ties, it provides the direction and policy principle for areas of high-level policy consultations, information sharing and trilateral drills, according to the ministry. "Accordingly, the ministers of the three nations reaffirmed the unwavering nature of the new era of trilateral coopera-

tion," it said in a joint press statement. A ministry official said the document is meant to ensure the conditions for trilateral security cooperation are continuously pursued amid a fluid international security environment. Under the agreement, the three nations are expected to step up cooperation for their effective operation of their real-time sharing of North Korean missile data and regularly carry out joint drills, including the multidomain Freedom Edge exercise, based on a multiyear plan.

Spins off the Race for Multi-billion USD Business for Laser Weapons

GOPAL MISRA



With the assassination of the Hamas chief, Ismail Haniyeh, conventional warfare has triggered off a race for inducting laser technologies for the use of energy in destroying the enemy with minimum collateral damages. The Israelis have destroyed two of their arch enemies, Ismail Haniyeh and Fuad Shukr, a veteran Hezbollah commander, recently, but two different strategies were adopted in their elimination. Ismail Haniyeh was eliminated in Tehran with minimum damages to the property and life, on the other hand, Fuad Shukr was killed at Beirut destroying a part of the building and wounding scores of his associates.

It is being believed among the experts of strategic affairs that the assassination of the Hamas leader has given new confidence to the Biden Administration that its war industry is going to get an unprecedented boost with the Tehran operation. In the case of Maduro, the US has already expressed its displeasure, but Russia and China didn't hesitate to congratulate Maduro for his reelection. The reference of Venezuela being one of the top producing countries in oil rich countries is necessary. Earlier, its oil industries, mostly being run by American companies, were nationalized. With the exit of the American capital, the country has been facing a perennial financial crisis. It is also now among the three sensitive spots in contemporary geo-politics, where violence may erupt anytime. Interestingly, the conflict zones, East Europe, West Asia and Venezuela are also major producers of oil. Since in Venezuela, the country's opposition leaders have already rejected the poll results, it means the situation in the country might lead to a major upheaval. There is no denying that these conflicts help war industries to test their new weapons, though causing large scale miseries.

Kinetic Energy

The recent elimination of the Hamas leader appears to have rescripted the current warfare strategy. At present, the US and China are at the forefront of laser-based weapon systems, but in recent years, Russia and India too have joined the race, perhaps, a little late. The US company, Raytheon Laser Technology, has announced its intention to produce medium tactical vehicles. The company has already received a sum of 10 million USD for developing weapons, which could destroy artillery, small weapons and drones with laser beams. Meanwhile, China has announced that its laser assault rifle, ZK ZM-500, is ready for mass production. These weapons based on the use of direct energy systems have caused anxiety among India's strategic affairs experts. They don't rule out that in the next conflict on the India-Tibet border, the dragon might deploy its laser weapons. Earlier, India's warfare strategists were worried about the growing use of drones in future conflicts with Pakistan and China. The new generation weapons have brought in paradigm changes regarding security concerns in the Indian context. In other words, with these weapons, China and its crony, Pakistan, could cause huge embarrassment to India, if they engage their southern neighbor in an armed conflict with the new generation weapons. It is a worldwide phenomenon, when the energy based technology for warfare is getting attention. The Blue halos locus laser defense system, recently developed in the US, has caused worldwide concerns. The new technology could be used for the defense as well as in offensive operations. It is being claimed that it could intercept a small drone before it hit the target, as well as for destroying the enemy. One of the scholars of the Henry Jackson Society, Major Andrew Fox, also a former paratrooper, is convinced that the recent wars, especially the 20-year conflict in Afghanistan has promoted the use of energy in modern warfare. It is not official, but it has been noticed that the laser weapons used in killing the Hamas leader didn't cause any noise. Azerbaijan being its strategic ally, Israel might have sent its drone from the facilities in the country developed under its supervision. The drones or missiles hit the target without much noise to cause any alarm. They just crossed the Caspian sea to hit the target. It also goes to the credit of the Israeli intelligence that they could keep a watch on the terrorist leader, who had traveled to Tehran with his companions in a private jet. It is also being asked why Israel didn't attack the residences of the Hamas leaders in Qatar, the answer, perhaps, could be that Israel has already assured the ruler of Qatar being used as a mediator in the West Asian conflicts that it would not be attacking the Hamas hideouts in their country.

