

REGION

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## EXCISE POLICY CASE: ARVIND KEJRIWAL'S JUDICIAL CUSTODY EXTENDED TILL SEPTEMBER 3



## Liquor policy scam: CBI alleges Kejriwal promised 90 lakhs to each AAP candidate during Goa assembly elections

OUR CORRESPONDENT  
New Delhi

In a shocking revelation, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) informed the court that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal allegedly promised each Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate in the Goa Assembly elections a sum of Rs 90 lakh. This revelation has ignited a new controversy, with AAP fiercely denying the allegations and accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of orchestrating a political plot to damage the party's reputation.

The CBI made this assertion during a court hearing, where it presented evidence suggesting that Kejriwal made the financial commitment to enhance AAP's chances in the Goa elections. These allegations have raised significant concerns about the funding and conduct of AAP during the state elections, potentially leading to both legal and political consequences.

In response, AAP leaders



have categorically rejected the CBI's claims, dismissing them as baseless and politically motivated. The party has accused the BJP of leveraging central agencies like the CBI to discredit AAP and disrupt its growing influence in states beyond Delhi.

AAP spokespersons highlighted the timing of the allegations, suggesting that they are intended to distract from the BJP's shortcomings as the elections approach. The party has also demanded that the CBI present solid evidence to substantiate its claims, warning against the misuse of investigative agencies for

political purposes. This incident has further intensified the already charged political atmosphere in the country. AAP, which has been expanding its reach beyond Delhi, especially in states like Goa and Punjab, views this as an attempt by the BJP to stifle its rise. Should these allegations prove true, they could severely damage AAP's image as a clean and transparent political alternative, which has been a key element of its appeal to voters.

Meanwhile, the BJP has quickly capitalized on the CBI's allegations to question AAP's integrity and transparency.

BANKING & FINANCE

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## RESERVE BANK OF INDIA TO INTRODUCE UNIFIED LENDING INTERFACE TO TRANSFORM CREDIT SECTOR



## RBI Recognises FACE as a Self-Regulatory Organisation in Fintech Sector

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has taken a significant step in regulating the burgeoning fintech sector by recognising the Fintech Association for Consumer Empowerment (FACE) as a self-regulatory organisation (SRO).

This development, announced by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das at the Global Fintech Fest on Wednesday, is expected to enhance consumer protection and ensure a balanced approach to innovation and regulation within the industry. The decision follows RBI's call for applications for SROs in the fintech sector, with three applications initially received. According to Governor Das, one application has been returned with provisions for resubmission after meeting specific criteria, while the third remains under examination.

The Digital Lenders Association of India (DLAI), one of the applicants, confirmed that their application



had not been returned and expressed anticipation for further communication from the regulator.

Governor Das emphasized that the role of SROs would be crucial in fostering regular consultations, feedback mechanisms, and policy dialogues. This will facilitate open communication and help fintech companies stay informed about regulatory expectations and priorities. "Our endeavour is to carefully craft regulations to achieve this delicate balance, while simultaneously ensuring trust, security, accessibility, risk management, and competition," Das stated.

The recognition of FACE

as an SRO is part of the RBI's broader strategy to ensure the sustainable and orderly development of the fintech sector.

Das highlighted the importance of a balanced approach between innovation and prudent regulation, advocating for self-regulation within the fintech ecosystem.

He underscored that banks and fintech non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) must adopt customer-centric approaches, robust security measures, and fair lending practices to ensure transparent financial products.

Looking ahead, Das outlined five policy priorities for India's financial system: digital financial inclusion, digital public infrastructure (DPI), consumer protection and cybersecurity, sustainable finance, and global integration and cooperation. He noted that the next two decades would see a significant focus on leveraging technology to deliver accessible and tailored financial services.

POTPOURRI

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## WHEN REKHA STUNNED EVERYONE BY HUGGING JAYA AFTER AMITABH BACHCHAN WON BEST ACTOR AWARD



## Gautam Adani replaces Mukesh Ambani as wealthiest Indian

MUMBAI: Recouping the dent caused by the Hindenburg Research report, Gautam Adani's net worth shot up 95 per cent to Rs 11.6 lakh crore last year, which helped him replace Mukesh Ambani to become the richest Indian, a report said on Thursday.

Reliance Industries Chairman and Managing Director Ambani's overall net worth increased by 25 per cent to Rs 10.14 lakh crore, as per the 2024 Hurun India Rich List.

In 2023's report, Adani's wealth declined by 57 per cent to Rs 4.74 lakh crore, and Ambani was way ahead with a fortune of Rs 8.08 lakh crore.

Adani's net worth declined sharply following various allegations levelled by US-based short seller Hindenburg Research. The conglomerate has denied all the allegations.

In the 2014 edition, Hurun had pegged Adani's fortunes at Rs 44,000 crore, which made him the tenth richest Indian then. Shiv Nadar and family of HCL gained one spot to be the third richest with a net worth of Rs 3.14 lakh crore, while Serum Institute of India's Cyrus Poonawalla slipped by one notch to the fourth position with a net worth of Rs 2.89 lakh crore in 2024. Sun Pharmaceuticals' Dilip Shanghvi continued his ascent on the list, securing the fifth richest tag against sixth last year with a net worth of Rs 2.5 lakh crore.

Radha Vembu of Zoho was the wealthiest among self-made women with a fortune of Rs 47,500 crore, while Zepeto's co-founders Kaivalya Vohra and Aadit Palicha, who are in their early 20s, were the youngest on the list with a net worth of Rs 3,600 crore and Rs 4,300 crore, respectively.

The list, which captures Indians having a net worth of over Rs 1,000 crore, grew by 220 individuals to 1,539 people in 2024. The cumulative wealth has seen a 46 per cent jump in the year.

Actor Shah Rukh Khan made his debut on the list with a fortune estimated at Rs 7,300 crore, which was much higher than business partner Juhi Chawla with Rs 4,600 crore net worth who secured second place among the entertainers. Interestingly, 16 professionals also made it to the list with Arista Networks' chief executive Jayshree Ullal being the wealthiest at Rs 32,100 crore and followed by D-mart chief executive Ignatius Navil Noronha at Rs 6,900 crore, according to the list.

## 'Perform, Reform, Transform, Inform': PM Modi's four-point mantra for ministers



NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, chairing a marathon meeting with his ministerial colleagues to review the functioning of the government, exhorted them to work without rest and gave a new four-point mantra of "Perform, Reform, Transform, Inform".

According to sources, the meeting at the Sushma Swaraj Bhavan on Wednesday lasted for more than five hours while PM Modi dwelled upon the government's functioning, its achievements, and their propagation and publicity, welfare measures and other key issues in an address to his colleagues, which lasted around 40 minutes.

The Prime Minister also asked the Ministers to connect with people through social media platforms to send across the message that the government is working responsibly. He also asked for people's responses to be expedited on social media so that his government is seen as responsive. The Ministers have been asked to give information about 10 major decisions of their respective Ministries on completion of 100 days of the Modi 3.0 government and also to propagate them on a mass level, sources said. Prime Minister Modi in the meeting has also specifically asked for faster and better communication of his government's decisions.

## Delhi's 'Winter action plan' to curb pollution likely empasise work from home instead of odd-even policy

OUR CORRESPONDENT  
New Delhi

Delhi's Environment Minister, Gopal Rai, announced that the upcoming Winter Action Plan to combat air pollution in the national capital will likely emphasize work-from-home policies and public awareness campaigns. The announcement followed a meeting with environmental experts and officials from various government departments to gather valuable input.

"These insights will be instrumental in shaping a comprehensive and effective Winter Action Plan," Rai stated during a press



conference. He highlighted the importance of behavioral changes, urging citizens to contribute to pollution reduction by adopting simple practices, such as turning off vehicle engines at traffic signals.

"Key suggestions from the expert meeting included promoting behavioral changes related to pollution through awareness

campaigns," Rai said. "Instead of enforcing the odd-even rule, we should encourage voluntary vehicle restrictions by specific groups. Other suggestions included implementing staggered office timings, using CSR funds from companies to purchase heaters for security guards to reduce biomass burning, promoting electric vehicles in pollution hotspots, and considering artificial rain to combat severe pollution levels."

The Delhi government plans to draft the action plan, incorporating 14 focus areas based on expert recommendations. These focus areas include addressing dust and industrial pollution, vehic-

ular emissions, stubble and open garbage burning, increasing green cover, conducting a tree plantation apportionment study, creating an e-waste eco-park, fostering public participation, engaging in dialogue with the Centre and neighboring states, and implementing the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP). The meeting also addressed issues such as vehicular and dust pollution, pollution hotspots, green area development, stubble and garbage burning, and the need for coordination with the Centre and neighboring states. Rai assured that these suggestions would be integrated into the final action plan.

## Akal Takht declares SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal Guilty



JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

Jathedar Akal Takht Gyani Raghbir Singh on August 30 has declared SAD president and former Punjab deputy CM Sukhbir Singh Badal Tankhaiya ( Sentenced to a religious punishment) as per Sikh rituals for extending severe damages to Sikh interests and party during their government 2007 to 2017 in Punjab as deputy CM . Addressing the gathering in front of Akal Takht, Jathedar Akal Takht said that Sukhbir Singh Badal during his tenure in the Punjab Government from the period 2007 to 2017 as Deputy Chief Minister of Punjab took such decisions which extended damage to Sikh Panth as well as Sikh face.

At the same time Jathedar has also asked the entire Sikh cabinet ministers for the period of 2007- 2017 to appear at Akal Takht since they were also equally responsible for the damage extended to Sikh Panth

and asked them to submit their written clarification within fifteen days at Akal Takht. Jathedar asked Sukhbir Badal to appear at Akal Takht within fifteen days as a humble Sikh to seek apology for his sins towards Sikh Panth, adding that Sukhbir would remain tankhaiya until then.

Jathedar said Sukhbir Singh Badal declared tankhaiya as per Sikh tenets during the meeting of five Sikh high priests. After the meeting the decision to declared Sukhbir Singh Badal as tankhaiya was pronounced by the Jathedar Akal Takht as per long coming traditions of the Sikh community. However, Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal on Thursday appointed senior leader Balwinder Singh Bhundar as the party's working president. "Sukhbir Singh Badal has appointed senior party leader Balwinder Singh Bhundar as Working President of the party," SAD leader and former Punjab Minister Daljit Singh Cheema posted on X.

## Bow my head at Shivaji's feet and apologise: PM on statue collapse



PALGHAR: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday apologised to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and those hurt by the collapse of the warrior king's statue in coastal Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra.

"Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj is not just a name or a



king. For us, he is our deity. Today, I bow my head at his feet and apologise to my deity," Modi said, after laying the foundation stone of the Rs 76,000 crore Vadhvan Port project in Maharashtra's Palghar district.

"Our values are different. For us, nothing is bigger than

our deity," Modi said. "Some people keep abusing Veer Savarkar but are not ready to apologise for insulting him," he said.

"The moment I landed here, I first apologised to Shivaji Maharaj over the statue collapse. I also apologise to the people who were hurt by the collapse," he said.

Modi had unveiled the statue in December last year during the Navy Day celebrations in Sindhudurg district. The statue was aimed at honouring the legacy of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj towards maritime defence.

The state government has announced that a joint technical committee headed by the Navy with representatives from the state government and technical experts will investigate the reasons for the statue collapse.

## Joint technical panel to probe collapse of Shivaji statue: CM Shinde



MUMBAI: Amid protests over the collapse of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj statue in the Rajkot Fort in Sindhudurg district, the Maharashtra government has announced the establishment of a joint technical committee comprising civil engineers, experts, representatives of IITs and Navy officers to investigate its reasons.

The decision was taken at a marathon meeting chaired by the Chief Minister with Ministers, senior bureaucrats and the Navy officers late Wednesday night. The Indian Navy had earlier constituted its own committee to conduct a probe.

The state government's committee will fix the responsibility for the collapse of the statue inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in December 2023. The Chief Minister directed the Public Works Department to appoint a committee of the country's best sculptors, civil engineers, experts and Naval officers to erect a grand and imposing statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj befitting his achievements. According to the Chief Minister's office, CM Shinde has also directed the appointment of a committee of representatives of JJ School of Arts and IIT, Civil Engineers, renowned sculptors from Maharashtra and technical officers of the Navy to suggest a design for the statue in a new grand format.

## Former Jharkhand CM Champai Soren joins BJP

RANCHI: After ending his political journey of four and a half decades with the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), former chief minister Champai Soren formally joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Friday.

In a big public meeting organised at Shaheed Maidan in Ranchi's Dhurwa, Union Agriculture Minister and Jharkhand BJP election in-charge Shivraj Singh Chauhan, election co-in-charge and Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma and Jharkhand BJP President Babul Marandi welcomed him into the party.

Champai Soren said that he has joined the BJP with the resolve to rebuild Jharkhand. Along with Champai Soren,



many others including his son Babul Soren and Seraike-la-Kharsawan Zila Parishad chairman and party's senior leader Sonu Ram Bodra joined the BJP.

Addressing the public meeting, Union Agriculture Min-

ister Shivraj Singh Chauhan said that Champai Soren was among those leaders whose struggles led to the creation of a separate Jharkhand. "Jharkhand Mukti Morcha has insulted such a leader. Now he is a member of the

Bharatiya Janata Party. We are together and have come with the resolve to build a new Jharkhand," he added.

It may be noted that on August 18, Champai Soren wrote a post on the social media platform X and announced that he will start a new chapter separate from JMM. He had written that while being the CM of the state, he was insulted in JMM and the way he was removed from the post was extremely humiliating.

On August 28, he resigned from the primary membership of the party and all the posts, claiming that its "present style of functioning and policies" forced him to leave the party that he served for many years.

## Skill ministry partners Visa to skill 20, 000 youth for tourism industry

OUR CORRESPONDENT  
New Delhi

In a bid to enhance the tourism service experience and support the rapidly growing tourism industry, the government has signed a three-year partnership with global digital payment leader Visa. This collaboration, valued at up to \$1 million, aims to upskill 20,000 Indian youth in tourism-related skills. The agreement was finalized on Friday.

"India's tourism industry has immense potential to drive economic growth and generate millions of jobs across the country. This partnership with Visa is a pivotal step towards realizing and unlocking that potential, equipping our youth with skills needed to thrive in the tourism sector and make India a premier global tourism destination," said Jayant Chaudhary, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

The move aims to train youth across 10 states, includ-



ing Assam, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, and West Bengal to elevate the tourism service experience for tourists. The ministry said that the programme will focus on essential roles within the domestic tourism industry, such as tour guides, customer service executives, naturalists, and paragliding tandem pilots.

"By empowering the youth of the country with skills to thrive in the tourism industry, we aim not only to elevate their employment prospects but also to improve the overall experi-

ence for tourists visiting India," said Kelly Mahon Tullier, Vice Chair, Chief People and Corporate Affairs Officer at Visa. The tourism sector is a significant contributor to India's economy, accounting for over \$231 billion in GDP and employing more than 42 million people in 2023.

As the post-pandemic travel landscape continues to grow, the NSDC-VISA initiative will ensure a skilled workforce to support India's ambitions of becoming a global tourism hub, said the government.



# Mohalla bus trial runs commence in South Delhi

OUR CORRESPONDENT  
New Delhi

Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot announced that trial runs have commenced on two new routes of the Mohalla Bus service. Trials are already ongoing on two existing routes: Pradhan Enclave Pushta to Majlis Park Metro Station and Akshardham Metro Station to Mayur Vihar Phase III Paper Market. In a post on X, Gahlot shared, "With the successful continuation of our Mohalla Bus trials, we're adding two more trial routes today — from Kailash Colony Metro Station to PNB Gitanjali Colony and Lok Kalyan Marg Metro Station to Vasant Vihar Metro



Station. These new routes will serve 6-7 South Campus colleges, including JMC, Maitreyi, Venkateswara, ARSD, RLA, and Motilal. This will enhance

are equipped with six battery packs totaling 196KW, offering a range of over 200 km with a 45-minute opportunity charging time. Each nine-meter-long bus can seat 23 passengers and accommodate 13 standing, with six seats reserved for women, marked in pink. A total of 2,080 buses are planned under the scheme, with all expected to be operational by 2025. Of these, 1,040 will be run by the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), while the remaining will be managed by the Delhi Integrated Multi-Modal Transit System (DIMTS). Currently, the government is running 100 buses sourced from the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC).

last-mile connectivity, particularly for young residents of Delhi."

The Mohalla Buses, distinguished by their green color,

# Delhi councillor returns to AAP fold, a day after joining BJP



OUR CORRESPONDENT  
New Delhi

In a surprising turn of events, one of the five Delhi councillors who recently left the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has rejoined AAP, calling his earlier decision a mistake. Ramchandra, the councillor from ward number 28 and a former MLA from the Bawana assembly constituency, expressed regret over his decision

and stated his intention to make amends.

In an official statement, Ramchandra explained that he had realized his error and subsequently met with senior AAP leaders, including former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and Members of Parliament Sanjay Singh and Sandeep Pathak. He admitted that his brief stint with the BJP was a significant mistake and affirmed his commitment to returning to his political family to correct it. In a post on X (formerly Twitter), Manish Sisodia shared, "I met with our Aam Aadmi Party colleague and former Bawana MLA, Ramchandra. Today, he has returned to his Aam Aadmi family." Ramchandra also claimed that he had been "misled" by certain individuals and vowed never to fall under their influence again. He made this pledge in the presence of Sisodia and other senior AAP leaders.

# Excise policy case: Arvind Kejriwal's judicial custody extended till September 3



NEW DELHI: A local court on Tuesday extended the judicial custody of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal till September 3 in connection with the alleged excise policy scam.

Chief Minister Kejriwal was produced before Special Judge Kaveri Baweja of the Rouse Avenue Court through video conferencing from Tihar Jail upon the expiry of his previously granted custody.

Last week, in a counter affidavit filed before the Supreme Court, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said that all the critical decisions in

the formulation of the now-scrapped Delhi liquor policy were taken at the behest of Chief Minister Kejriwal in "connivance" with the then Deputy Chief Minister and Excise Minister Manish Sisodia.

Seeking dismissal of Kejriwal's plea challenging his arrest in the excise policy scam, the CBI claimed that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo was simply attempting to politically sensationalise the matter, despite repeated orders passed by various courts being prima facie satisfied with the commission of the offences, for which cognisance has already been taken. The CBI said that a total amount of Rs 44.54 crore was sent through hawala channels to Goa from Delhi, which was used for meeting various election-related expenses of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) during the Assembly elections in the coastal state in 2021-22.

# Increasing syndicate crimes a challenge for Haryana police



SATISH HANDA  
New Delhi

Since past few years, fast increasing cases of syndicate crimes like murder, ransom demand, liquor and drugs smuggling, cyber cheating, illegal immigration (kabootar bazi), illegal mining, crimes against women and financial crimes in Haryana state have become a challenge for residents as well as for the police in the state, which claim having controlled the same to the large extent in past couple of years, in which large number of hard core criminals as well as anti-social elements involved in illegal activities in the state have been arrested and pushed behind bars. Information reveals that the Haryana state government has taken stern action against the criminals and gangsters, seized and demolished their properties with bulldozers in the past one year.

Information reveals that 3,658 cases related to the crime against women which include 1716 rape, gang-rape cases in a year. State police record reveals that during year 2020, nearly 13,000 cases of crimes against women were registered by various police stations across the state and the number of such cases rose to 16,658 cases in the year 2021 which include 1,716 cases related to rapes and gang-rapes in the state. Similarly, 450 cases of domestic violence were registered during the year. Information also reveals that a total number of 2.43 lakh criminal cases were recorded in the year 2022, witnessing 17.6% increase as compared to the cases registered during the previous year. Cases registered under POCSO Act during the year were identified as 1,272, which witnessed 7.7% increase as compared to the previous year.

# 'Ghar- Ghar Paras' campaign to increase emergency care and road safety awareness

OUR CORRESPONDENT  
New Delhi

Paras Health, launched 'Ghar-Ghar Paras' campaign to ensure enhanced public awareness about emergency care services and trauma care while simultaneously promoting road safety awareness within the community.

The campaign as the name suggests underscores Paras Health's commitment to ensuring timely medical interventions during emergencies. In order to prioritize the emergency and trauma care services, Paras Health, across its hospitals, is providing the free ambulance service within the cities of the respective hospitals. This step by Paras Health is crucial in removing potential barriers to receiving critical care. Furthermore, the campaign leverages Paras' well-equipped



Trauma Care Centres, ensuring citizens have immediate access to specialized care during critical situations.

Road traffic crashes rank as a major health burden in India, placing 13th among all health issues causing death and disability over the past decade (2009-2019). While this paints a concerning national picture, recent statistics highlight a worsening trend. In 2022 alone, official reports documented a

staggering 461,312 road accidents. These accidents tragically claimed 168,491 lives and caused injuries to an additional 443,366 people. Compared to 2021, these numbers represent a significant increase: 11.9% for accidents, 9.4% for deaths, and a worrying 15.3% rise in injuries.

The initiative, in Gurgaon, engaging street plays (Nukkad Natak), talk shows in schools, road shows demonstrating importance of medical care dur-

ing emergency, will be staged to raise awareness about road safety practices. This collaborative effort seeks to educate citizens on accident prevention measures and responsible driving behaviour. Similar collaborations with local authorities are planned for other locations of Paras Hospitals including Udaipur, Panchkula, Srinagar, Ranchi, Patna, and Darbhanga. Further enriching the campaign's reach, Paras Healthcare will be distributing first-aid kits in underprivileged communities, including slum areas and orphanages, across its hospital network. Dr. Dharminder Kumar Nagar, Managing Director, Paras Health, emphasized that the campaign's focus is on public empowerment, and stated further, "At Paras Health, we believe that timely medical intervention is crucial during emergencies.

# Five days training program for teachers aimed at identifying gifted students



OUR CORRESPONDENT  
New Delhi

The Delhi government initiated a five-day training program for its school teachers aimed at identifying gifted students and developing a specialized curriculum to harness their potential. Organized by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), the program, known as "Project Ab-

hishikt," has been underway since Tuesday at a government school in Kalkaji, with 104 teachers participating.

The project focuses on several key areas: identifying gifted learners, selecting educators who are well-equipped to deliver a specialized curriculum, crafting a curriculum that meets the unique needs of these students, and ensuring the effective implementation of this curriculum.

"The primary goal of the project is to bridge the gap between the current abilities of these students and their immense potential," said SCERT Joint Director Nahar Singh. "This will be achieved by providing specialized support and a carefully developed curriculum to ensure their success."

The initiative targets students in Classes 6 and 9 who demonstrate exceptional abilities, often surpassing their peers, another official explained. The officials noted that teachers often concentrate on students who struggle academically, which can result in the talents of gifted students being overlooked.

Project Abhishikt was launched by the Directorate of Education and SCERT to identify and nurture gifted students from 15 government schools across Delhi.

# Dushyant Chautala of JJP join hands with Chandersheikhar of Azad's party to contest coming assembly polls in Haryana

SATISH HANDA  
New Delhi

The Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) and the Azad Samaj Party-Kanshi Ram (ASP-KR) on Tuesday have joined hands to contest coming Haryana Assembly elections in alliance under the agreement that Dushyant Chautala's JJP will contest 70 seats while the remaining 20 will go to Chandra Shekhar Azad's ASP-KR. Dushyant, former Deputy CM of Haryana has dubbed the alliance a replay of 1998 when the then INLD supremo and his great-grandfather Devi Lal, became the first leader to support BSP founder Kanshi Ram's Delhi Boat Club agitation calling for Bharat Ratna for BR Ambedkar. When asked about the possibility of an alliance of his party JJP's with the BJP, Dushyant straightway ruled it out. Azad, a first-time MP from Nagina in UP and also chief of 'Bhim Army', also dismissed the idea of joining hands with the



BJP saying his party, accusing the party of harming the interests of workers and farmers and said "We will never ally with the BJP again, since we have suffered a lot after having an alliance with the BJP in past and now fully understand how they treat their partners".

Dushyant said, he is hopeful about the JJP-ASP-KR alliance winning enough seats to form the government independently since there are nearly 21% Dalit voters in Haryana capable to change the scenario of victory

Haryana launched by Dushyant Chautala was able to win 10 seats in the first attempt during 2019 Vidhan Sabha polls and became 'kingmakers' in forming BJP-JJP alliance government in the state.

Both leaders also hinted at playing kingmakers if the coming elections in the state resulted in a hung Assembly. Dushyant made it clear his party wouldn't support the BJP even if it faced a repeat of 2019. Information reveals, during 2019 Vidhan Sabha polls Dushyant's JJP was able to get good support of 'Jaat' and 'Dalit' voters and was able to win seats during the first attempt. However, JJP contestants could not exhibit well during the 2024 Lok Sabha election and all their candidates failed to save their securities. Political analysts suggest the JJP's alliance with the ASP-KR aims to dent the voter base of the Congress among both Jats and Dalits.

# Congress leaders fight among themselves as if they are bargaining for vegetables in a vegetable market: Vij

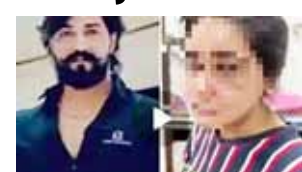
SATISH HANDA  
Ambala

Former Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij took a jibe at the Congress and said that, "A party that has not held elections in Haryana for 16 years should be cancelled." He also mocked the Congress leaders, saying Congress leaders fight among themselves as if they are bargaining for vegetables in a vegetable market. Vij was responding to questions asked by media persons here. Congress had organized an election meeting, which was later canceled. On this matter, former Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij took a dig at Congress, questioning, "Can a party that has not held elections in Haryana for 16 years be considered a party?"

# Pressure being built to withdraw the case, victim trainee doctor at Rohtak PGI said I want justice

SATISH HANDA  
Rohtak

The video of the student doctor at PGIMS Rohtak who was kidnapped, ill treated by a resident doctor gone viral on social media revealed the student said that in the first few days they had living for each other, but when she came to know that he is already having friendship with another female left meeting him. Meanwhile, there is another video of PGIMS medical student who was kidnapped brutally beaten up in Rohtak getting viral on social media, in which the victim student has said that she will not withdraw the case filed against the accused doctor on her complaint of harassing her who has been terminated from the institute, and she wants justice against alleged accused beaten up and harassed her.



She said, if the the doctor beaten and tortured her for 12 hours had killed her that night (similar to the case held at Kolkata recently in which semi nude body of a trainee doctor was recovered inside the hospital with several injury marks all over on her body), people would have taken out candle marches and protests for me too as in Kolkata case, she added The student has given this answer to those who are trolling her on second social media gone viral. She admitted that though she came close to him, but when she came to know that he was already in friendship with a girl she started to step back and the doctor made it difficult for her to study and live.

# Congress backing terrorism for vote bank: Nayab Singh Saini

PARVESH HANDA  
Rohtak

During a public rally at Rohtak Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini accused the Congress of supporting terrorism and pushing the country, especially Jammu-Kashmir state towards lawlessness to attract its vote bank. He strongly condemned the Congress leadership for joining hands with the National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir, Saini said the alliance wanted to bring back Articles 370 and 35 A, but would not succeed in its plans. The CM was addressing a media persons after inaugurating the state election office of the BJP at the party's state headquarters. Saini alleged the Congress regime had indulged in malpractices during its two successive tenures in the state, adding that the Congress wanted to divide the people on communal lines, but was wiped



out from the state. Saini raised a question, why no action had been taken against former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda despite cases being registered by the CBI and Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the matters were pending before the Supreme Court. He alleged that Hooda while in power had forcibly acquired farmers land at cheaper rates and obliged his nears and dears. Replying to another que-

ry, the Chief Minister cautioned JJP leader Dushyant Chautala that the Congress would finish his party. He said, for the lust of power in Jammu-Kashmir Congress want to push J-K back to the era of terror asked its leader Rahul Gandhi to explain why the party forged alliance with the National Conference and the Abdullah who wants to withdraw section 370 in Jammu-Kashmir and spread terrorism in the valley again.

# Congress in Haryana merely a 'baap-beta' party: Kiran Choudhry

SATISH HANDA

Four-time MLA Kiran Choudhry, who recently left Congress and joined BJP, also a nominee for Rajya Sabha seat predicts the BJP is going to win coming assembly polls in Haryana by thumping majority. Kiran Choudhry, the daughter-in-law of former CM Late Bansilal, also a former four-time MLA of Haryana and a bitter rival of former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda in the Congress had finally left the party to join the BJP and the BJP has now fielded her as its nominee for a Rajya Sabha seat also and she is set to be elected unopposed on August 27 on the basis of the BJP's strength in the Assembly. After she left Congress and joined the BJP being a disciplined party. She said, there is nothing called the Congress except there is only a



'baap-beta' party left in Haryana, pointing at Bhupinder Singh Hooda and his MP son Deepender she said, "Anyone who is capable of coming up is cut down to size, since father wants to clear the field for his son, who is completely incapable. They will never do anything good for the party, both have finished the party in Haryana". Kiran said, former state president Kumari Selja no doubt is brilliant, calm and quiet, but in the Haryana Congress, only the 'baap-beta' are left to destroy whatever is left, since the Congress is already on a ventilator in the state.

# Race for Chief Minister's chair in Haryana by Congress leaders

Haryana CM Nayab Saini said, Congress has neither a leader nor any policy, creating hurdles in recruitments in Haryana

SATISH HANDA  
Bhiwani

Addressing Jan Ashirwad rally during an Assembly constituency in Bhiwani, Haryana CM Nayab Saini said Congress has neither a leader nor a policy that has credibility among the electorate in Haryana state, as such the people of the state need to be cautious of them. Making an attacking on former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Saini alleged that a 'bharti roko' gang has been active at the behest of Hooda which always create hurdles in the recruitment process by approaching the court and now this group has gone to the Election Commission in an attempt to stop the ongoing



recruitment process in the state. He alleged the Congress leaders had been resorting to false propaganda that if BJP comes to power for the third time, they will change the Constitution, whereas the BJP always acts according to the Constitution by following the path shown by Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar. Saini alleged the Congress has always insulted the Constitution.

Taking a dig at Hooda for demanding account of the BJP government's works, Saini alleged that when Hooda was ruling in the state as Chief Minister for a decade incidents of atrocities occurred with the Scheduled Caste people in Hisar and Sonapat districts and the houses of people belonging to the Schedule Caste community were burnt and people will take revenge in coming assembly election. Saini said, in-spite of claiming 'hisaab' for BJP's 10 year rule in the state, rather Congress should give 'hisaab' for 10 years while ruling in the state.



# Sorry, says CM Mamata Banerjee on RG Kar rape-murder case

**KOLKATA:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee dedicated the foundation day of the Trinamool Congress' student wing TMCP on Wednesday to the memory of the woman doctor of the state-run R.G. Kar Medical College & Hospital who became the victim of a ghastly rape and murder earlier this month.

"Today I dedicate Trinamool Chhatra Parishad Foundation Day to our sister, whom we mourned the tragic loss of at RG Kar Hospital a few days ago. And please, our heartfelt condolences to the family of the sister who was brutally tortured to death and seeking speedy justice, as well as to all the women of all ages across India who have been subjected to such inhumane acts. Sorry," the Chief Minister said in a message posted on her official X handle in the morning.

According to her, since



students and youths have a great social role to play it is the task of student society to give the dream of a new day by keeping the society and culture awake and to inspire everyone around with the bright vows of a new day.

"My appeal to all of them today, be encouraged in this effort, stay committed. My dear students, stay well, stay healthy, stay committed to a bright future," the message read.

A mega programme is scheduled in Kolkata on Wednesday afternoon on the occasion of Trinamool Congress Chhatra Parishad's foundation day.