India's defense establishment has taken steps to learn the laser technologies for upgrading the country's defense systems, but compared to China and the US, the Indian efforts are still at a nascent stage. Initially, the Delhi-based Laser Science and Technology has been entrusted to develop laser based weapons. It is not known when India would be able to showcase her success in this field. Both the US and China have already established themselves in this game changing technology. India too is expected to join this coveted field, but it appears her formal presence in the development of the energy based system could be delayed due to the paucity of resources. It may be noted that our investment is estimated to be only 100 million USD while other countries have been investing much more funds in developing war technologies.

India's Durga-2

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

Biden calls for US SC reform to 'restore faith'

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden has announced a plan to reform the Supreme Court, saying that he looked forward to working with Congress to prevent the abuse of presidential power and "restore faith" in the nation's highest court. "President Biden believes that no one -- neither the President nor the Supreme Court -- is above the law," the White House said in a fact sheet.

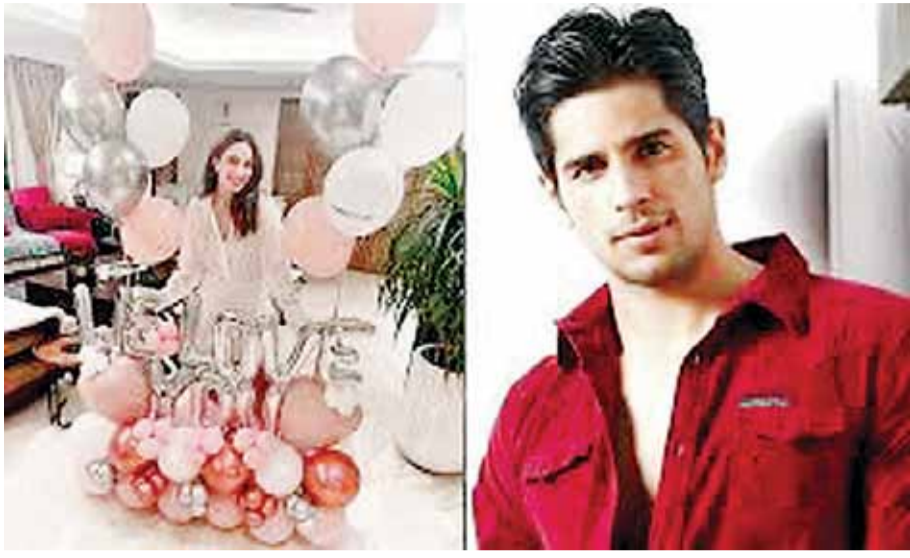


In the face of this "crisis of confidence" in America's democratic institutions, Biden was calling for three reforms to "restore trust and accountability": No immunity for crimes a former president committed in office; Term limits for Supreme Court justices; Binding code of conduct for the Supreme Court, Xinhua news agency reported, citing the fact sheet. Firstly, Biden called for a constitutional amendment that makes clear no president is above the law or immune from prosecution for crimes committed while in office. This came in response to the court's July 1 ruling, which determined that presidents cannot be prosecuted for "official acts" performed while in office, a decision related to a case involving former President Donald Trump, who was indicted by a federal grand jury for his efforts to overturn the 2020 election. Secondly, Biden supported a system in which the president would appoint a Justice every two years to spend 18 years in active service on the Supreme Court. Currently, Supreme Court Justices serve lifetime appointments on the court. During his tenure, Trump nominated three conservative justices, shifting the balance of the Supreme Court from a 5-4 to a 6-3 conservative major-

ity, thereby strengthening the conservative advantage. Biden has become more vocal in his criticism of the Supreme Court and its decisions. "In recent years, the Supreme Court has overturned long-established legal precedents protecting fundamental rights. This Court has gutted civil rights protections, taken away a woman's right to choose, and now granted Presidents broad immunity from prosecution for crimes they commit in office," the White House said. Thirdly, Biden believed that Congress should pass binding, enforceable conduct and ethics rules that require Justices to disclose gifts, refrain from public political activity, and recuse themselves from cases in which they or their spouses have financial or other conflicts of interest. "Recent ethics scandals involving some Justices have caused the public to question the fairness and independence that are essential for the Court to faithfully carry out its mission to deliver justice for all Americans," according to the fact sheet. Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito have faced scrutiny for their personal con-