The Chief Minister herself is slated to address a gathering on the occasion. The programme coincides with the 12-hour general strike convened by the BJP condemning police action on the protesters participating in the 'Nabanna Abhijan' (March to Bengal

“My appeal to all of them today, be encouraged in this effort, stay committed. My dear students, stay well, stay healthy, stay committed to a bright future”

Secretariat) rally on Tuesday condemning the rape and murder case.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has already taken up the charge of investigation in the matter following an order of the Calcutta High Court. The central agency is also conducting a parallel probe on the financial irregularities in R.G. Kar, which many have claimed have some links with the gruesome rape and murder.

## Rahul Gandhi calls for restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood



FW DESK

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has reiterated his call for the restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir, saying that it does not make sense to run the region from Delhi.

During his recent visit to Srinagar, Gandhi interacted with a group of Kashmiri women and highlighted the importance of returning statehood, which, he said, was taken away for the first time in Indian history.

Gandhi expressed his concerns about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, accusing him of not listening to others and being unwilling to acknowledge mistakes. He suggested that this approach stemmed from insecurity and weakness, rather than strength.

The Congress leader also engaged in a candid conversation with the women, discussing issues ranging from societal pressures to get married to their educational aspirations. He noted the resilience and wisdom of the women of Kashmir and stressed the need to ensure their voices are heard.

## Former Jamaat-e-Islami members expected to contest in PDP strongholds in South Kashmir



Former members of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) are set to contest as Independent candidates across at least a dozen constituencies, with a particular focus on south Kashmir, according to a report in a section of Kashmir media.

These individuals, now operating under the banner of the newly-formed Justice and Development Front (JDF), will be challenging the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in areas traditionally considered its strongholds. Although the JDF could not officially register as a political party due to time constraints, it still plans to participate actively in the elections.

The reports quoting sources in the group indicated that they are likely to field candidates in constituencies including Pulwama, Rajpora, Tral, Bijbehara, Anantnag, Kulgam, Devsar, and Zainapora. These are areas where the PDP, already weakened by the departure of several key leaders since 2019, might face tough competition.

## Get well soon, says Surjewala over Kangana's comment on farmers' protest

**CHANDIGARH:** Under fire over her remarks that the 'farmers' protest could have led to a Bangladesh-like situation in India if not for strong measures taken by the Modi government, Congress leader Randeep Surjewala on Monday asked BJP leader and Mandi MP Kangana Ranaut to "Get well soon."

Even BJP leaders in Punjab and Haryana have advised Kangana to refrain from making inflammatory comments as they fear this could further escalate farmers' outrage against the party.

In a video shared on X, Mandi MP Ranaut alleged that during the farmers' stir against the three farm laws, "bodies were seen hanging and rapes were taking place."



Responding to her post, senior Congress leader Surjewala wrote on X, "After all, why do BJP people hate the country's food providers so much? The BJP has always lied, deceived, conspired and oppressed our farmers. And once again a BJP MP has made baseless allegations against our food providers. The question

is that, has Kangana made this cheap allegation against the farmers as per the BJP's election strategy?"

The Congress leader who is campaigning in poll-bound Haryana that also saw year-long farmers' protest against the three farm laws that have now been rolled back, asked, "Were these just Kangana's words or did someone else copy them? If not, then why are the Prime Minister of the country, the Chief Minister of Haryana and all the BJP MPs and MLAs silent on this issue?"

When Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini was questioned by the media over the purported remark of the party's MP against the farmers' agitation, he refused to com-

## Govt committed to ensuring more youth play and shine: PM Modi on National Sports Day

**NEW DELHI:** On the occasion of National Sports Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended his greetings to sports persons across the nation and reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting sports and encouraging greater youth participation in the field.

August 29, the birth anniversary of legendary hockey player Major Dhyan Chand, is celebrated as National Sports Day in India.

"Greetings on National Sports Day. Today, we pay homage to Major Dhyan Chand Ji. It is an occasion to compliment all those passionate about sports and those who have played for India," PM Modi stated in a post on X.

Emphasising the government's dedication to promoting sports, he added, "Our Government is committed to supporting sports and ensuring more youth are able to play and shine."



The Prime Minister also shared a video on X, highlighting the significance of sports in everyone's life and its contribution to bringing the world together.

"Sports has been a part of the culture and heritage of India for years. Sports is not only about winning medals but also winning hearts. Sports is for everyone. Sports not only prepares champions but also promotes peace, progress, and wellness. Sports is also a way to bring the world together," the Prime Minister said in the video.

PM Modi further emphasised that the power of sports significantly enhances the country's global image and assured that no effort will be spared in making the 2036 Olympics, set to be held in India, a grand success.

"This is a dream of 140 crore Indians," the Prime Minister added. Reflecting on the current enthusiasm for sports among the youth, PM Modi remarked, "Today, the attraction towards sports we are seeing in youth, this is the biggest tribute to Major Dhyan Chand."

## Minor victim of sexual assault should not be repeatedly called to testify: SC



**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court has stressed that a minor victim of sexual assault should not be repeatedly called to testify before the trial court.

A bench headed by Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia said that the child who has suffered a traumatic experience of sexual offence should not be called time and again to testify about the same incident.

The court was hearing a plea challenging the orders of the High Court of Orissa and the Additional Sessions Judge-Special Court under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, Nayagarh, which denied recalling a minor victim for re-examination as a witness.

Allegedly, the accused kidnapped the minor girl, got her married at a temple, and forced her to make sexual relations. Later, the victim was rescued by her parents with the help of the police.

The accused were booked in 2020 under the relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code, POCSO Act, and Prohibition of Child Marriage Act.

In the course of trial, the special court rejected the application moved by the accused for recalling the victim for re-examination as witness. The trial court relied upon Section 33 (5) of the POCSO Act mandating that a child will not be called in the court to testify.

Upholding the decision, the apex court said, "POCSO Act is a special legislation, which was enacted to protect children from sexual offences and for safeguarding their interests and ensuring the well-being of the child at every stage of trial of offences under the Act. A bare perusal of Section 33 (5) of the Act indicates that a duty is cast upon the special court to ensure that a child is not repeatedly called to give his/her testimony before the court."

It added that although Section 33 (5) would not act as an absolute bar to recall the victim for re-examination as a witness, each case must be looked at in the context of its individual facts and circumstances.

## Congress corners BJP on Kangana's outrageous statement on farmers

**KAVITA SHARMA**  
New Delhi

The Congress party cornered the Bharatiya Janata Party over the outrageously atrocious and provocative statement of its controversial MP Kangana Ranaut for describing farmers as "rapists" and "murderers".

The party also sought clarification from the union government on the MP's related statement that foreign powers including America and China were trying to create disturbances like in Bangladesh through these protests.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters, Chairperson of the Social and Digital Platforms, Supriya Shrinate referred to Ranaut's statement where she had alleged that murders and rapes took place during the farmers' protest.

Referring to the BJP's clarification distancing itself from the MP's statement, Shrinate asked, if it is so, what action did the party plan to take against her (Ranaut) as she did not deserve to sit in the parliament. The Congress spokesperson observed that the BJP MP had insulted the farmers of the country by making such outrageous and provocative



statements against them. She also demanded clarification from the government on the allegations by the BJP MP that the US and China were trying to destabilise the country by orchestrating such protests.

She pointed out, this statement had come from an MP of the ruling party, hence the government owed an answer and clarification. She asked, if it is really so, what was the government of India doing. She said, the ministries of home affairs and external affairs must come out with clarification on the issue as it is a serious matter.

Shrinate said, the BJP cannot simply shrug off its responsibility by a token denial without following it up with any concrete action against the MP, who has been repeatedly and regularly making controversial statements.

## PM Modi shares interaction video with 'Lakhpati Didis'

**Highlights empowerment through SHGs**

**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi engaged with the 'Lakhpati Didis' of Maharashtra's Jalgaon, praising their entrepreneurial spirit and the significant strides they have made towards financial independence and empowerment.

In a video posted by PM Modi on X, the women, who are beneficiaries of various government schemes aimed at women's welfare, were seen sharing their success stories with the Prime Minister.

The women, known as 'Lakhpati Didis' due to their ability to generate an annual household income of at least Rs 1 lakh, expressed their gratitude to PM Modi for the initiatives that have enabled them to support their families and inspire others in their communities.

"We are very proud to be Lakhpati Didis. PM Modi is doing great work for the welfare of women," one of the beneficiaries stated.

In a notable gesture, when the women welcomed PM Modi with an 'Arti,' the Prime Minister reciprocated by holding the Arti plate and performing their Arti instead.

During the interaction, PM



Modi asked the women about the key differences between those who have become 'Lakhpati Didis' and those who have not yet reached that milestone.

The women credited the welfare schemes for their financial independence and ability to contribute to their households.

One woman from Assam shared her journey of becoming a 'Lakhpati Didi' over five years and how she has helped 207 other women achieve the same status. "I now earn Rs 8 lakh per annum," she proudly informed the Prime Minister, who acknowledged her as an inspiration for others in Assam. "Yes sir, I have become a hero from zero," she added.

Another woman from Nashik, Maharashtra, revealed that she and 10 other women run a business producing sanitary pads. However, she noted that the stigma surrounding menstruation has prevented others from joining their venture. Despite this, their work continues to challenge social taboos and contribute to women's health.

From Nahana, Himachal Pradesh, a woman shared how her family's pride has grown as she transitioned from a housewife to a successful entrepreneur. "My children proudly tell others that their mother has gone to Maharashtra to meet Modiji," she said.

Many 'Lakhpati Didis' de-

scribed how they were once confined to their homes but are now running businesses and empowering other women. Some of them are involved in animal healthcare, while others assist farmers.

On Sunday, PM Modi released a revolving fund of Rs 2,500 crore to benefit 48 lakh members of 4.3 lakh Self-Help Groups (SHGs). He also disbursed bank loans totalling Rs 5,000 crore to support 25.8 lakh members of 2.35 lakh SHGs, furthering the government's commitment to women empowerment.

Since the inception of the Lakhpati Didi Yojana, 1 crore women have been empowered to become 'Lakhpati Didis,' with the government's goal to elevate 3 crore women to this status.

These women not only achieve financial independence but also serve as role models in their communities by adopting sustainable livelihood practices in farming, non-farming, or service sectors.

SHG groups, under the Lakhpati initiative, foster collective action and mutual support, providing platforms for essential financial literacy, skill development, and livelihood assistance.

## Morality is Freedom-Nationwide Campaign by Jamaat-e-Islami Hind Women's Wing

**Increase in Sexual Violence and Decline in Moral Values is a Serious Issue for the Country: Jamaat-e-Islami Hind Women's Wing**

**KAVITA SHARMA**  
New Delhi

A month-long nationwide campaign is set to be launched by the Women's Wing of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind in September 2024. The theme of this campaign is 'Morality is Freedom.' The objective of this campaign is to raise awareness among people and inform them about what true freedom is and how it is linked to morality," said Ms. Rahamathunnissa A, National Secretary of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, at a press conference held at the headquarters in New Delhi.

Expressing regret over the increasing incidents of sexual



violence and homicide targeting women and girls in the country, she stated, "Social inequality, neglect of security, and discrimination against women in our society have further complicated this issue. Particularly, the cases of sexual violence against marginalized women, Dalits, Adivasis, minorities, and disabled women are even more severe. Recent incidents, such as the rape and murder of a female doctor at RG Kar Hospital in Kolkata (West Bengal), the gang rape and murder of a 14-year-old Dalit girl in Gopalpur (Bihar), the rape and brutal murder of a Muslim nurse

in Udhm Singh Nagar (Uttarakhand), and the sexual assault of two kindergarten girls at a school in Badlapur (Maharashtra), prove that there is a serious need to reflect on the mentality and behavior towards women and girls in our country." She added, "The statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) show that crimes against women are increasing year by year. These reports only include the cases that have been reported; who knows how many cases go unreported. How much struggle do women have to go through to get justice? The Bilkis Bano case, in which she was gang-raped during the 2002 Gujarat massacre, is a stark example. She fought a long and hard battle to get justice."

## Three terrorists killed in separate encounters in Jammu and Kashmir



FW DESK

Three terrorists were killed in two separate encounters in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district, officials said. The encounters began following a joint operation by the Indian Army and Jammu and Kashmir police, prompted by suspected terrorist movement.

According to the army's Srinagar-based Chinari Corps, intelligence inputs led to the operation on the night of August 28-29 in the Machhil area, where two terrorists were likely killed. Another terrorist was killed in an encounter in Tangdhar sector after an infiltration attempt was intercepted.

## India has surpassed its NDC emission intensity target, where achievement target was 33% by 2030 Kirti Vardhan Singh



**NEW DELHI:** Speaking at the ASSOCHAM Environment and Carbon Conference Kirti Vardhan Singh Hon'ble Minister of State, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India shared that Government is doing the part with policies and it actively supports in achieving net zero under Viksit Bharat 2047. Of course, climate change is a big problem, we all know that and the effects of climate change are not defined by political or national borders. We all know that our country is very heavily dependent on our agricultural producers. So, climate change is basically a boundary-less phenomenon that we are facing.

And of course, we are doing our own bit in building our climate resilience and achieving our targets, our NDC targets. But at the same time, it also depends a lot on what is happening in the rest of the world. And Mission for Life is one of the areas which we also have to look. Whenever we talk about climate change, when there are discussions and deliberations on UNFCCC and COP in the world stage, the majority of the focus is on industrial outputs, on how our industry can cope

up with climate change and what changes are needed in terms of infrastructure.

One of the key challenges that I feel our country faces is the lack of proper technology or the cutting-edge technology that is needed. If you talk about a circular economy, if you talk about converting our waste into worth, oblique wealth, when it comes to all this, we have a shortage of technology. We have already achieved the emission intensity of GDP, where the achievement target was 33% by 2030. We have already achieved 40% of our electrical installed capacity through non-fossil fuel sources. Again, 9 years before our target, he added.

A circular planning whereby whatever methods we adopt, whatever pathways we discover or research on, the ultimate goal is to achieve net zero. So, we have to take multiple facets into account when we talk about achieving net zero, when we talk about fighting climate change, when we look forward to the future that we are going to give our future generations to our children. So, our research has to be more focused towards finding the

right technology or developing technologies towards greener industries and towards low carbon emission.

Archana Varma, IAS, Mission Director, National Water Mission, Ministry of Jal Shakti, GoI discussed India has had, as we all know, historically India has had a low history of carbon emission. We have just contributed 4% of CO2 emissions despite housing 18% of the population. The Jal Jeevan Mission, in which 19 crore rural households are to be supplied with drinking water and already 14 crores and above have been supplied with drinking water. Govt is also working on the National Mission for Clean Ganga, in which the objective is to clean and reduce the pollution in Ganga. And we have the National River Conservation Directorate, which performs a similar function for the other rivers.

The National Water Mission, wherein the goal is that we use water efficiently and increase water use efficiency, especially in the industrial, agriculture and domestic sector by 20 percent, so that we achieve the parameters of water conservation and water security by 2047. Also, the scheme of Atal Bhujal Yojana, which basically relates to, we all know that groundwater table in many parts of India is really depleting. So, to ensure that groundwater table doesn't deplete, we have a community-led Atal Bhujal Yojana. We have the Jal Shakti Abhiyan 2019, which has its major objective of creating awareness and being a people-led movement for water conservation.



**RAKESH GOSWAMI** STRESSES RAPE INCIDENTS HIGHLIGHT SYSTEMIC FAILURES IN JUSTICE



## Proper probe key to timely justice



Amid national outrage over the rape and murder of a trainee doctor in Kolkata and the sexual abuse of two kindergarten girls in Badlapur, Maharashtra, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken twice in 10 days on crimes against women. In his 78th Independence Day address, Mr. Modi said that crimes against women should be investigated without any delay, and that it was important to instill fear among culprits of committing such crimes. "There should be a wide discussion about the criminals who get punished so that even those who commit such sins fear the consequences including hanging to death. I feel that it is very important to create this fear," he said. Then, while addressing the Lakhpati Didi Sammelan in Jalgaon, Maharashtra, on Sunday, Mr. Modi said that committing a crime against women was "an unpardonable sin", adding that the guilty should not be spared.