duct. Thomas did not disclose receiving extravagant travel from wealthy Republican donors. Alito's wife displayed flags outside their homes associated with the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot and efforts to overturn the 2020 election. "President Biden and Vice President (Kamala) Harris look forward to working with Congress and empowering the American people to prevent the abuse of Presidential power, restore faith in the Supreme Court, and strengthen the guardrails of democracy," the White House said. In a statement released Monday, Harris, who has become the Democrats' likely White House nominee, said that "there is a clear crisis of confidence facing the Supreme Court as its fairness has been called into question after numerous ethics scandals and decision after decision overturning long-standing precedent." Implementing term limits and an ethics code for the Supreme Court would likely necessitate new legislation, which means the currently divided Congress is not anticipated to address this issue before the yearend.

Sidharth Malhotra wishes his 'love' Kiara on her b'day: 'You're the kindest soul I know'



Actor Sidharth Malhotra has penned a romantic note for his wife and actress Kiara Advani, who is celebrating her 33rd birthday on Wednesday, calling her the 'kindest soul'.

The 'Student of the Year' actor took to Instagram, and shared a happy picture of the birthday girl. The photo features Kiara, who is wearing a white dress, and is standing close to balloon decorations, which reads: "We love you."

Sidharth wrote in the caption: "Happy birthday love, the pic says it all. You're the kindest soul I know, here is to many more memories together."

He gave the music of the track 'Ranjha' sung by B Praak, Jasleen Royal, and Romy to ceremony. Kiara, who began her acting career in 2014 with the comedy film 'Fugly', was later seen portraying the real-life role of Sakshi Singh Dhoni in the sports biopic 'M.S. Dhoni: The Untold Story', directed and co-written by Neeraj Pandey.

She has featured in movies like 'Bharat Ane Nenu', 'Lust Stories', 'Good Newwz', 'Guilty', 'Laxmii', 'Shershaah', 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2', 'Jugjugg Jeeyo', and most recently 'Satyaprem Ki Katha'.

Kiara next has Telugu political action thriller 'Game Changer', directed by S. Shankar and produced by Sri Venkateswara Creations. The film stars Ram Charan in a triple role.

She also has 'War 2' in the kitty.

On the other hand, Sidharth was last seen in the action thriller 'Yodha', directed by Sagar Ambre and Pushkar Ojha.

He also starred in the action thriller series 'Indian Police Force', created and directed by Rohit Shetty and Sushwanth Prakash.

Priyanka Chopra is excited to use this 'wild' prop for her period drama 'The Bluff'

MUMBAI: Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who is busy shooting for her upcoming movie 'The Bluff', is having a great time during the film's schedule and seems to be enjoying every bit of it.



The actress recently took to the Stories section of her Instagram, and shared a BTS picture from the sets of the film which shows a vintage gun.

The film is set in the Caribbean islands during the 19th century, and sees Priyanka in the role of a former female pirate who must protect her family when her past catches up to her.

Meanwhile, Priyanka's film 'Mujhse Shaadi Karoge' co-starring Salman Khan, and Akshay Kumar recently completed 20 years. Priyanka

Chopra celebrated the 20th anniversary of the film's release as she shared a throwback photo on her Instagram.

In the picture she can be seen posing with Akshay and Salman. She wrote on the picture: "20 years of being Rani! Woah! Those brows tho."

'Mujhse Shaadi Karoge' was directed by David Dhawan and released in 2004. It quickly became a blockbuster hit. The film revolves around a love triangle involving Samir (played by Salman Khan), Rani (played by Priyanka Chopra), and Sunny (played by Akshay Kumar), blending comedy, romance, and a series of misunderstandings that keep audiences entertained all the time.

Rs 3 Lakh Crore Gender Budget Signals New Era of Women's Empowerment

NEW DELHI: In a year marked by significant policy shifts, the Union Budget 2024 has emerged as a beacon of progress, particularly in the realm of women's empowerment and economic development.



The allocation of Rs. 3 Lakh Crore for the gender budget marks an all-time high, signalling the government's commitment to women-led development. This substantial increase is not just a number; it's a statement of intent.

Mitali Nikore, a prominent economic analyst, aptly described this as "societal transformation," emphasising how these measures will support women in balancing their household and professional responsibilities.

This focus on the care economy, a subject of Nikore Associates' recent publication cited in the Economic Survey 2023-24, underscores the growing recognition of un-

paid domestic and care work's economic value, estimated at 15-17 per cent of GDP.

The budget also tackles the pressing issue of employment head-on. The Finance Minister's emphasis on creating 75 million jobs annually is a bold move in response to the paradox highlighted in the Economic Survey 2024 - industries with openings struggling to find qualified candidates.

This situation underscores the urgent need for targeted skill development programs, a point strongly advocated by experts like Nikore.

In line with this, the introduction of a new internship scheme and the proposal for stronger industry-academia linkages are promising steps.

Sanjay Dutt gifts himself brand new Range Rover on 65th B'day



MUMBAI: Sanjay Dutt, the celebrated Bollywood actor, on Monday (July 29) celebrated his 65th birthday while also gifted himself a brand new Range Rover.

Dutt was spotted embracing his special day in style wearing a casual printed shirt and denim jeans. The actor radiated a relaxed yet charming aura. He stepped out to greet his fans, who had gathered to celebrate the occasion with

This gesture not only showcased his enthusiasm for his new acquisition but also allowed fans to see him in a more personal light.

to the actor's refined taste and status.

In a delightful twist, Dutt took the new car for a spin himself. This gesture not only showcased his enthusiasm for his new acquisition but also allowed fans to see him in a more personal light.

The actor's hands-on approach, driving the car himself, added a special touch to the delivery experience.

On the work front, Sanjay Dutt will soon be seen in a string of releases, such as "Ghughhadhi", "Double iSmart", "Sheran Di Kaum Punjabi", "KD - The Devil", "Baap" and more.



Farmers shout slogans as they burn an effigy of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a protest against the central government demanding minimum crop prices, in Amritsar on Thursday. PHOTOS: PRABHJOT GILL

Varun's father David Dhawan didn't like what his son became during 'Badlapur'



MUMBAI: Bollywood star Varun Dhawan has revealed that his father and director David Dhawan didn't like what the actor became after doing 'Badlapur'.

On Thursday, Varun attended the special teaser launch event of his upcoming spy action streaming show 'Citadel: Honey Bunny' at the Mehboob Studios in the Bandra west area of Mumbai, along with his co-star Samantha Ruth Prabhu, the show creators Raj & DK and the music director duo Sachin-Jigar.

Varun interacted with the media stationed at the venue, and shared that his character in the revenge drama 'Badlapur', in which he was pitted against Nawazuddin Siddiqui, took a toll on him and bled into his personal life.

The actor revealed that he started behaving differently during the making of 'Badlapur' and the character triggered a change in his personality.

Varun then shared that his role in 'Citadel: Honey Bunny' is also in a dark space but is not as disturbing as it was in 'Badlapur'.

What's interesting is that David was all praise for Varun and how he handled his character during the making of the show.

'Badlapur' is a neo-noir action thriller film directed by Sriram Raghavan of 'Andhadhun' fame. The film was based on the novel 'Death's Dark Abyss' by Italian writer Massimo Carlotto. It also stars Huma Qureshi, Yami Gautam, Vinay Pathak, Kumud Mishra, Divya Dutta and Radhika Apte.

Elsewhere during the event, Varun also revealed that his upcoming spy action streaming show 'Citadel: Honey Bunny' has a one take action sequence which lasts for 12 minutes.

'Citadel: Honey Bunny', which is the Indian counterpart of the global streaming series 'Citadel', features many exhilarating moments and action sequences, of which the one with a runtime of 12 minutes, stands out.

Varun also lauded Samantha for her dedication towards the series and pulling off action sequences despite battling her medical condition.

He said Samantha's physical training for the show outdid his preparations.

The actor told the media, "She has inspired me, the creators, and put up a terrific show."

PSPCL's Border Zone Launches Massive Tree Planting Campaign



FW DESK Amritsar

The Border Zone of Punjab launched an ambitious tree planting campaign today to increase greenery in the border areas. This initiative was

inaugurated by the Honorable Administrative Director, Sardar Jasbir Singh Sur Singh, by planting a tree with his own hands during a ceremony in Amritsar.