Protests erupted after a postgraduate trainee doctor was found dead after 36 hours of duty at Kolkata's R.G. Kar Hospital on August 9. Forensic reports stated that she had been raped. Furious at persistently high level of sexual violence despite reforms in the criminal justice system, women gathered on streets across India. The Calcutta High Court ordered the transfer of probe of the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Later, the Supreme Court took suo motto cognisance of the case.

Following the gang rape and murder of a 23-year-old woman in New Delhi in December 2012, the government brought about several changes in the criminal justice system. The definition of rape was widened to include non-penetrative acts, fast-track courts were set up, and the age threshold was reduced so that even 16-year-olds could be tried as adults in sexual offences.

However, little seems to have changed. According to a government report, on average, one woman reported a rape every 15

minutes across the country in 2018. There were more than 31,000 reported rapes in 2022, the latest year for which data are available. Around the time of the 2012 Delhi case, data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) showed that there were 25,000 recorded rapes a year across India.

### A collective failure

That the annual number of rapes is largely above 30,000 is not just a cause for concern, but also a reflection on the four components of the criminal justice system: the police, the prosecution, the courts, and the prisons. It is a collective failure of these four components that there is no fear of punishment in the minds of people who commit these heinous crimes. The police, which are the investigative agency, have to ensure that there are no infirmities in the investigation procedure. For this, the first step is to preserve the scene of crime so that experts can gather evidence in the best possible manner. A botched job in the early stages of investigation has serious ramifications and often leads to acquittal. A botched job also gives some rapists the confidence that they can get away with their crime. Early-stage botching begins with delay in the registration of the crime. There was a delay of 14 hours

in registering an FIR in the Kolkata case. In the Badlapur sexual abuse case too, the police sprung to action only after public outrage. The Bombay High Court slammed the police for the delay in filing the FIR and recording statements.

After the registration of the FIR, proper investigation needs to be done. This includes collection of vital evidence from the scene of crime. The role of the investigators, therefore, is of paramount importance. Police being a state subject, the State governments have a bigger role to play in ensuring delivery of timely and fair justice. Why should all highly publicised cases be transferred to the CBI after an outcry by the media and the public? Lack of confidence in state investigative agencies is a major cause for concern.

If the investigation is improper, the prosecution finds it difficult to pursue the case in a court of law. This creates problems in trials, appeals, and every step of legal proceedings, often ending in rapists getting away. As per the NCRB data, conviction rates for rapes were 27%-28% from 2018 to 2022. This means that almost 70% of rape cases in India end in acquittal. But even in cases where the prosecution manages to get conviction, inordinate delays in execution of the sentence makes delivery of justice a long process. In the 2012 Delhi case, even though the fast-track court which tried the case held the accused guilty of gang rape and murder in less than a year, the guilty were hanged after seven years.

### Revamped justice system

In the revamped criminal justice system of India, forensic examination has been made mandatory in cases with offences that are

punishable with imprisonment of seven years or more, which are categorised under heinous offences. The maximum punishment for rape in India is life imprisonment and death penalty in the case of the victim being below 12 years of age. The forensic examination is aimed at enhancing the criminal investigation by ensuring that a team of experts conduct an on-site examination and gather evidence. The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2024, which has replaced the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, also makes it mandatory to video-tape the forensic examination. The revamped criminal justice system of the country has also fixed timelines for enforcement agencies to take cognisance of complaints and mercy petitions, for filing of charge sheets and e-FIR for women, along with timelines for hearings to address contemporary challenges.

But these legal reforms will yield the desired results only when the investigating agency does its job thoroughly. Often, failure in preliminary investigation and incomplete or delayed collection of forensic evidence leads to botched-up investigations that ultimately make it more difficult for the victim to get justice. It is important that the investigating agency preserves the scene of crime and collects forensic evidence to build a watertight case so that the accused persons get convicted. It is equally important to ensure that the appellate courts, such as the High Court and the Supreme Court, dispose of the appeals quickly and in a time-bound manner for sentences to be executed.

These steps may not prevent atrocities against women, but they will at least instill the fear of consequences in the minds of the perpetrators, and ensure that the victims and their families don't have to wait endlessly for delivery of justice.

*Rakesh Goswami is Professor of Journalism at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi. Views are personal.*

**ELISABETH FAURE** ON HOW JAN POSHAN KENDRA IS TRANSFORMING FOOD DISTRIBUTION LANDSCAPE



## Reimagining India's fair price shops



As the backbone of India's Public Distribution System (PDS), fair price shops (FPS) play a crucial role in ensuring food security for millions of citizens. Reforms are needed to enhance the profitability of FPS dealers, strengthen their livelihood, and ensure they serve citizens' entitlements.

There are approximately 5.37 lakh ration shops in the country, of which around 2.95 lakh are operated by private individuals. The remaining are operated by cooperative societies, self-help groups, panchayats, and others. State governments also provide private dealerships to the disadvantaged. These shops, which are visited by millions of beneficiaries every month, can also function as social change establishments that promote citizens' nutrition.

### Stepping into the future

In the past, the central and State governments have undertaken initiatives to support FPS operators in expanding their offerings and making them sustainable through additional sales and better uptake of rations by beneficiaries.

For instance, the PDS Control Order 2015 allowed dealers to sell non-PDS commodities. The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution has been partnering with other Ministries and agencies to broaden the range of products and services available, including Common Services Centre services, banking services, and the sale of cooking gas cylinders.

In 2023, the government started exploring ways to make ration shops vibrant, modern, and viable by enabling them to offer more

products and services along with the PDS operations.

The Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD) started an initiative to develop 75 model ration shops. These model shops could have waiting spaces, CCTV cameras, toilets, and drinking water facilities, among other things.

This initiative has shaped a programme for establishing SMART-FPS or Jan Poshan Kendra. It is a step in the right direction, addressing the viability of FPS while also focusing on improving nutritional outcomes. This initiative can potentially transform the country's food distribution landscape.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in India and the DFPD are collaborating at the national and State levels to increase efficiency, accountability and inclusion in the supply chain and distribution of food entitlement schemes. Apart from the Jan Poshan Kendra, these transformational

initiatives include route optimisation, rice fortification, smart warehouses, grain ATMs, and mobile storage units.

### Unlocking entrepreneurship

One of the critical issues FPS face is the need for more access to credit to initiate new businesses. The proposed Jan Poshan Kendra programme recognises this challenge and aims to empower FPS owners to expand their business opportunities and revenue streams. The programme seeks to create an environment where these shops can establish creditworthiness through simple-to-use digital solutions and leverage credit facilities from the Small Industries Development Bank of India and other institutions.

Furthermore, the lack of entrepreneurship skills and training has been a significant barrier for FPS owners in diversifying their operations. The emphasis of the Jan Poshan Kendra programme on boosting the confidence of FPS owners and equipping them with essential entrepreneurship skills is a crucial step towards addressing this challenge. The programme aims to enhance their digital literacy and provide training in retail business, enabling FPS owners to leverage digital platforms and technologies effectively. This will further contribute to their success as they tap into the existing e-commerce market like aggregators already doing business with kirana or local grocery stores.

### Jan Poshan Kendra as change agent

Transitioning from food security to nutrition security is another critical aspect that the Jan Poshan Kendra programme aims to address by encouraging FPS dealers to

offer affordable and diverse food to influence choices and preferences towards nutritious options. Thus, the programme aligns with the Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition (POSHAN) Abhiyan, creating a new pathway for improved nutrition for all citizens.

WFP Annapurta pilots showed the potential of FPS dealers as change agents. For example, a dealer in Uttarakhand transformed his shop into a modern, citizen-friendly space, attracting more beneficiaries and increasing PDS sales. This demonstrates that FPS dealers can change their behaviour and become agents of change with the right incentives.

The WFP supports DFPD pilots at 30 locations in Gujarat and Telangana by helping create a model for better infrastructure, skill-building, and income-generating opportunities. Additionally, WFP is setting up standalone Annapurtis in two locations to give beneficiaries 24-hour access to PDS foodgrains, mainly benefiting migrant populations. The proposed upgrade includes installing solar panels for renewable energy, waste management areas, and provisions for wheelchair access, creating an inclusive and sustainable environment for FPS and their customers.

The Jan Poshan Kendra programme aims to provide the support the FPS owners need to thrive. It envisions a future where they can sustain their businesses and contribute to building a healthier and more food-secure India.

*Elisabeth Faure is Country Director of the World Food Programme in India. Views are personal.*

### LETTERBOX

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Don't worry about being successful but work toward being significant and the success will naturally follow.

OPRAH WINFREY

## THE FINANCIAL WORLD

RNI NO. DELENG/2011/38860

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: BUILDING NO-23, NEHRU PLACE NEW DELHI 110019; PHONE: 9888040061

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### BOOKS: REVIEW

## New book 'Blood in the Sea' unveils Goa's hidden history

**B**lood in the Sea: The Dark History of Hindu Oppression in Goa" by Vinay Nalwa is an evocative exploration of Goa's layered history, a narrative that delves far deeper than the vibrant Portuguese influence that often dominates perceptions of this coastal region. This book embarks on a journey to uncover the ancient roots of Goa, intricately intertwined with Hindu legends, and navigates through the tumultuous eras of Islamic and Portuguese dominance, highlighting the resilience of the Goan people and their ultimate liberation.

The book begins with a captivating look at the geological origins of Goa, establishing a foundation for the rich cultural tapestry that would later emerge. Nalwa deftly connects these origins to ancient Hindu legends, particularly the story of

Parshuram, providing a spiritual and historical context that sets the stage for the region's significance in Hindu mythology. This early period, as the author describes, was marked by the flourishing of Hindu dynasties that fostered a culture of art, architecture, and trade. The harmony and prosperity of this era laid the groundwork for what Goa would become, a cultural beacon in the Indian subcontinent.

As the narrative progresses, Nalwa shifts focus to the darker chapters in Goa's history. The arrival of Islamic rulers, particularly the reign of Adil Shah, introduced a period of oppression that sought to disrupt the cultural and religious fabric of the region. However, it is under Portuguese colonial rule that Goa's history takes a particularly grim turn. Nalwa does not shy away from detailing the brutal tactics employed by the Portuguese to consolidate

their control over the region. The narrative is filled with harrowing accounts of mass conversions, the ruthless inquisition led by Franciscan and Jesuit priests, and the systematic desecration of Hindu temples. These actions were part of a broader effort to erase Hindu cultural and religious practices, including the deliberate suppression of the local Konkani language in favor of Portuguese.

One of the most compelling aspects of "Blood in the Sea" is its focus on the resistance movements that arose in response to these oppressive regimes. Nalwa chronicles the bravery of those who fought against the foreign rulers, from the liberation of Dadra Nagar Haveli by RSS volunteers to the two major freedom struggle movements in Goa. The author paints a vivid picture of the courage and sacrifice of individuals who, despite overwhelming odds, stood up against their op-



*Blood in the Sea: The Dark History of Hindu Oppression in Goa* By Vinay Nalwa; Prabhat Prakashan Pvt. Ltd.; 284 pages; Rs500.

pressors. These resistance movements, as Nalwa illustrates, were not just acts of defiance but also symbols of hope that inspired a collective consciousness among the Goan people, eventually leading to their liberation.

The culmination of Goa's liberation struggle is a particularly poignant section of the book. Nalwa meticulously describes the joint operation of the Indian armed forces, highlighting the strategic and moral challenges they faced. The narrative pays homage to the supreme sacrifice made by many Indians, both within Goa and across the nation, to secure the region's freedom. This part of the book is not just a recounting of historical events but a tribute to the indomitable spirit of the

Goan people and their unwavering commitment to reclaiming their cultural and political identity.

"Blood in the Sea" is much more than a historical account; it is a tribute to the resilience and perseverance of a region that has weathered centuries of turmoil. Through meticulous research and a compelling narrative, Vinay Nalwa brings to life the complex history of Goa, a history that is as rich and diverse as the culture it represents. The book serves as a powerful reminder of the struggles that have shaped Goa and the enduring spirit of its people. For anyone interested in the history of Goa, particularly beyond the well-trodden narratives of Portuguese influence, this book is an essential read.

In conclusion, "Blood in the Sea" not only educates readers about the intricate and often painful history of Goa but also celebrates the cultural richness and resilience that have defined the region. Vinay Nalwa's work is a testament to the power of history in shaping our understanding of identity and heritage, making it a must-read for anyone looking to explore the deeper layers of Goa's past.



# Ambani announces Jio AI Cloud Welcome offer; Car manufacturers offer up to Rs 20,000 discount under new scrapping policy

NEW DELHI,

Stepping up the company's AI and cloud play, Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani on Thursday announced that Jio users will get up to 100 GB of free cloud storage to securely store and access their photos, videos, documents, digital content and data.

Addressing the 47th AGM of RIL, Ambani said the Jio AI-Cloud Welcome offer will be launched during the upcoming Diwali, which would bring a "powerful and affordable solution where cloud data storage and data-powered AI services are available to everyone, everywhere". "Jio users will get up to 100 GB of free cloud storage to securely store and access all their photos, videos, documents, all other digital content, and data. And we will also have the most affordable prices in the market for those needing even higher storage," he said.



Jio is of the firm belief that AI should not be a luxury reserved for a select few, he said, adding that AI services must be accessible on all devices, not just expensive, high-end devices. "This requires a delivery model where AI services and the data processed by AI are both hosted in the cloud, allowing every user to access their data

and AI services from anywhere, on any device, over low-latency broadband networks," Ambani said. This is the only way to ensure that everyone will benefit from AI, irrespective of their socio-economic background. "We call this concept Connected Intelligence. As a first step to Connected Intelligence, every user needs ample and af-

fordable data storage capacity in the cloud, with the highest levels of privacy and security. With data safely stored in the cloud, AI can deliver intelligent, personalised services over the network," he said.

Jio has added its voice assistant "Hello Jio" to its newly launched operating system -- Jio TVOS, which will enable TV users to control their Set-Top Box with voice commands.

It will be accessible through the mic button on the Jio remote. "Recently, we made Hello Jio even smarter using the latest Generative AI technologies, improving its natural language understanding and making it feel more human-like. Now, finding content on JioSTB is easier than ever. For example, just say, 'Hello Jio, find action movies,' and it will search across all your apps like Amazon Prime, Disney+, HotStar and more," Reliance Jio Chairman Akash Ambani said.



**NEW DELHI:** Car and SUV manufacturers have agreed to offer discounts of 1.5 per cent of the ex-showroom price of a new car or Rs 20,000 whichever is lower, while truck manufacturers will offer discounts of up to 3 per cent with the launch of the Centre's Vehicle Scrapping Policy, according to an official statement issued on Wednesday.

These Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) discounts are in addition to the

scrap value provided by Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facilities (RVSFs) to the vehicle owners and existing incentives of Motor Vehicle Tax concession, waiver of fee for issuance of certificate of registration and waiver of liabilities by the Government of India under the Vehicle Scrapping Policy linked to the Certificate of Deposit (CD) on purchase of a new vehicle, applicable in many states, according to the statement of the Ministry of

Road Transport and Highways.

Car and SUV manufacturers including Maruti Suzuki India Ltd, Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Hyundai Motor India, Kia Motors, Toyota Kirloskar Motor, Honda Cars, JSW MG Motor, Renault India, Nissan India and Skoda Volkswagen India, are offering discounts of 1.5 per cent of the ex-showroom price of new car or Rs 20,000, whichever is less, against the passenger vehicle scrapped by the owner in the last six months, said the statement issued by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

Mercedes Benz India has offered a flat discount of Rs 25,000, which will be over and above all existing discounts.

Details of the scrapped vehicle have to be linked in the Vahan system.

Companies may voluntarily offer additional discounts on identified models.