The campaign aims to plant 500 trees in each divi-

sion and sub-division of the Border Zone, demonstrating a significant commitment to environmental conservation and sustainable development in the region.

This initiative highlights the Border Zone's commitment to improving the local ecosystem and combating climate change. The large-scale tree planting campaign is expected to have a positive impact on the environment and communities in the border areas. The event underscores the dedication to green initiatives being led by PSPCL's CMD, Er. Baldev S. Sran.

Rain breaks the spell of unprecedented heatwave in Kashmir

FW DESK

Although rain on Monday has broken the prevailing heatwave, July witnessed the highest recorded temperatures in Kashmir Valley.



According to the meteorological office, Srinagar city recorded a high of 36.2 degrees Celsius on Sunday. This was the hottest July day since July 9, 1999, when the mercury had settled at 37 degrees Celsius. The hottest July day in Srinagar was recorded on July 10, 1946, with the mercury rising to 38.3 degrees Celsius.

The Met office has forecast a spell of rain at isolated places in the Kashmir valley over the next 24 hours, which is expected to bring down the

mercury. Srinagar is currently experiencing the rain which has brought much needed relief to people.

Haryana Khaps constitute 51 members committee seeking ban on love marriages without parents consent and live-in relationships

SATISH HANDA Narwana (Jind)

After Punjab and Haryana High Court decision on several writs, the representatives of nearly 300 khaps from northern states Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh attended a 'Sarv Jatiye Sarv Khap Sammelan' in Jind's Danoda village in Haryana on Sunday and constituted a 521 members committee which passed resolutions seeking bans on live-in relationships, same-sex relationships and same-sex marriages, apart from demanding parental consent for a love marriages. The representatives of 23 Khaps in Haryana at a meeting sought an amendment in the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, to ban the marriages within the same village and gotra (sub-caste) in the State and make live-in relationships strictly illegal.



Majra Khap chief Gurdinder Singh Sandhu, also secretary of five-member co-ordination committee for the Khaps said marriages within the same village and gotra (sub-caste) were not allowed in these parts of rural Haryana and the young boys and girls marrying against the social norms usually led to disputes after some time. However, the government is giving police protection to such couples which is encouraging this unwanted practice. Sandhu said such marriages are not acceptable in most parts of Haryana, especially Raghbir Nain president of Binain Khap appointed president of 51 the members committee said the live-in relationships also cause social disorder and must not be allowed. Parents' consent is necessary for love marriages as well, said Sandhu that the Khaps across Haryana had been demanding a ban on marriages within the same village and gotra (sub-caste) since a long time, but the government had failed to listen to them. He alleged, government wanted to weaken the Khaps by facilitating settlement of minor disputes at community level without legal separation. Khap members said the

courts had recognised certain rights of live-in partners at par with the married couples, but there was no provision for legal separation in such relationships similar to a divorce in a marriage and staying in live in relationship is a black spot leaving ill effect on children compelled to lead normal life without parents and many times indulge in criminal activities. They demanded an immediate ban over whether such couples living in relationships should be treated illegally. The need for better co-ordination among Khaps was also stressed at the meeting and a 23-member president board was constituted for making collective decisions on important matters. The khaps will launch an agitation if their demands are not met,

they said. Talking to the media, Nain said they will talk to the government to amend the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and keep girls' marriage at 18. Few members also met Haryana CM Nayab Saini demanding immediate implementation of their demands in the state. Binain Khap chief Raghbir Nain was deployed to hold dialogue with the Union government also in this regard.

Raghbir Nain said, "We have seen many married women and men staying in live-in relationships with other men or women and this is a dangerous trend. Their children suffer the most because of their parents' action, causing a significant rise in the number of hate crimes (honor-killing) in the state. We urge the government to ban live-in relationships, no marriage in the same village, gotra and neighbouring villages. We have also sought parental consent mandatory in love marriages," he added. We are not against love marriages but such marriages should be solemnised with the consent of their parents. Chahal Khap president Balbir Singh said the khaps have also demanded action against the parents who solemnise child marriage of their wards, ban on usage of drugs, save environment and restriction on dowry in marriages.