## National Infrastructure Trust files Rs 1,600 Draft Offer Document



**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
Mumbai

National Infrastructure Trust – sponsored by Gawar Construction Limited (GCL or "Sponsor,"), has filed its Draft Offer Document with the regulator to raise an aggregate amount of Rs 1,600 crore via an issue of units to the public. The IPO comprises fresh issue of units aggregating upto Rs 1200 crore and Offer for Sale of upto Rs 400 crore by Sponsor Selling Unitholder. The Net Proceeds are proposed to be utilized towards providing loans to the Project SPVs for repayment/pre-payment of external borrowings, in part or in full from financial lenders; Loans to Project SPVs for repayment of unsecured loans availed by the Project SPVs from the Sponsor.

National Infrastructure Trust is an infrastructure investment trust sponsored by Gawar Construction Limited, established on September 25, 2023 with the objective to carry on the activities of, and to make investments as, an infrastructure investment trust, as permissible under the SEBI InvIT Regulations.

The Sponsor, Gawar Constructions Limited is an infrastructure development and construction company in India with over 15 years experience, primarily engaged in construction of roads and highway projects across 19 states in India.

Revenue from operations of the SPV for fiscal 2024, 2023 and 2022 was Rs 1,485 crores, Rs 2,033 crores, Rs 1,908 crores respectively. Projected cash flows for FY25, FY26 and FY27 is estimated to be Rs 582 crores, Rs 662 crores and Rs 585 crores respectively. As per the Draft document, India's road network has grown 59% to become the second largest in the world in the last 10 years. A total 202 national highway projects worth Rs 79,789 crore (\$U.S. 9.59 billion) for building 6,270 kms in length are at the implementation stage in the country, and the Government has allocated Rs 111 lakh crore (\$U.S. 1.4 trillion) under the National Infrastructure Pipeline for FY25. SBI Capital Markets Limited and HDFC Bank Limited are appointed as the lead managers to the issue. Axis Trustee Services Limited has been appointed as the sole Trustee of the Trust. The Units are proposed to be listed on BSE and NSE.

## Market Gives Thumbs Down to Resourceful Automobile Upon Listing

**NEW DELHI:** In a surprising turn of events, Resourceful Automobile shares made a flat debut on the BSE SME platform on August 29, listing at Rs 117, identical to its issue price.

This muted performance comes despite the company's initial public offering (IPO) being oversubscribed by an impressive 419 times. The Rs 12-crore public offer garnered substantial interest during its three-day bidding period, receiving bids for 40.76 crore shares against the available 9.76 lakh shares. However, the listing gains fell significantly short of grey market expectations, where shares were trading at a premium of 89 percent. The grey market, an unofficial trading platform operational from pre-subscription to listing day, had indicated much higher potential gains. Resourceful Automobile Limited, founded in 2018, operates under the brand 'Sawhney Automobile.'

The company offers a comprehensive range of Yamaha two-wheelers, including commuter bikes, sports bikes, cruisers, and scooters. Despite its recent entry into the market, the Delhi-based firm maintains only two outlets and employs a workforce of eight people. The company's operations are centered around two conceptual showrooms, each equipped with



an attached workshop.

The Blue Square showroom in Dwarka, New Delhi, showcases the full lineup of Yamaha two-wheelers, along with apparel and accessories. A second showroom is located on Palam Road, New Delhi. This development occurs against the backdrop of a surge in SME IPOs attracting record subscriptions throughout the year. Many of these offerings have been followed by impressive listing gains, often outperforming main board IPOs with stronger track records, disclosures, and financials. At least five SME IPOs have witnessed subscriptions of approximately 1,000 times. In light of this trend, on August 28, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) issued an advisory cautioning investors about SME investing. The market regulator urged investors to be wary of companies presenting unrealistic positive outlooks and advised against relying on the social media tips or rumours for investment decisions.

## Gujarat, with 10 pc growth in direct selling, crosses Rs 1,000 cr business mark

**FW DESK**  
Ahmedabad (Gujarat)

Ruling the roost at the second position after Maharashtra in the Western region, the direct selling business in Gujarat has crossed Rs 1,000 crore, registering a growth of nearly 10% in the year 2022-23, the Indian Direct Selling Association (IDSA) shared in a survey report to the media here on Thursday.

The report, prepared by the KANTAR, signifying the industry's core strength in creating self-employment, skill development opportunities, and socio-economic growth at the grass-roots levels, reflects that the state clocked a business turnover of Rs 1,014 crore during the period, Rs 91 crore above the 2021-22 fiscal, registering a robust 9.86% growth.

The state, which continued to be the ninth-top direct-selling market in the country, provided self-employment to over 2.1 lakh microentrepreneurs, with over



77,000 of them being women. The industry, which makes a significant contribution of over Rs 150 crore to the state exchequer through taxes, also has over 4.8 percent share on overall national sales, which stood at over Rs 21,282 crore in 2022-23, the IDSA shared.

In his address, Kunvarjibhai Mohanbhai Bavaliya, Minister for Food, Civil Supply, and Consumer Protection Affairs, said that while creating a conducive business environment for the direct selling industry, the state is committed to safeguarding the interests of consumers. Underscoring the need

to ensure the quality of the products for consumers, he offered all the help to the industry from his department, which is also working on constituting a monitoring Mechanism as envisaged in the Consumer Protection (Direct Selling) Rules 2021. He also felicitated 12 women entrepreneurs on the occasion who have excelled in the field of direct selling with respective companies in the state.

Vivek Katoch, Chairman, of IDSA, said, "Gujarat continues to be among the key and priority markets for the direct selling industry. The growth figures reflect that the

direct selling industry in the state is poised for new horizons, reaffirming the relentless hard work of direct sellers."

"The industry has provided sustainable self-employment and micro-entrepreneurship opportunities for nearly 86 lakh Indians and has demonstrated consistent and sustained growth with a CAGR of over eight percent during the last four years. The 19 member companies of IDSA can confidently lay claim to successfully protecting consumer interests as well as those of over 2.1 lakh direct sellers in the state," adds Katoch.

He said the "Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, through the Consumer Protection (Direct Selling) Rules 2021, has brought regulatory clarity to the operations of the direct selling entities and to protect consumers. So far, ten states have established monitoring committees by the Rules' provisions. I trust that other states, including Gujarat, will also accomplish the task soon."

## TVS Motor Company Launches the "All-New TVS Jupiter 110"

**Redefining the Benchmark in the Scooter Segment**

**ARUNKUMAR RAO**  
Bengaluru

TVS Motor Company (TVSM), a global leader in the two and three-wheeler segments, has taken another bold step in the evolution of urban commuting with the launch of "The All-new



TVS Jupiter 110". This latest model encapsulates the brand's

commitment to innovation, performance, and customer satisfaction by offering next-generation features that set it apart from the competition. The TVS Jupiter 110, embodying the spirit of "Zyada" (More), delivers more in every aspect: style, mileage, performance, comfort, convenience, safety, and technology.

For over a decade, the TVS

Jupiter has been a trusted companion for 6.5 million customers across India, becoming one of the most recognized and beloved scooter brands in the country. At the launch event in Bengaluru, Aniruddha Haldar, Senior Vice President — Head Commuter Business and Head Corporate Brand & Media, TVS Motor Company, expressed pride in the product's enduring success.

## HAL & SAFHAL Forge Strategic Alliance to Develop 'Aravalli' High-Power Engine for Next-Gen Helicopters



**ARUNKUMAR RAO**  
Bengaluru

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and SAFHAL Helicopter Engines Pvt. Ltd. (SAFHAL) have signed a strategic airframer contract to jointly design, develop, manufacture, supply, and support a next-generation high-power engine named 'Aravalli.' This engine is intended for HAL's 13-ton Medium Lift class Indian Multi-Role Helicopter (IMRH) and the Deck-Based Multi-Role Helicopter (DBMRH). The name 'Aravalli,' inspired by India's iconic mountain range, symbolizes the nation's ambitions for achieving self-reliance in critical engine technologies. The contract was signed by Mr. S Anbuvelan, CEO (Helicopter Complex), HAL; Mr. Olivier Savin, Director, SAFHAL Helicopter Engines, and EVP, Sales & Marketing, Safran Helicopter Engines; and Mr. S K Mehta, Director, SAFHAL Helicopter Engines and Executive Director (Finance), HAL, according to a press statement from HAL.

# Board Characteristics of Pharmaceutical Companies in India



**DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH**



**BHAKTI SAJGURE**

Board characteristics have drawn attention of researchers across the world as board of directors exercise significant influence on success or failure of a corporate entity. Board size, board independence, and board gender diversity are integral components of Board characteristics. Diversity can be observed in terms of gender, age, and nationality of board members thereby recognizing their influence on directors' knowledge, experience and skills. Vijay Govindarajan and Chris Trimble in their paper titled, "The CEO's Role in Business Model Reinvention" (Harvard Business Review January-February 2011 Issue) cited N.R. Narayana Murthy of Infosys in this regard what he called the "30/30 rule": 30% of participants in any strategy discussion should be younger than age 30, because they are creative and not wedded to the past. In this way, Infosys relied heavily on inputs from young employees. The company assembled a Voices of Youth panel of higher performers who participated annually in eight senior management meetings. Murthy credits youth involvement for sparking more than

10 R&D projects at Infosys on diverse areas.

Regulation 17 of the Listing regulations and Sections 149 and 152 of the Companies Act, 2013 has a requirement that the board size should lie between 3 and 15. Further, it is also provided as per Regulation 17 (1) (c) of SEBI (Listing Obligations & Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 (referred as 'SEBI LODR') that the Board of Directors of the top 1,000 listed companies (with effect from April 1, 2019) and the top 2,000 listed companies (with effect from April 1, 2020) shall comprise of not less than six directors. Top 1,000 and 2,000 was to be determined on the basis of market capitalization as at the end of the immediate previous financial year. In this background, board size in top 25 pharmaceutical companies in India in terms of market capitalization varies from 6 to 12 directors.

The Kotak Committee under the Chairmanship of Uday Kotak was constituted in June 2017 and one recommendation was regarding minimum six directors in all entities. This recommendation was positive but it was not possible to implement the recommendation or all entities at one go, and hence, it was implemented in a phased manner. At that time, 97% companies out of top 500 in terms of market capitalization at NSE, and 94% companies out of top 1,000 and 69% out of top 1,000 and above, had at least six directors on boards. For the companies listed on the BSE, 96% companies out of

Table 1:- Board Size in Top 25 Pharmaceutical Companies in India

Name of Companies	Number of Directors
JB Chemicals	6
Sun Pharma, Pfizer, and AstraZeneca	7
Lupin, Aurobindo Pharma, Ipca Labs, Ajanta Pharma, Laurus Labs, Sanofi and Suven Pharma	8
Mankind Pharma, Abbott, GSK, and Gland Pharma	9
Dr. Reddy's Labs, Zydus Lifesciences, Torrent, Piramal Pharma, Alembic Pharma and Natco Pharma	10
Cipla, Divi's Labs, Alkem Labs, and Glenmark	12

Source: Compiled from Annual Reports (2023) of respective companies

top 500, 91% out of top 1,000, 78% out of top 2,000 and 63% out of top 3,000 companies had at least six directors. By 2023, out of 25 top pharmaceutical companies, only one company had 6 directors, and other 24 pharmaceutical companies had a higher number of directors as given in Table 1.

Board Independence is an important consideration as Section 149 (4) of the Companies Act asks for one-third of total directors as Independent Directors. Regulation 17 of the Listing Regulations mandate that in case the Chairman of the Board of Directors is a non-executive director, at least one-third of the Board of Directors shall comprise of independent directors and where the listed company does not have a regular non-executive chairman, at least half of the Board of Directors shall comprise of independent directors. 15 pharmaceutical companies (Sun Pharma, Cipla, Zydus Lifesciences, Torrent, Lupin, Aurobindo, Abbott, GSK, Gland, Ajanta, JB Chemicals, Laurus, Sanofi, Suven and AstraZeneca) out of top 25 have three types of directors namely

Executive, Non-executive, and Independent directors, e.g., Pankaj R. Patel served as Non-Executive Chairman of Zydus Lifesciences, and Mukesh M. Patel served as Non-Executive Director. Dr. Sharvil P. Patel who is the son of Pankaj R. Patel served as Managing Director, and Ganesh N. Nayak is the Executive Director of the Company. On March 31, 2023 the company's board comprised of 10 directors which included 2 Executive Directors, and 8 Non-Executive Directors, including 6 Independent Directors. In other words, the board size of 10 directors comprised 4 non-Independent directors and 6 Independent Directors.

Eight (08) pharmaceutical companies (Natco Pharma, Pfizer India, Alembic Pharma, Glenmark, Ipca Labs, Alkem Labs, Divi's Labs, and Dr. Reddy's Labs) among top 25 had two categories of directors, i.e., Non-executive Independent Directors and Executive Directors. Glenmark had the highest number of non-executive independent directors, followed by Dr. Reddy's Laboratories. An equal num-



ber of non-executive independent directors and executive directors were present in the board of Natco Pharma, Ipca Labs, and Alkem Laboratories. Piramal Pharma and Mankind Pharma have used the nomenclature of Executive Directors, Non-Executive Independent Directors, and Non-Executive Non-Independent Directors, e.g., in Piramal Pharma, Nandini Piramal and Peter DeYong (married to Nandini Piramal and acknowledged under inter-se relationships among directors) are Executive Directors – Promoters Group, one Executive Director – Non-Promoter Group, two non-Executive and Non-Independent Directors – Non Promoter Group and four board members represented as Non-Executive Independent Directors.

It is also mandated under Regulation 17 of the Listing Regulations that the Board of Directors shall have an optimum combination of executive and non-executive directors with at least one – woman director. The Kotak Committee as referred above had recommended "at least

one woman independent director" on all listed entity boards. Implementation of this recommendation was also found difficult for all entities at one go. Hence, it was made mandatory that the Board of Directors of the top 500 listed companies shall have at least one independent woman director by April 1, 2019 and by April 1, 2020 this provision was made mandatory for the top 1,000 listed companies. For FY23, each of 10 pharmaceutical companies (Natco, Alembic, Pfizer, Laurus, J.B. Chemicals, Ajanta, Gland Pharma, Ipca Labs, Sun Pharma and GSK India) had one – woman director. The highest number of female directors was in case of Glenmark, i.e., 4 out of 12. Each of six pharmaceutical companies namely AstraZeneca, Piramal Pharma, Abbott, Alkem Labs, Lupin and Dr. Reddy's Labs had 3 female directors. 8 out of 25 pharmaceutical companies had two female directors respectively.

Finally, the Committees of the Board also have a bearing on the Corporate Governance of any organization. Statu-

tory committees namely Audit Committee, Nomination and Remuneration Committee (NRC), Stakeholder Relationship Committee (SRC), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and Risk Management Committee (RMC) are mandatory under the Companies Act. All top 25 pharmaceutical companies have these committees except that Lupin and Cipla has the Sustainability Committee that is entrusted with CSR activities, and in Zydus Lifesciences, ESG Committee deals with CSR mandate. Similarly, for Stakeholder Relationship Committee, Cipla and Zydus Lifesciences have different nomenclature.

Significant differences are found in Non-statutory Committees constituted by various pharmaceutical companies. Sun Pharma has a Corporate Governance and Ethics Committee. Cipla and Glenmark have an Operations & Administrative Committee. Certain Committees are for a specific purpose, e.g., Buyback of Shares. For 2023, Zydus Lifesciences as well as Natco Pharma had Buyback Committee. Only Zydus Lifesciences reported about Finance & Administration Committee. Dr. Reddy's Laboratories had a Banking & Authorization Committee for this period. Glenmark and Zydus reported about their Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Committee and no other pharmaceutical company among top 25 pharmaceutical companies had ESG Committee. Gland

Pharma and Natco Pharma had ESOP Compensation Committee. Just one company – Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, set up Science, Technology and Operations Committee. Other main committees set up by top pharmaceutical companies were: Committee dealing with Land Property by two pharmaceutical companies, Executive Committee by two pharmaceutical companies, Share Transfer Committee by four pharmaceutical companies, and Board Administrative & Share Transfer committee by one pharmaceutical company.

Board characteristics of top 25 pharmaceutical companies in India as captured above, present these companies in positive light. In finality, it is the board evaluation that can contribute significantly to improved performance at three levels – Organizational, Board and individual Board member level. Otherwise, just representation on the board without contribution is like what late Subir Raha as CMD, ONGC said in January 2009.....board members opening their mouth only to sip tea.

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



# SBI Projects Lower GDP Growth 7.1% in Q1 FY25

**NEW DELHI:** In a recent report, economists at the State Bank of India (SBI), the country's largest lender, have projected a decrease in India's economic growth for the first quarter of the fiscal year 2025.

The real GDP growth is estimated to be 7.1 per cent for the April-June period, down from 7.8 per cent in the same quarter of the previous year.

The report, based on a 'Now-casting Model' utilising 41 lead indicators, suggests that the Gross Value Added (GVA) growth may fall below 7 per cent, to approximately 6.7-6.8 per cent for Q1 FY25.



This projection aligns with other analysts' expectations of a moderation in economic activity during this period.

Several factors contribute to this anticipated slowdown, including softer manufacturing performance, lower government spending due to general elections, declining profit margins in the manufacturing sector, and increased staffing costs for manufacturing companies.

Despite the projected quarterly decline, SBI economists maintain their 7.5 per cent growth estimate for the entire fiscal year 2024-25, which exceeds the Reserve Bank of India's forecast of 7.2 per cent.

The report also highlights global economic uncertainties, including persistent geopolitical tensions and concerns about potential recessions in key economies.

However, it notes a positive development for India with the South West monsoon picking up from early July, potentially benefiting the agricultural sector.

# RBI to Introduce Unified Lending Interface to Transform Credit Sector

**MUMBAI:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is set to launch the Unified Lending Interface (ULI), a new initiative poised to boost the country's lending ecosystem.

Announced by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday in Bengaluru, the ULI is anticipated to have a transformative impact similar to the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) on the payments system.

Das highlighted that the ULI will build on a pilot technology platform launched last year, designed to streamline credit processes by enabling frictionless access to critical data. The new system will facilitate the seamless, consent-based transfer of digital information, including PAN and Aadhaar records, lending history, income, credit records, and land records from multiple sources to lenders.

The ULI aims to reduce



credit appraisal times, particularly benefiting smaller and rural borrowers by employing common, standardised Application Programming Interfaces (APIs). This 'plug and play' approach is expected to simplify digital access to information from various providers.

"The ULI will be introduced nationwide in due course," Das stated, emphasising that the initiative is expected to replicate the UPI's success in

reshaping India's financial landscape.

The UPI, launched in 2016, has revolutionised payments by allowing transactions through Virtual Payment Addresses (VPAs), minimising the need to share sensitive banking details.

Das referred to the 'new trinity' of JAM-UPI-ULI, where JAM stands for Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile. The ULI is anticipated to enhance India's digital infrastructure by offering a user-friendly interface that reduces technical complexities and documentation requirements.

The RBI Governor also noted that by digitising and integrating disparate financial and non-financial data, the ULI will address significant credit demand across various sectors, especially benefiting agricultural and MSME borrowers.

# Heatwave and Elections Lead to Contraction in India's Microfinance Sector



**NEW DELHI:** For the first time in 12 quarters, India's microfinance sector has faced a contraction, with the outstanding gross loan portfolio dropping to Rs 4.33 lakh crore at the end of June 2024, from Rs 4.42 lakh crore three months earlier. This 2 per cent decline marks a significant shift in the sector's growth trajectory, according to Sa-Dhan, an industry body citing data from credit information company Crif High Mark.

The contraction is largely attributed to a severe heat wave in North India and disruptions caused by the two-month-long general elections. The extreme temperatures affected economic activities, particularly in rural areas where microfinance plays a crucial role. The elections also diverted resources and created uncertainty, impacting loan disbursements and repayments. In addition to these challenges, funding constraints and an over-extension of credit in some regions have further slowed growth.

"There has been an overheating of credit in certain geographies," Sa-Dhan reported, highlighting the cautious stance adopted by both lenders and borrowers amid these conditions. Analysts suggest this could be a temporary setback for the microfinance sector, which has seen robust growth over the past few years. However, the contraction underscores the need for microfinance institutions (MFIs) to enhance their risk management practices and diversify their strategies to better withstand external shocks.

# PhonePe launches PG Bolt to revolutionise in-app payments for merchants

**NEW DELHI:** PhonePe Payment Gateway on Thursday announced the launch of PhonePe PG Bolt -- a groundbreaking solution that empowers merchants by offering the fastest in-app payment experience to customers with a 99 per cent success rate.

PhonePe PG Bolt offers a 1-second transaction time with the widest reach for registered PhonePe merchants and users who can integrate their payments across apps without multiple onboarding.

PhonePe PG Bolt offers a multitude of benefits that set it apart from other payment solutions in the market.

With a focus on speed, convenience, and reliability, PhonePe PG Bolt delivers a 10x faster payment experience with UPI Lite, Wallets, and EGVs, through a one-click, PIN-less process.

Unlike other solutions that require multiple steps and phone permissions, PhonePe PG Bolt eliminates these hurdles, ensuring enhanced customer experience and an efficient payment journey which leads to increased conversion rates and drives business growth.

By providing complete control over the customer's payment experience within the merchant app, PhonePe PG Bolt eliminates the need for redirection to external payment platforms.

Merchants can offer a wide range of payment options, including UPI Lite, UPI-linked bank accounts, electronic gift cards, RUPAY credit cards, and wallets, to cater to diverse customer preferences.

This comprehensive suite of payment options, coupled



**"We are excited to launch PhonePe PG Bolt as it represents a significant milestone in our mission to empower businesses and enhance the overall payment experience for consumers"**

with PhonePe's extensive user base helps position merchants for success.

PhonePe PG Bolt addresses key challenges faced by merchants, especially enterprises, by reducing transaction failures, eliminating payment funnel drop-offs, and minimising cart abandonment.

By integrating the PhonePe PG Bolt, merchants can significantly improve customer satisfaction, increase sales, and gain a competitive edge in the market.

"We are excited to launch PhonePe PG Bolt as it represents a significant milestone in our mission to empower businesses and enhance the overall payment experience for consumers," said Ankit Gaur, Head PhonePe Payment Gateway and Online Merchants.

"By providing merchants with the tools to create a seam-

# India Emerges as Global Leader in Digital Public Infrastructure

**NEW DELHI:** In a significant shift from its traditional role as a "rule-taker," India is now poised to become a key player in shaping global standards for digital financial technologies and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). This development marks a pivotal moment in India's technological evolution and its growing influence on the world stage.

Dammu Ravi, Secretary of Economic Relations at the Ministry of External Affairs, highlighted India's ambition to collaborate with international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The goal is to establish standards for cutting-edge technologies including digital payments, blockchain, and cybersecurity. "For decades, India has followed rules set by the global community, primarily Western nations," Ravi stated at the Global Fintech Fest in Mumbai.

# Federal Bank first Indian Bank to launch India's Pioneering Facial Payment System SmilePay

**MUMBAI:** Federal Bank, India's leading private sector Bank, is proud to announce the launch of SmilePay™, this groundbreaking technology will allow customers to complete transactions using only their face. This revolutionary product, unveiled as we enter India's 78th year post Independence, marks a significant milestone in the country's journey towards financial freedom and convenience. The launch of SmilePay™ happened at the Global Fintech Fest by Ms Shalini Warriar, Executive Director, Federal Bank.

Introducing SmilePay™: Pioneering a New Era of Facial



Authentication Payments Two of India's largest corporate houses, Reliance Retail and Ananya Birla helmed Svatantra Micro Housing (SMHFC), are among the first to pilot this innovative technology with their customers at select outlets / branches. SmilePay™ is the first-of-its-kind payment so-

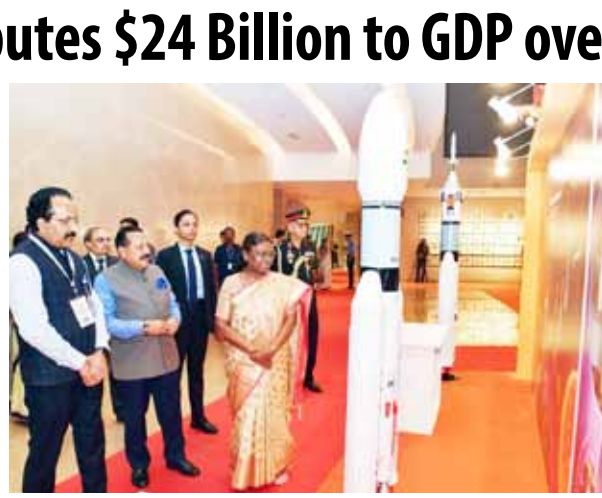
# India's Space Sector Contributes \$24 Billion to GDP over Past Decade

**NEW DELHI:** As India celebrates its first National Space Day, marking the one-year anniversary of Chandrayaan-3's successful moon landing, a new report reveals the significant economic impact of the country's space sector.

According to preliminary findings presented by Steve Boehinger of Novaspace, a European consultancy, India's space sector has directly contributed approximately \$24 billion (Rs 20,000 crore) to the nation's Gross Domestic Product over the last ten years. The sector has also directly supported 96,000 jobs across public and private industries. The report, initiated by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), highlights

the multiplier effect of the space industry on the broader economy. For every dollar produced by the space sector, there was a \$2.54 impact on the Indian economy. Moreover, India's space workforce was found to be 2.5 times more productive than the country's average industrial workforce.

The study, conducted by Indian economics research firm econONE and Novaspace, involved interviews with representatives from 56 Indian organizations in both public and private sectors. It revealed that India has invested \$13 billion in its space sector over the past decade, positioning the country as the 8th largest space economy globally in terms of funding.



The space sector in India has seen significant growth and diversification, with 700 companies now operating in the field, includ-

communications emerged as the largest contributor to the space economy at 54%, followed by navigation (26%) and launches (11%). The main industries supported by the space sector were identified as telecom (25%), information technology (10%), and administrative services (7%). While the report paints a positive picture of the sector's growth, it also highlights areas for improvement. Many stakeholders indicated that while India's space progress has boosted national prestige and international leadership, it has yet to significantly impact company profitability or competitiveness. The report suggests that this may change as commercial space becomes a key priority area.

# Proved Panacea for Economic and Social Problems



**SATISH SINGH**

The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), launched on 28 August 2014, completed 10 years on 28 August 2024. During its 10-year journey, this scheme has achieved many achievements. It has been successful in realizing the concept of financial inclusion, increasing women empowerment, taking the process of digitalization to every village and every house, reducing the role of middlemen and users in rural areas, reducing incidents of theft, plummeting corruption, bringing social change, increasing pace of deposits and expenditure in the rural areas etc.

In the current financial year, till August 16, 3 crore new accounts have been opened under this scheme. The number of Jan Dhan accounts was 14.72 crore in March 2015, which increased to 53.13 crore on 16 August 2024, which shows an increase of almost 4 times in the number of accounts opened. 66.6 per cent of the accounts opened are in rural and urban areas. Most importantly, 53.13 crore accounts are active and have a balance of Rs 2.3 lakh crore, whereas only 14.7 crore accounts could be opened till March 2015 and Rs.15,670 crore was deposited in them. The average balance in Jan Dhan accounts in August 2024 was Rs 4,352, which was Rs.1,065 in March 2015.



It is noteworthy that only 8.4 percent of Jan Dhan accounts had zero balance till 16 August 2024. Out of 53.13 crore accounts, 29.56 crore accounts belong to women, which is 55.6 in percentage.

Public sector banks have played a positive and important role in opening Jan Dhan accounts. Government banks have opened 78 percent of the Jan Dhan accounts. Having 9.4 crore accounts, Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of Jan Dhan accounts, while Bihar is second in the case with 6.00 crore Jan Dhan accounts.

Jan Dhan accounts, mobile and Aadhar card have played an important role in providing benefits of government schemes to the common people during the Corona pandemic and in distributing Kisan Samman Nidhi among small and marginal farmers through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). Due to this, many people from the deprived section were saved from untimely death during the Corona pandemic.

Today, due to Jan Dhan accounts, 99.95 percent of the people living within a radius of 5 kms of the inhabited vil-

lages have access to banking facilities. The villagers are taking advantage of the banking facilities provided by bank branches, banking correspondents and Indian Post Payment Bank in some form or the other. People in rural and urban areas are also taking advantage of the phone-based non-financial services started by the State Bank of India without going to the bank branch, so that their valuable time is not wasted.

No fee is charged by the bank for opening a Jan Dhan account, maintaining accounts and not maintaining the minimum balance or even if the account balance is zero and the customers are also being given the facility of overdraft up to Rs 10,000. Banks are also issuing RuPay cards free of cost, with which customers are also being given free accident insurance up to Rs 2 lakh.

Today, due to the PMJDY, 80 percent of adults have a formal bank account, whereas in 2011 this percentage was just 50. This scheme has increased India's standing in the context of financial inclusion at the global level and due to this, common people have

access to banking facilities at the individual level instead of the family.

To create a proper ecosystem for financial inclusion, it is necessary that along with the participation of the common people, the government should also have an active participation in the matter. In this context, the government and the common people are working dynamically, and work is also being done to promote it at the private level. However, there is still a need to make people financially literate along with Jan Dhan accounts and make them aware of the dangers of online fraud, which needs to be done continuously by both private and government entities, only then these goals can be achieved effectively.

Due to Jan Dhan accounts, today RuPay cards have given the villagers access to the markets of the world. Now Amazon, Flipkart etc. are delivering products made in India and abroad even to the houses of the village. Not only this, Jan Dhan accounts have developed the tendency to save among the people as well as increased the tendency to spend, the main reason for which is the access of the villagers to the online market. These changes are also accelerating economic activities. Jan Dhan accounts are also carriers of social change. Due to these, incidents of theft in rural areas are decreasing and people's addiction to gambling and drinking alcohol is also diminishing.

In the last decade, Rs.38.49 lakh crore was transferred

through DBT and leakage of Rs 3.48 lakh crore could be curbed, which usually used to fall prey to middlemen and corruption before opening Jan Dhan accounts. Jan Dhan accounts have also helped in promoting digitalization, increasing e-commerce business and making India the top country in the world in terms of digital payments through Unified Payment System (UPI). By July 2024, 5570 crore transactions were done through UPI in India.

To bring further improvement on social and economic fronts, along with Jan Dhan accounts, now the government and banks also need to provide micro and small level loan facilities in rural and urban areas at affordable rates, so that rural India can become self-reliant and the share of rural areas in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) can increase, as well as the concept of inclusive development in the country can also be realized 100 percent.

In the current era of digitalization, it is also important that continuous work should be done towards protecting the urban and rural common people from online fraud and making them literate. Also, the government should plan to link other government schemes with Jan Dhan accounts so that maximum number of deprived sections can avail the benefits of government schemes.

Satish Singh, Ahmedabad based Senior Columnist. Views are Personal

# PMJDY world's largest financial inclusion scheme: Finance Minister



**NEW DELHI:** The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 28, 2014, has become the world's largest financial inclusion scheme — with more than 53.14 crore beneficiaries and total deposit balances at

Rs 2, 31, 236 crore, the government said on Wednesday. The Ministry of Finance said in a latest statement that PMJDY accounts grow 3.6-fold from 15.67 crore in March 2015 to 53.14 crore as on August 14.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that

universal and affordable access to formal banking services is essential for achieving financial inclusion and empowerment, as "it integrates the poor into the economic mainstream and plays a crucial role in the development of marginalised communities." "PM Jan Dhan Yojana has transformed the banking and financial landscape of the country over the last decade. These bank accounts have garnered a deposit balance of Rs. 2.3 lakh crore, and resulted in the issuance of over 36 crore free-of-cost RuPay cards, which also provide for a Rs 2 lakh accident insurance cover," Minister Sitharaman noted. "Notably, there are no account opening fees or maintenance charges and no requirement to maintain a minimum balance.

# Gala Precision Engineering Limited IPO of Rs 167.93 cr

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**

**Mumbai**

Gala Precision Engineering Limited is coming out with its IPO from September 2, 2024 to September 4, 2024 and price band of Rs 503 to Rs 509, aggregating Rs 157.93 crores.

Gala Precision Engineering Limited is a precision component manufacturer of technical springs like disc and slip springs (DSS), coil and spiral springs (CSS), and special fastening solution (SFS).

The proceeds from the fresh issue include: Rs 370 million being used for setting up a new facility at Vallam-Vadagal, SIPCOT, Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu for manufacturing high tensile fasteners and hex bolts;



Rs 110.69 million being used for funding capital expenditure requirements towards purchase of equipment, plant and machinery at Wada, Palghar, Maharashtra; Rs 454.30 million for repayment/prepayment, in full or part, of certain borrowings availed by the Company; and general corporate purposes.

The Company, led by Kirit Vishanji Gala, is a technology-driven company with strong focus on quality, design tool development and application

engineering. The Company supplies its products to original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), Tier I and channel partners; used in sectors like renewable energy including wind turbine and hydro power plants, various industrial sectors like electrical off-highway equipment, infrastructure and general engineering, military segments such as automotive and railways.

Its technical springs and high tensile fasteners, have been supplied to customers in countries such as Germany, Denmark, China, Italy, Brazil, USA, Sweden Switzerland etc. and is a key link to the global supply chains for OEMs.



# INTERNATIONAL

## B'desh court imposes travel ban on 14 former ministers, lawmakers

**DHAKA:** A Dhaka court on Thursday issued a travel ban on 14 former Awami League ministers and lawmakers in connection with corruption allegations brought against them by the interim government in Bangladesh, according to a media report.

The development comes after former prime minister Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League resigned and fled to India on August 5 following the mass movement against her government.

The Daily Star newspaper reported that the travel ban has been issued against former social welfare minister Dipu Moni, former health minister Zahid Maleque, former education minister Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury, former food minister Sadhan



Chandra Majumder, former industrial minister Nurul Majid Mahmud Humayun and former industrial deputy minister Kamal Ahmed Majumder.

Former lawmakers Salim Uddin, Mamunur Rashid Kiron, Kujendra Lal Tripura, Kajim Uddin, Noor-E-Alam Chowdhury Liton, Shahjahan Khan, Kamrul Islam and Ziaur

ACC Public Prosecutor Mahmud Hossain Jahangir had moved the petition on behalf of the ACC. In the application, Jahangir said the former ministers and lawmakers were trying to flee the country.

Former Bangladesh speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury and ex-commerce minister Tipu Munshi have been arrested over the killing of a goldsmith during the recent quota reform protests.

Over 1,000 people have been killed during the protests against the Sheikh Hasina-led government while more than 400 were blinded by police fire, with some of them losing sight in one or both eyes, a top adviser of the interim government said on Thursday.

## 'Boring, rambled incoherently', Trump on Kamala Harris

**WASHINGTON:** Republican presidential candidate and former US President Donald Trump on Friday slammed his rival Kamala Harris over her first major interview since her entry into the election after Joe Biden's exit.

"I just saw Comrade Kamala Harris' answer to a very weakly-phrased question, a question that was put in more as a matter of defense than curiosity, but her answer rambled incoherently, and declared her 'values haven't changed...'" Trump said in a post on his Truth Social media platform.

"...On that I agree, her values haven't changed - The Border is going to remain open, not closed, there will be Free Healthcare for Illegal Aliens, Sanctuary Cities, No Cash Bail, Gun Confiscation, Zero Frack-



America will never allow an election WEAPONIZING MARXIST TO BE PRESIDENT OF THE US," he wrote.

On Thursday, US Vice-President Kamala Harris said her "values have not changed" as she has changed her position on key issues that could determine her elections, such as fracking, which she had once opposed and now doesn't.

She said this during an interview with CNN. Fracking, a process of extracting natural gas and petroleum from deep inside rocks, is popular in Pennsylvania, a key battleground state that will determine the outcome of the 2024 presidential election, along with a handful of other states. It is opposed by those who argue it contaminates underground and surface water.

## BNP leader urges India to take relook at ties with Bangladesh



**DHAKA:** A senior BNP leader has blamed an "ecosystem of former diplomats, bureaucrats, politicians, and think tanks" for creating a "bogyman" to mislead the Indian establishment into believing that Indo-Bangla relations would deteriorate without the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League.

Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury of the Khalida Zia-led Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) said Bangladesh wants strong ties with India. Chowdhury's party, the BNP, is the arch-rival of the Hasina's Awami League.

Chowdhury — who heads the foreign affairs cell of the BNP — asserted that New Delhi "failed to understand the pulse of the people of Bangladesh" and had "put all its eggs in one basket" by supporting one party and family in the country.

## UN chief condemns attacks in Pakistan's Balochistan



**UNITED NATIONS:** UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has condemned the attacks in Pakistan's Balochistan province, his spokesman said.

"The Secretary-General strongly condemns the 26 August attacks in Pakistan's Balochistan province," said Stéphane Dujarric, spokesperson for the UN Chief, at a daily briefing, on Monday. "The Secretary-General stresses that attacks against civilians are unacceptable," he added as reported by Xinhua news agency.

The UN Chief extended his deepest condolences to the families of the victims and called on the Pakistani government to conduct an investigation and ensure that those responsible

are held accountable, Dujarric said. More than 70 people have been killed in multiple cases of terror attacks in the Balochistan province in southwestern Pakistan, media reported, quoting military and police officials.

The country's military said that 14 soldiers and police were killed as well as 21 terrorists were also killed in fighting in a major attack that targeted vehicles on a major highway in Bela, a town in Lasbela district, Al Jazeera reported. In a separate attack in Musakhel district, local officials said at least 23 civilians were killed after attackers reportedly stopped their convoy, checked their IDs and determined they were from Punjab, with 35 vehicles also set

## Humanitarians in UN armoured vehicle escape Israeli gunfire in Gaza



**UNITED NATIONS:** Two humanitarian workers in a UN-marked armoured vehicle escaped physically unharmed a salvo of Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) gunfire in Gaza, a UN spokesman said. "Yesterday (Tuesday) evening, a clearly marked UN humanitarian vehicle — part of a convoy that had been fully coordinated with the IDF — was struck 10 times by IDF gunfire, including with bullets targeting front windows," said Stéphane Dujarric, chief spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, on Wednesday. The World Food Programme (WFP) said it was pausing the movement of its employees in Gaza until further notice after the WFP team came under fire, Xinhua news agency reported. The agency said the incident occurred a few metres from an Israeli checkpoint at the Wadi Gaza bridge as the team was returning from a mission to Kerem Shalom/Karam Abu Salem in two armoured vehicles after escorting a convoy of trucks carrying humanitarian cargo routed to Gaza's central area.

## Russia and Ukraine exchange 230 prisoners of war

**MOSCOW:** Russia and Ukraine successfully exchanged 230 prisoners of war following negotiations held with the mediation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"As a result of the negotiation process, 115 Russian servicemen captured in the Kursk region have been returned from the territory controlled by the Kyiv regime. In exchange, 115 prisoners of war of the Ukrainian Armed Forces were transferred," the Russian Defence Ministry said in a statement.



It mentioned that currently, all Russian servicemen are in the territory of the Belarus, where they are receiving the "necessary psychological and medical assistance", as well as the opportunity to contact their relatives.

"All released servicemen will be delivered to the Russian Federation for treatment and rehabilitation in medical institutions of the Russian Ministry of Defence. The United Arab Emirates provided humanitarian mediation efforts during the return of Russian servicemen from captivity," the ministry added.

The exchange took place as Kyiv is celebrating the 33rd anniversary of Ukraine's Independence on Saturday.

The UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs also expressed its appreciation to the Russian and Ukrainian governments

partnerships with both sides.

"These efforts reflect the UAE's commitment to being a reliable mediator supporting diplomacy to resolve the crisis between the two countries... Notably, since the beginning of this year, the UAE's mediation efforts have succeeded in completing exchanges of war captives between Russia and Ukraine, in addition to a successful exchange of two prisoners between the United States and the Russian Federation in December 2022," said the UAE Foreign Ministry.

The Ministry further affirmed the UAE's commitment to continuing all efforts and initiatives aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the conflict, stressing the importance of dialogue, and de-escalation, as the only ways to resolve the conflict, and for mitigating its humanitarian repercussions.

## Imran Khan eyes Oxford University Chancellor post



**LONDON:** Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has decided to enter the race to be elected the new Chancellor of the University of Oxford to "give back" to the world. The 71-year-old cricketer-turned-politician studied philosophy, politics and economics (PPE) at the world-famous university's Keble College from 1972 to 1975 and also captained the university cricket team. He told 'The Daily Telegraph' from his prison cell in Rawalpindi this week that he would be a passionate advocate for the university. "Oxford University helped me a lot in my formative years. As Chancellor, I would passionately advocate for Oxford, championing its values of diversity, equality and inclusion, both in the UK and abroad," said Khan in his application.

### GLOBAL ARMAMENT MARKET

## Private Sector in Defense Industry is Upbeat Following Singh's US Visit



**GOPAL MISRA**

The three-day visit of the Indian Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, to Washington on August 23-25, has kindled renewed hope for the nascent private sector in the armament industry.

During the nineties, the then Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, had dared to open the capital goods sector and the services sector for the private sector. Similarly, after becoming the prime minister in 2014, Narendra Modi took a calculated risk by allowing the Indian private sector to venture in the defense production sector, still considered a holy cow.

Indeed, it was a calculated risk triggering paradigm changes in the country's defense procurement sector. Like the country's public sector, it had been one of the most lucrative sectors for augmenting political as well as personal wealth for the country's chosen politicians, defense and civilian officials engaged in procuring defense supplies.

During the past 10 years, India's private sector companies aspiring to become manufacturers and exporters in the lucrative armaments markets on a global scale have already achieved substantial experience. It is quite known that despite aggressive media rhetoric, the Indian defense sector has been languishing due to substandard technologies and the political apathy. For the politicians irrespective of their much-pronounced different ideologies, importing the state-of-the-art weapons

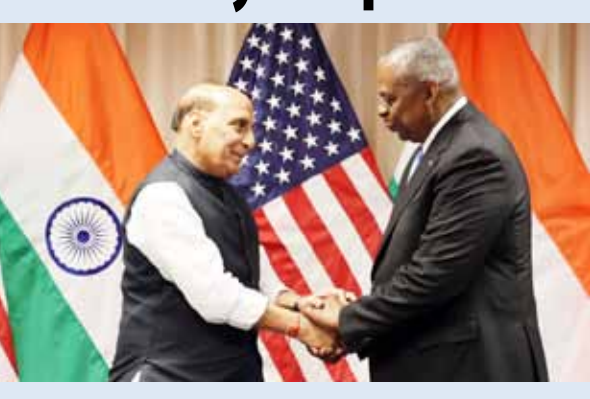
or fighter planes rather than developing even the engines for its planes was much more lucrative than allocating adequate budget for research and development without any substantial kick offs. The successive governments never shared the details of the plight of scientists and their exodus to various destinations across the continents, including China.

Therefore, it is a matter of little surprise that the country could not develop aircraft engines. Instead of taking corrective steps, a number of senior Indian Air Force officers have been engaged to justify the import of engines for the much-awaited Indian fighter plane, Tejas. Meanwhile, during the past four decades, the Chinese companies have already show-cased their high-tech weapons and aircrafts for the world markets.

A Bold Step- During his visit, Singh has supervised signing of the two historical pacts facilitating the availability of technologies to the Indian companies, and the appointment of liaison officers on reciprocal basis for sharing the experience and effectiveness of the new weapons being developed and marketed by the US and India.

It is hoped that the Modi government's decisive policy initiatives in this key sector may finally enable the Indian industries to access and assimilate new technologies for manufacturing new hi-tech weapons for the world markets.

Earlier, only the public sector such as Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) were engaged in the



production and research. In spite of the Russian cooperation, the defense sector too suffered like most of the public sector industries.

With the entry of some of the top Indian companies, the Tata Advance System, Mahindra and Mahindra, Larsen and Toubro and many other private ventures is expected to revolutionize the country's present primitive armament industry to become a hub for exporting the state-of-the-art weapons and ammunition to be exported to other countries. The Indian corporations such as Tata or Mahindra and Mahindra are already global brands. However, the entry of Anil Ambani known for causing financial disaster to many companies in the Ambani empire, now in the defense sector is quite intriguing. He is being allowed to collaborate with the French company manufacturing Rafael fighters for assembling and servicing in India.

The Indian Government has rejected the allegation that the government had suggested the name of Anil as an Indian partner. It is being claimed that his name was suggested by the French company. Since Anil has hardly

any experience in this field, it is difficult to accept the Indian government's claim. It is believed that the truth will be known only after the change in regime in France. Anil, it is being stated despite being known as a thoroughly incompetent business man, might either have a godfather in the ruling BJP or have been supported by his elder brother, Mukesh.

Investments Opportunities - The recent agreements signed in Washington are expected to lure a large number of investors in India's defense production companies; thus boosting their market share like their peers in the US and Europe. The Indian corporate are hopeful that they too would be earning huge profits like the American armament industries. It has flourished in recent years, especially after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, a terrorist outfit of the Palestinians in West Asia.

America's major defense manufacturing companies such as RTX, earlier known as Raytheon, Northrop Grumman's Corporation and Lockheed Martin have regis-

tered huge profits during the past three years. The prices of their shares have increased by more than 40 percent. In 2024, 900 billion USD is being allocated in the American defense budget, which is expected to boost the prospects of more profits this year.

It is stated that the emoluments of the CEOs of the weapon manufacturers is 100 times more than even the Secretary of Defense in America.

Expansion of the Collaboration - During this high-power visit, the agreements signed between the officials of the Pentagon and the Defense Ministry of India, include the SOSA or the Security of Supply Arrangement. The crucial pacts were signed before Rajnath Singh and his American counterpart, Lloyd Austin. The initiative is considered as a milestone in the growing US-India defense ties. India, thus, has become the 18th country to join the exclusive club of the SOSA countries, including the UK, Japan and Australia.

Liaison Officers - The two sides have also agreed to appoint liaison officers for better coordination in different commands. The details are yet to be shared about this proposal. It is believed that in the coming years, India and the US are going to have close coordination in the Indo-Pacific region. The two countries are worried that the aggressive Chinese policy in the region might lead to a war-like situation in the region.

In spite of the ongoing efforts for an immediate ceasefire in the Ukraine - Russia War and in the West Asian conflict, peace continues to be elusive.

## 2nd phase of Afghan refugee repatriation soon: Pak



**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan will launch the second phase of the repatriation of Afghan refugees, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has announced, emphasising the need for the role of the UN and the international community in their rehabilitation.

Naqvi said Pakistan has been hosting Afghan refugees for decades, and the phase-wise repatriation of illegal foreigners has already started. Naqvi said the second phase of the repatriation of refugees will be started soon.

## Royal Malaysian Navy ship crew evacuated after taking on water



**KUALA LUMPUR:** The crew of a Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) ship was evacuated due to heavy flooding, following a collision with an underwater object off the coast of Johor state.

All the crew had been recovered safely while the partially submerged ship was being salvaged, the RMN said on Sunday in a statement.

"A leak was first detected at 12 p.m. ... It is believed to have been caused by the vessel colliding with an underwater object. It (the leak) was initially detected in the ship's engine room before spreading uncontrollably. The crew was safely recovered after efforts

to control the situation and stabilise the vessel did not succeed," it added.

RMN said the ship partially sank in the incident, which occurred at noon two nautical miles southeast of Tanjung Penyusop while it was conducting an operation in the area, Xinhua news agency reported.

It said all 39 crew members were rescued after efforts to stem the leak and stabilise the ship failed.

The focus now is on conducting a salvage operation to save the ship.

RMN will establish a special investigative board immediately to determine the cause of the incident, it said.

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



# When Rekha stunned everyone by hugging Jaya after Amitabh Bachchan won Best Actor award



The moment had left the audience in awe and amaze due the dynamics between the trio.

The highly-circulated clip is garnering immense love from netizens.

"Such a wholesome moment!", write an Instagram user on the viral video. "Rekha ji is so elegant and looking more happier", said another user.

"Jaya and Rekha in this way... Amazing", said another user on Instagram.

Rekha and Amitabh Bachchan had shared the screen in several memorable films including 'Muqaddar Ka Sikandar', 'Mr Natwarlal', and the most talked about movie — 'Silsila' — which also featured Jaya.

In a candid interview with Simi Garewal in 2004, Rekha spoke openly about her feeling for Amitabh, admitting to being in "love" with him. However, she clarified that despite the rumours, they were never in a relationship.

**NEW DELHI:** A rare moment that amazed everyone at the 2015 Star Screen Awards, involving legendary actors Rekha and Jaya Bachchan, has now taken over the internet.

In a now viral video, Rekha surprised everyone by rushing to hug Jaya after Amitabh Bachchan's name was announced as the Best Actor for his performance in Piku.

While the legendary actor walked on the stage to receive the trophy, both Jaya and Rekha stood together to acknowledge his accolade.

## Farhan Akhtar back in Ladakh to shoot for 'special film'



**NEW DELHI:** Actor-filmmaker Farhan Akhtar on Wednesday said he is in Ladakh to shoot for a 'special film'. Farhan, who previously shot for his films 'Lakshya' (2004) and 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag' (2013) in the mountainous region, shared the update in an Instagram post. "Back in Ladakh after Lakshya and Bhaag Milkha Bhaag to shoot for a very special film," he captioned a photo of the picturesque locals of the union territory. While 'Lakshya'—set during the 1999 Kargil War—was his second directorial venture, he played the role of the late Milkha Singh in the iconic sprinter's biopic 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag', directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra. "Details to be revealed soon. Watch this space," he added. Farhan's last project as an actor was sports drama 'Toofaan' (2021).

## Malaysia Tourism, India highlights 'Merdeka Day'

DOMINICK RODRIGUES  
Mumbai

Malaysia celebrated its 67th Independence Day -- also known as "Merdeka Day" (Freedom Day) and National Day (Hari Kebangsaan) with Tourism Malaysia (India) highlighting the country's remarkable journey of growth, unity and progress in its six-decades transformation into one of South-east Asia's most dynamic and prosperous nations.

Ahmad Johani Mohd Ali, Director, Tourism Malaysia, New Delhi, said here recently that Malaysia, in preserving its rich cultural heritage while embracing modernity and innovation, highlighted its vibrant tourism sector through its offerings of adventure, relaxation and cultural enrichment.

Tourism Malaysia unveiled its strategic roadmap for "Visit Malaysia 2026" in which it aims to attract 35.6 million tourists and generate RM147.1 billion in receipts.



Noting that Malaysia's tourism industry has grown exponentially while also enhancing its global reputation, Noriah Jaafar, Director, Tourism Malaysia, Mumbai, said this roadmap would be highlighting Malaysia as a top tourist destination through strategically creating demand, increasing traffic, and prioritising key target markets.

Razaid Bin Abd Rahim, Director, Tourism Malaysia, Chennai also highlighted a quiz contest on social media from August 27 to August 31 in which participants

showed their knowledge about Malaysia including its historical milestones, landmarks, influential leaders, national symbols and modern achievements. The Visit Malaysia Year 2026 will commemorate the sustainability of the nation's tourism industry, which is also in line with the "United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG). Tourism Malaysia is actively endorsing the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand 'Growth Triangle' (MT-GT) with the shared aim of promoting the region as a unified tourism destination.

## SALMAN KHAN braves injury for eco-friendly Ganesh Chaturthi event

**MUMBAI:** Fans of Salman Khan grew concerned after videos of the actor appearing bothered by an injury at an event started doing the rounds on social media. People started posting get well soon messages for him online.

In several clips circulating on the Internet, Salman — who attended 'Bacche Bole Morya' on Wednesday to advocate the need of cleanliness and eco-friendly



Ganesh Chaturthi festival this season — could be seen wincing as he touched the right side of his rib cage. "He got hurt and isn't well, still he attended the event. It shows his commitment towards the environment. Thank you so much," said Amruta Fadnavis, the organiser of the event. It could not be confirmed whether the 58-year-old actor, who is currently shooting for his next film Sikandar, got hurt on set.

A source close to the actor confirmed that he had suffered a rib injury but is doing fine now.

"Nothing to worry about. The shoot of Sikandar, is on schedule and not pushed," the source added.

A worried fan wrote on X: "#SalmanKhan bhai is suffering from a serious rib injury, get well soon bhai, your health and happiness matters the most." Another post read: "No matter what, he always gets back up #SalmanKhan #Sikandar."

"Stay healthy bhai @Being-SalmanKhan nothing is more important than your health," wrote another user.

## When Shah Rukh Khan assisted Farah Khan on 'Kabhi Haan Kabhi Naa'



**MUMBAI:** Choreographer-director Farah Khan, shared an interesting anecdote about Bollywood megastar and her close friend Shah Rukh Khan.

A video of Farah shows her walking down the memory lane and talking about the budget constraints on 'Kabhi Haan Kabhi Naa' and how SRK served as her assistant on one of the songs.

She told Radio Nasha, "The film was made on a shoe-string budget. SRK was paid Rs 25,000 for that film. I was the highest paid resource on that movie, I want to tell you. I was paid Rs 5,000 for each song on that film, and there were 6 songs. So, I was paid Rs 30,000."

She further mentioned that the film didn't even have a budget for assistants in each department.

"For one song in the film, we didn't have the budget to pay the dancers. So, we hired all the locals in Goa. They had never done lip-sync and they didn't know how to catch the beat. So, SRK used to lie down, out of the frame, and he used to pinch them to get up when the beat came."

The film was directed by Kundan Shah of 'Jaane Bhi Du Yaaro' fame. It also starred Deepak Tijori, Suchitra Krishnamurthy and Naseeruddin Shah. It was made on a budget of Rs 1.4 crore, and grossed Rs 5.5 crore equivalent to Rs 80 crore adjusted for inflation as of 2018.



## Priyanka Chopra is back to where she belongs, dives into nostalgia

**MUMBAI:** Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who will be next seen in the American swash-buckler action drama film 'The Bluff', is currently in Mumbai, and revisiting some old places.

On Monday, the actress took to the Stories section of her Instagram, and shared a video in which she could be seen enter-



ing the filmcity in the Goregaon area of Mumbai. The actress put up laughing emojis on the video and used the song 'Udd Jaa Kaale Kaava' from the Sunny Deol-starrer blockbuster 'Gadar 2'. The actress visited the filmcity along with her mother Madhu Chopra and her brother Siddharth Chopra. She

## Priyanka Chopra's daughter Malti Marie makes Instagram debut

**MUMBAI:** Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who was recently in Mumbai for her brother Siddharth Chopra's engagement ceremony, has debuted the Instagram handle of her daughter Malti Marie Jonas.

On Wednesday, Priyanka took to the Stories section of her Instagram, and shared a picture of her daughter. She also mentioned the official Instagram handle of her little bundle of joy.

While, Priyanka and her husband Nick Jonas have been fiercely protective of their daughter, and refrained from



showing her face in social media, the actress now feels it's time for her daughter to have her own Instagram account. Priyanka recently visited India briefly for her brother's engage-

ment. She had shared pictures and videos from the ceremony. Siddharth Chopra, held a ring ceremony with his partner, actress Neelam Upadhyaya, in Mumbai, India on August 23. Sharing the video and a throw-back picture, Priyanka wrote in the caption, "And they did it. With the blessings of their parents, friends and families, on our dad's birthday. Their ring ceremony @siddharthchopra89 @neelamupadhyaya @drmadhuakhourichopra". For the ceremony, the actress wore a stunning saree channelling her inner desi girl. Meanwhile, on the work front, the actress will be seen in the second of her spy-thriller streaming show 'Citadel'. As per reports, the 2nd season of the global series is set to begin production this year, with Joe Russo directing.

## Lara Dutta shares precious moments with daughter at Taylor Swift's concert



**MUMBAI:** Actress Lara Dutta Bhupathi, who was recently seen in the streaming series 'Ranneeti: Balakot & Beyond', has shared a glimpse of her Taylor Swift concert that she attended with her daughter, Saira in London.

On Wednesday, the actress took to the Stories section of her Instagram and dropped 2 videos of herself and her daughter enjoying the concert. In the video, Taylor Swift can be seen performing the song 'Shake It Off'. She wrote on the video, "Players gonna play baby." Lara and Mahesh Bhupathi got engaged in 2010. They tied the knot on February 16, 2011, in a civil ceremony in Mumbai and followed it with a Christian ceremony on 20 February 2011 at Sunset Point in Goa.

Prasanna. The show was inspired by true events and is a war room drama based on the aftermath of the Pulwama terror attack and the subsequent retaliatory action by the Indian Air Force. It takes the viewers behind the scenes of the definitive defence operations of India and the ensuing mission when India fought back, marking the first-ever series to depict the 2019 warfare.

The series was released on April 25, 2024, on JioCinema with dubbed versions in Kannada, Marathi and Bengali languages. The actress also has the theatrical film 'Welcome To The Jungle' in the pipeline in which she is set to reunite with Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar.

The film also stars Akshay Kumar, Raveena Tandon, Suniel Shetty, Disha Patani, Aftab Shivdasani, Jacqueline Fernandez, Arshad Warsi and Tusshar Kapoor. Lara and Akshay last worked together in the streaming film 'Bell Bottom'.

## Why the employees' unions are denouncing the Centre's Unified Pension Scheme?

JAG MOHAN THAKEN

The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on 24th August, 2024, approved a new pension scheme named the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) for the government employees claiming it a very beneficial scheme.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman states that the newly launched Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) is a new pension scheme, not a rollback of NPS, and is designed to benefit government employees without burdening the government.

Clarifying the objections raised the FM says, "It is not a rollback... it is different from OPS and NPS. It is clearly a new package. UPS is better and will satisfy most government employees. It is tailored in such a fashion that every calculation fits and even the government is not burdened too much." She expresses hope that most of the states would adopt UPS "as it has a lot of benefits for employees". But why the employees' unions are not satisfied with this newly launched scheme? Why they are disapproving this?

Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) denounced the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) approved by Union Cabinet on 24.8.2024 as another dubious desperate effort to deceive the Govt employees of their due full right to Old Pension Scheme known as OPS. CITU urges for restoration of old Pension Scheme.

**Let us see- What the newly launched UPS is?**

As claimed by the government, the salient features of the UPS are:

Assured pension: 50% of the average basic pay drawn over the last 12 months prior to su-

perannuation for a minimum qualifying service of 25 years. This pay is to be proportionate for lesser service period up to a minimum of 10 years of service. Assured family pension: @60% of pension of the employee immediately before her/his demise. Assured minimum pension: @10,000 per month on superannuation after minimum 10 years of service. Inflation indexation: on assured pension, on assured family pension and assured minimum pension. Dearness Relief based on All India Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (AICPI-IW) as in case of service employees. Lump sum payment at superannuation in addition to gratuity. 1/10th of monthly emoluments (pay + DA) as on the date of superannuation for every completed six months of service and this payment will not reduce the quantum of assured pension.

Why the employees' unions are negating the new scheme?

Criticizing the UPS, in a release issued by Tapan Sen, the General Secretary of Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the union states that the Old Pension Scheme was non-contributory and with assured pension existing as per Central Civil Service Rules 1972 now 2021. A. B. Vajpayee led NDA Govt had introduced the National Pension Scheme (NPS) in 2004 surreptitiously through an Executive Order for those recruited from 1.1.2004. The central and state Govt employees and central trade unions opposed it from that day and were on path of struggles against it urging for restoration of OPS. The Pension Fund Regulatory & Development Authority Act 2013 notified in February 2014 enabled statutory basis for the NPS. CITU further adds the unpre-



cedented struggles by the Govt Employees for restoration of Old Pension Scheme (OPS) and the whole hearted support rendered to such struggles by the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and Federations could compel the arrogant BJP regime to shift from its arrogant stance of sticking to NPS, but the package offered by it in the name of so-called UPS reflects the same deceptive ploy of depriving the Govt employees of their legitimate dues on account of pension. Several State Govts also reverted back to the OPS and were urging for their share of state Govt Employees contribution to PFRDA to be refunded to their State Govts. Modi Govt had rejected all of such requests of State Govts which reverted back to OPS. It was countered by the relentless struggles of employees and trade Unions. Hence this dubious attempt of deceptive UPS is made by Modi led ND Alliance Govt. The Finance Secretary T. V. Somanathan Committee recommendations to study modifications in NPS, which was also boycotted by several Employees federations, are used for this desperate attempt of UPS - a cocktail of NPS and truncated OPS is approved by the Union cabinet.

The employees' union says the Modi led ND Govt with its neo liberal pursuit of safeguarding the interests of speculative crony capital has come with this UPS with some modification of benefits with additional contribution of 4.5% from the Govt only to further its investment of pen-

2 months of pay on retirement as benefit in addition to gratuity.

In UPS, employee will get 50% of 12 months average basic pay as pension on normal retirement at the age of 60 with the completion of 25 years of service, effective from 1-4-2025 that is for those retiring on 31-3-2025 but not applicable to those retired before it. In OPS for 10 years of service 50% of last month's pay is pension and for voluntary retirement after 20 years of service employee gets 50% of pay as pension.

The Union further adds that employees with service less than 25 years will get proportionately lesser pension in UPS. Employee with 20 years of service will get only 40% of 12 months average basic pay as pension. For 10 years of service employees will get only 20% of average basic pay as pension. In case of proportionate pension for less than 25 years up to 10 years a minimum pension of Rs 10,000 is proposed by government. While Minimum pension in OPS is Rs 9000 plus DA (which as on 1-4-2025 will be 57% that is Rs. 5130) so minimum pension as on 1-4-2025 will be Rs.14,130. Hence the proposed Rs.10,000 pension is half of that of OPS. For less than 10 years of service at the time of superannuation employee is not eligible for any pension.

Criticizing the family pension under newly launched scheme, CITU states that under UPS family pension is 60% of pension i.e., 60% of 50%. It means 30% of last pay for 25 years of service at the time of superannuation. For employee with minimum pension of rupees 10,000 it will be 60% of it, i.e., Rs 6000. Minimum pension of rupees Rs 10000 applies only to superannuation and not for family pension. But under OPS family pension is 50% of last pay if the pensioner dies before 7 years after retirement or before 67 years of age. There

after family pension will be 30% of last pay. Minimum pension as on 1-4-2025 will be Rs.14130. But in UPS minimum family pension will be only Rs 6000.

Raising doubts the employees' union says that DA/DR will be given to assured pension or minimum pension or family pension based on the Consumer price index as in the case of serving employees. Whether they will start a new base index from 1-4-2025 or they will grant the same percentage of DA/DR as for serving and OPS pensioners are not yet spelt out? In OPS if the pensioner or family pensioner completed 80 years of age additional pension of 20%, for 85 years 30%, for 90 years 40%, 95 years 50% and 100 years 100% is given with Same DA for additional pension also.

In OPS this additional pension is not available. In OPS pension/family pension/minimum pension is revised whenever pay commission is implemented while there is no such assurance under UPS. Commutation of pension i.e., withdrawal of 40% pension in advance available in OPS is not available in UPS. For those employees who die or become invalid becoming all class unfit in NPS, OPS is applicable to them already. Employees can opt to UPS or NPS, once opted will be final.

The union further raises eyebrows that there may be many more shortcomings in UPS which may be known after the full text of UPS is notified.

Completely Denouncing the UPS, the trade union CITU urges the Union Govt to restore the non-contributory defined assured Old Pension Scheme. CITU also called for extending full support to the Govt employees struggle for restoration of OPS.

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